

Christian Supersessionism

A Problem for the Black Movement

Afrofuturist Abolitionists of the Americas

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Conversations about anti-Jewishness in Black Movements are hard to have when we consider the reality that Zionism is real. This Kickback will be a very quick flash through of many historical concepts: anti-Semitism in European Christianity, the Hamitic hypothesis, Black cultural nationalism, Zionism, and bourgeois/capitalist thought. This is not exhaustive although I have some resources to refer to but definitely encourage further research on your own terms.

How it all begins:

Early Christians, instead of being mad at Rome for killing Yeshua, they blamed Jewish people for essentially “pulling strings” to get him killed. In the Bible, the Sadducees and Pharisees were interpreted as having snitched on Yeshua to Roman authorities. So Jews at some point started being seen as instruments of the devil, or puppetters of satan’s activity in the dominant system. Throwing Jewish life under the bus during the early days of Christianity was part of interreligious conflict between ethnically Jewish Christians and “gentile” Christians of Hellenized/greek and other backgrounds.

There was two motivations to the religious bias against Jews that started this all: 1) a theological motivation is the most apparent one. There was heavy conversation about whether memberships in the church was egalitarian (open to all) or conditional on Jewish ethnicity and Jewish ritual observance. This conversation was the main reason the Apostle Paul wrote what he wrote. 2) a missiological motivation is another major aspect of the bias. There were growing concerns at the time, due to Roman oppression of religious movements of that day, about if the church was actually supposed to be a challenge to Roman authority or if it should align with Rome to make the spread of the gospel easier.

Eventually the church did collaborate with and incorporate Roman sensibilities. A certain use of Paul’s theology was essential in making appeals to dominant Roman persuasions around things like slavery, sexuality, and more—all while castigating Jewishness as hostile to the gospel’s spread. Whether this was Paul’s intent is up for debate but I can say that his and other Christians’ openness to drawing on Greco-Roman culture to illuminate the Christian Message while teaching that Jewish life could only be essential to that same process of illumination in the past tense created room for a new and problematic doctrine.

Supercessionism is the name for this doctrine. It means basically the church is supposed to be the “new Israel” and Jewish rituals and law and identity should fade away as God through the church incorporates the whole world into a mystical experience of redemption. The assumption is that the “world” being brought in and Christianized is a Roman one, as that is what was the context for “gentile” identity at the time.

So, what we have is some early Christians already seeing Jews as devil-collaborators against Jesus, and some Christians started tryna appeal to/draw on Roman thought in order to make the church’s spread easier. Jewish people became seen as both an enemy to Christians AND a hindrance to the Christian’s spiritual right to missionize and reclaim the world’s dominant system.

Anti-semitism arrives:

What we understand today as Anti-semitism originates there, and as an ideological edifice it still retains these features: the Christian supercessionist wants to claim as their territory that which is seen as “owned” by Jewish people, and frames Jewish people as either devilish masters of that dominating system or hindrance to Christian reclamation thereof.

It’s this scapegoating coupled with reactionary desire to reclaim a dominant system from the “Jewish enemy” that took a new character as Capitalism arose. Europeans had a long history of reactionary violence against Jews by this time. They had even begun to somewhat racialize Jewishness by then. There was a combination of narratives about Judas Iscariot’s betrayal of Jesus for silver, and also early Christianity’s inherent criticism of wealth and the rich that converged to mark Jewish people as inherently spiritually corrupt around greed. During the formative days of capitalism, working class Europeans would turn their frustration into deep hatred for “Jewish bankers,” an idea that still persists today. Anger about Capitalist oppression (rather than Roman oppression) and yet a desire for rulership as Capitalists (rather than collaboration with Rome) begins unfolding. There is anger now at the fictive “Jewish masters” of Capitalism who are also somehow “hindrances” to gentile/Christian rights and authority/autonomy therein. Today, white nationalism retains these anti-Semitic, racialized, understandings as well as the reactionary pro-capitalist desires, when expressed in secular terms.

Black Christianity:

In comes Black people who adhere to Christianity. The forms of Christianity we converted to are European ones. Something I did not mention before is that along with a theological history that led to anti-Semitism, Christianity has had a theological history known as the Hamitic hypothesis. Hamitic hypothesis is the idea that Black people are slaves because of the Curse of Ham. In the book of Genesis, Noah has three sons: Shem, Ham, Japheth. Noah curses Ham’s grandson Canaan because Ham ended up seeing his father naked while Noah was passed out drunk. The curse basically says that Canaan shall be a “servant of servants.” The historical context of that curse against Canaan was land conflict between the Israelites and the Canaanites. I won’t get into that too much, but basically that curse had nothing to do with race or even ethnicity, but was about a particular local territory conflict. For some reason, though Shem became later interpreted as the father of all Asians and Middle Easterners, Japheth as the father of all Europeans, and Ham as the father of all Africans. And in the process of this theological shift, the curse of Canaan got associated with all “Hamites”—African people—and we were said to be a “servant of servants.” By the 600s CE we find trace evidence in Jewish and Islamic thought of this Hamitic notion, and it is possible there was a skin color association but the historical record on this is not clear. What we do know, however, is that Black people’s relationship to the Christian narrative was certainly understood as that of the Hamite, a servant of servants by God’s will, especially as modern colonialism began to develop. When we look into chattel slavery, we find that many pro-slavery advocates used the idea of a Hamitic hypothesis to explain the savagery and sexual immorality of Black people that slavery was supposed to be the correct punishment for. Many Black people internalized these narratives but some did not, or perhaps modified them. At some point, a few Black Christians began to reinterpret a number of Scriptures, like the Psalm which

says “Ethiopia shall stretch out her hand to God.” This and other reclaimed Scriptures were said to cancel out any European Christian justification for slavery and other forms of colonial violence against our people. Instead now, because of Christ, we deserve liberation. This is the earliest Black nationalism as we understand it today.

But along with this racialized theological formula, these Christians continue to hold onto Europeans’ racialized supercessionism. In this way, a Black Nationalist right to freedom and self determination is about fulfilling a Christian spiritual right to reclaim the dominant system for us. It modifies the earlier reactionary missiological framing where “the Jews” are the devilish masters of a dominant system that “we” (Christians) actually have a spiritual right to occupy. Jewish people become the face of whiteness/the oppressor, and Black people the face of Christianity qua the “real Hebrews” or “True Israel” who must incorporate or appropriate the oppressor’s system instead. Mind you, this is all happening in a capitalist context, so the understanding of Black liberation they cling to is, of course, a bourgeois one. Black nationalism in this way is therefore often both Christian/religious and pro-capitalist, and so the understanding of Jewishness and of our relationship to the world system is shaped by European ideology. This is the only reason why there are similarities between Black cultural nationalism and white nationalism. White nationalism is also a bourgeois/capitalist project.

Revolutionary Nationalism:

Unlike white nationalism tho, colonized people have developed revolutionary nationalism that are not bourgeois/capitalist. As such Black REVOLUTIONARY nationalism will NEVER understand the world system as something we have a spiritual right to as Black people. Black revolutionary nationalism is hostile to the world system. The logical consequence is that a Christian supercessionist and anti-semitic understanding of Jewishness CANNOT EXIST in revolutionary nationalism. As a result, Black revolutionary nationalism has deep history of solidarity with Jewish people, understanding that our struggles are not religious struggles—they are MATERIAL struggles. Additionally, Black revolutionary nationalism is never gonna use a whitewashed understanding of Jewishness—where Jewishness becomes the face of white violence. What Black revolutionary nationalism will say is that the violence of white Jews is the same as that of white Christians, white Muslims, white Hindus, white Buddhists, white atheists. Revolutionary nationalism will say that all these violences are colonial violence. Just like the violence against Yeshua of Nazareth and against the early church was not because of Jewish people but because of COLONIALISM (Rome had a vested political interest in suppressing the dissenting voice of Yeshua). Again, the battle is material not religious.

Kwame Touré is one of the go to figures for understanding the contemporary Black revolutionary stance on Jewish struggle, that nationalists, Anarkatas, and other radicals all proclaim now in some way. From Touré’s organizing, it was established as a fundamental political line that resistance to Zionism is essential to fighting our domination under colonialism. But Touré was always careful about distinguishing between Zionism and Jewishness itself. Kwame Touré and others have faced and continued to face repression for our stance against Israel’s existence and Zionism. And yes, that repression is often framed through false accusations that to be anti-Zionist is to be anti-Semitic.

However, the defense of Israel through appeals to guarding against anti-Semitism is not because of a unique power that white Jewish people somehow have in the global capitalist/colonial system. The struggle for Palestinian Liberation gets suppressed because of the strategic impact of the anti-Zionist line on all struggles against colonialism. Anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism are the basis of anti-Zionism and that is the only way to effectively explain why the political establishment works so hard to silence critics of Israel and white Jewish violence. Anyone implying that white Jewish people are the sole/main Zionist forces, however, or that they themselves have orchestrated a uniquely repressive variation on colonialism through the State of Israel, is giving room to covertly anti-Jewish feelings among some of our people. This implication bears too close a resemblance to the architecture of anti-Jewish thinking which always frames “the Jews” as devilish masters of some dominating system. White non-Jewish leftists are very guilty of this line, and they do it because like other anti-Semites, they do want to hold onto a colonialist world system for themselves (which is why they criticize Israel so loudly but remain silent on Amerikkka). Black anti-Zionism is not to be hypocritical like this, because our anti-Zionism is an anti-colonial politic. It is from that perspective that we must not scapegoat white Jewish people because while we certainly acknowledge that white Jews are certainly complicit in and agents of colonialism, slavery, and Zionism—we also know it is Christianized Europeans whose nations have been firmly and avowedly behind the creation and maintenance and propaganda for the Israeli apartheid/fascist project since the beginning. And we know their support for Israel, dressed up in what some call “philosemitism,” and white Jewish complicity in it all, have less to do with shared religious heritage and more to do with material interests. It is solidarity along colonial/capitalist lines that is most decisive here, not a “Judeo-Christian” affinity. The Holocaust emerged because of material crisis within Europe that had its roots in colonialism and imperial conflict; and Europeans only stepped in to defeat the Nazi regime to further maintain their power against the threat of anti-colonial and communist struggle; and the development of the Israeli project has always been a step in the strategic process of trying to keep Massa’s house intact moving forward.

An analysis on colonialism and imperialism is our basis.

Black Celebrities:

When folk like Nick Cannon cart out xenophobic narratives about Jewish people, they are not doing it for anti-colonial or anti-imperial reasons. These people are not radicals but are bourgeois in thinking.

This is why I often say, amending Fanon’s observation about the relationship between anti-Semitism among whites and negrophobia, the anti-Semite in our community is undoubtedly a transphobe. Because anti-semitism emerges only in formula of understanding committed to the colonial/capitalist system. The anti-Semite in our community therefore is someone who holds to his biased ideas about Jewishness because he is a bourgeois nationalist, who also believes in the binarist nuclear family model is the pinnacle of Black salvation from economic destitution since it aligns with capitalist ideas. He likely sees the Jewish threat to his reactionary desire to reclaim the system as an architect of communist and queer liberation movements, because he asserts the validity of capitalism as a mode of production, and will be biased against those politics which call it into question. He will, furthermore, believe (or at least not question) the dream of America

and his place in it, and so when cops murder us it is not assumed that it's because we aren't Americans like revolutionary nationalist Malcolm X taught. No, the cultural/bourgeois nationalist has integrationist desires behind his anti-racist criticisms of the police. Even the most fiery and militant ones get angry mostly because they feel that our (spiritual) right to reclaim a dominant system we been excluded from is hindered (and often times police brutality is interpreted as Divine punishment for Jewish or queer or communist presence in our community). The cultural nationalist, whether he is a Notep or a Hebrew Israelite, or a Nation of Islam member, or any of the various Christian sects—he has no disregard for the capitalist/colonial system itself. Since his ideas are informed by a European Christian context of understanding, once again he is likely going to see “the Jews” as the face of his exclusion from the dominant system his reactionary thought tells him is his (spiritual) right to claim. So the supercessionist belief that he is the “real Hebrew/Jew” only exemplifies this thought process. Too many people have tried to give Nick Cannon credit and assume that Nick Cannon's words were just some misguided expression of anti-colonial frustration about white Jewish violence. No, they were bourgeois and upheld by supersessionist cultural legacy.

If I am wrong, and there were any remotely anti-colonial energies behind why Black cultural nationalists push these concepts, though, then how do we explain the fact that whenever Zionists (both Christian and Jewish) in the US approach them—as happened with Nick Cannon—they reveal their pro-Israel and other pro-colonial stances? We cannot simply say the Nick Cannon succumbed to Zionist pressure. Black radicals should not inject our anti-colonial alignment in the words of these class traitors when nothing they say reflects our political lines at all. Kwame Touré faced repression but never backed down from the correct line. It should be obvious that a celebrity's expression a pro-Israel stance is because of his bourgeois class orientation or class interests. And so it is with the other big faces of modern bourgeois/cultural nationalism in the Black movement. Nick Cannon and these other men completely recognize the suitability of the Israeli capitalist project to their own worldview as a rich people or boujie aspiring people. Their originary anti-Jewishness has not gone away simply because they express support for Israel. Philosemitism never goes beyond its supersessionist orientations, only trying to coopt Jewish struggle into colonial/capitalist politics instead.

We should reject the idea that simply pressure from Zionist media can be used to explain his shift in language. It is the prevalence of Euro-derived religious nationalist influences in our culture and the way it cloaks capitalist ideology that upholds both anti-Jewishness and other biases and oppressions including Zionism. For this reason, conversations about anti-Zionism cannot continue to be framed as the only solution to anti-Jewishness. This ignores the fact that Christian nationalism as a bourgeois project is essential to Zionism while also being the primary driver of anti-Jewishness in all communities. In order to address anti-Jewishness and practice anti-Zionism simultaneously, Black non-Jews must confront bourgeois nationalism in our communities' faith practices, especially the Christian or Christian-influenced ones.

This is the primary contradiction, as Christian religious nationalism is what allows room for Zionists to step in to seemingly “call him” into accord, because of the shared material/bourgeois investment. It's the same thing with the union of Black evangelicals and white evangelicals around Israel, especially in the prosperity theology world which is a hyper capitalist religious fold. The call out of Nick Cannon was nothing more than a crisis intervention method to stabilize conflict that could emerge in a man who publicly demonstrate that he had a shared bourgeois

interest with them. We cannot look at Nick Cannon as some victim on par with Kwame Touré or anything of the sort. Nick Cannon is not a working class Black revolutionary.

What We Can Say:

At the same time, it is possible to remark that colonizers also coalesced around Nick Cannon because they do not want bourgeois aspirational Black people to express things that might cause working class Black folk watching him to see themselves as at odds with white/colonial interests. Working class people have legitimate frustrations with white Jewish oppression that has been a site for real conversations on Zionism and colonialism in general by Black revolutionaries. The ruling class is afraid of us raising consciousness around anger about white Jewish oppression to a level that locates their violences in a larger anti-colonial continuum. Because then they know our community's love for Black nationalist political tendencies will then evolve into a revolutionary variety that questions not just Israel but the US and all forms of imperialism and colonialism. And we'd then organize in a way that poses a challenge to the cooption of our mindset that they have been tryna succeed at for the last few decades. Zionists stepped in not because of Nick per se, but because of what Black radicals could do with the controversy he introduced by exorcising the reactionary aspects of nationalism and espousing its radical iterations. It's this same damage control mechanism behind why they collaborate with Black evangelical/prosperity ministers around a philosemitic push, to keep the working class people in their pews from ever becoming open to the radical explanation for their frustration with white Jewish violence in the hood. In all these cases, anti-Jewishness never truly goes away, it's just twisted so that whiteness and capitalism is centered. But anticolonial struggle, Black Jews, Palestinian liberation, Black radicals—all get erased and shut out. As a bourgeois class traitor, Nick was completely on board with holding the line in these ways to solidify bourgeois rather than revolutionary thought. That's why he got up with public support for a colonial project, effectively closing out any potential for critical conversations about either Israel or colonialism, all through the ruse of newfound philosemitism.

The role of Black celebrities in brandishing colonial thought for themselves and suppressing radical perspectives is very pertinent beyond just Nick Cannon and conversations about Israel. So much Black "leadership" is not just pro-Israel, but pro-America, pro-cop, etc. So much Black leadership pushes the Pull Yourself By the Bootstraps idea than ever before, calling it the "Grind" of calling their presence liberation or calling themselves businesses. So much Black leadership is saying that we should hug cops because most of them are good, and that we should vote for center-Right politicians because they are the best we have. So much Black leadership centers cis and abled victims of police violence because these are respectable victims to them who don't deserve State repression like the queers, crazy folk, etc. And so much of the cultural touchstones being drawn on or appealed to in order to legitimize these dominant social relations is religious values, more specifically Christian. If there is any religious group posing an issue for the Black Movement, including anti-Zionist struggle, it is Christians, not Jewish people. But again, that is because of a bourgeois investment, and therefore it is a material problem and not a fundamentally religious problem.

Therefore, while it is often suggested that Black and anti-Zionist Jewish comrades must prove they are pro-Black, prove that Judaism isn't colonial in order to not experience bias from folk en-

grained in Black Christian culture—I say that Christians should be doing the work to demonstrate that our religion is not to be aligned with colonialism/capitalism. It cannot be any longer that Christianity is the only major religion that’s been violently used whose adherents don’t have to develop and affirm a radical politics. It cannot be that we are simply written off as a lost cause while Jewish comrades have to defend themselves to our community. Christians must affirm that neither the anti-semitism of early AD/CE days, or of the Middle Ages, or of today, is valid or logical. Christians must affirm that anti-Jewishness is xenophobic and is an ideological strategy of reaction and mystification—to uphold capitalism. Christians must affirm that anti-Jewishness and philosemitism alike are a colonial tactic expressed around Christian religious logics to let the real system (capitalism and colonialism) off the hook. Part of this may require a shift in our theologies, our religious understanding of Jewishness and other faiths but also of Blackness/Afrikanness. We need a viable theological alternative to supercessionism, one that can acknowledge the distinction of Christianity from Judaism without enunciating a mystical edifice that is oriented around both missiological incorporation of dominant thinking and the negation of Jewishness. We also need viable theological alternatives to the way Africanness is still demonized and sexually criminalized in mainstream Christian thinking. We need a formula for enunciating the spiritual validity of Black liberation without relying on and trying to rewrite European derived religious anthropologies about moral deficit on part of Afrikan culture and Afrikan people. But most importantly, while we are doing this religious solidarity work, we must raise consciousness around capitalism as an exploitative and ecocidal mode of production, and around the color line—the war between Man and colonized—by which it accumulates and unfolds. Capitalism and colonialism are the material basis for all this mess; structures of domination are what is primary here and we should put in the work to organize our communities against it.

What approach do you suggest in doing this?

I personally believe encouraging Black August or Freedom Week fasts and Bible studies attuned to Black liberation struggle is a good starting place because abolition is so resonant in Black Christian history. That is what I have been suggesting. The theology around fasting as a relinquishment of worldly investment and a deeper pursuit of the Spirit’s grace to overcome death can shine really well during Black August or Freedom Week to illuminate certain basic liberation theology affirmations like the inherent sinfulness of the capitalist/colonial system and way of behaving as well as the counter-oppressive element built into a Christian life of salvation. Christian Fasting during Black August and Freedom Week can allow us to bring Scriptural encouragement to be “transformed by the renewing of our mind” or to “cast down imagination that exalt themselves above the knowledge of God” to Black Freedom struggle. From there we scale and study not just carcerality, capitalism, colonialism, but anti-Jewishness, queerphobia, ableism, and so many other form of domination, hierarchy, and oppression.

If you have other ideas, let’s hear them.

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