

**Historical Racism As It Applies to Liberation Theologies: A Critique**

In Ivan Petrella's *Beyond Liberation Theologies: A Polemic*, Petrella makes the claim that class should be the basis for liberation theology, because it is a global form of oppression that affects the world's majority. I disagree with this claim, because I think Petrella overstates the impact of class as the origin of oppression. Poverty is simply an indicator that other forms of oppression have affected or are affecting people in a particular region. In America, for example, that form of oppression is racial oppression, but that's not true globally, because things are different place to place. In general, Petrella's argument that class is a proper basis of liberation theology is inadequate, because it ignores the effects of historic racial prejudice.

One part of Petrella's argument is that class is more significant than race in terms of oppression. He states this when he says, "Race, therefore, does matter, but it matters most importantly because racial discrimination created a racial wealth gap that thus maps onto class inequality" (Petrella 72)<sup>1</sup>. In Petrella's understanding of class in relation to race, class is the root of oppression on which other forms of oppression are able to be built. To further this point, he says, "Class is involved in all social arrangements of oppression; nothing occurs without implicating the material conditions that shape the way individuals and groups locate themselves, and are located, within their societies" (Petrella 81). The issue with Petrella's argument is that it does not take into account the historical aspect of race that has contributed to the generational

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<sup>1</sup> "Beyond Liberation Theology: A Polemic - Ivan Petrella - Google Books."  
[https://books.google.com/books/about/Beyond\\_Liberation\\_Theology.html?id=r\\_dz9bc4X\\_EC](https://books.google.com/books/about/Beyond_Liberation_Theology.html?id=r_dz9bc4X_EC). Accessed 10 Jun. 2019.

wealth gap in the United States. The history of colonialism and black people's fight for liberty in America plays a huge part in how we should go about studying liberation theology. An example of this is the issue of welfare and its effect on the black family structure. In her book *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, Delores Williams writes, "Some forces in white society exerted much energy aborting these manhood and fatherhood efforts to protect the black family. The Ku Klux Klan came to life shortly after the emancipation of slaves. One of its aims was, through the use of violence, to stamp out any manifestation of black male power, the very power necessary for the protection of the family. Then, in the twentieth century, certain governmental welfare policies have had the effect of hindering the building of the black father's financial strength, important for protecting the family economically. Today, black working fathers cannot reside with their destitute families if the mother is to receive welfare payments for the children" (Williams 71)<sup>2</sup>. Through this history, what seems immediately apparent is the Ku Klux Klan's role in breaking down the black family and even how the government took the reins on this mission through means of systems allegedly created to help. However, what is less apparent is how this affects the prospective economic prosperity of the black family. The goal of the KKK and the government is to break apart black mothers and black fathers, and in doing that, you decrease the income that is coming into the household as well as the resources for the children. This shows how a racial disparity is exposed through poverty. In this situation, there is bias against the black family and black people, and as a result of that bias flourishing, a black family is broken and left impoverished.

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<sup>2</sup> "Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist ... - Google Books." 1 Oct. 2013, [https://books.google.com/books/about/Sisters\\_in\\_the\\_Wilderness.html?id=hY6vAQAAQBAJ](https://books.google.com/books/about/Sisters_in_the_Wilderness.html?id=hY6vAQAAQBAJ). Accessed 10 Jun. 2019.

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