# Fannie Lou Hamer and Transforming Anger: From Danger and Demand to Liberation and Love

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## A Time of Anger

We live in a time when anger is ubiquitous in the public square of the United States of America. Anger itself has become a central topic of conversation. Three popular bestselling books have been published in the last two years celebrating female anger and black anger.[1] National polls tell us anger crosses cultural lines: Americans of all stripes are angry and view the country as more angry than previous generations.[2] And the presidential politics of the 2020 campaign have been colored arguably more by anger than any other emotion. In a time such as this we are compelled to search our history and our religious traditions for teachers and wisdom regarding the nature of anger, in its righteousness and its sinfulness, in its utility and its risk, in its tendency toward healing justice and toward retributive destruction. This project seeks to do just that by exploring the life and work of one particular woman, lesser-known civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer, and by drawing on two traditions within Christianity, Catholic moral ethics and the black church. Hamer and these traditions will guide us to understand the dangers and demands of anger in its ethical ambiguity, as well as introduce us to practices that reveal and enable transforming anger, anger that both transforms practitioners and anger that is transformed by practitioners. In this transforming anger we witness anger in all its liberative and loving potential rather than its retributive divisiveness, but it is not easily won and certainly not won alone. It is neither achieved without community nor without God. Rather, we discover transforming anger at the nexus of an individual transformed in radical freedom, a community rooted in practical resources for responding to suffering, and the grace of God.

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[1] See Rebecca Traister's *Good and Mad: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Anger,* Soraya Chemaly's *Rage Becomes Her: The Power of Women's Anger,* and Brittney Cooper's *Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Finds Her Superpower.*

[2] See NPR (https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/06/26/735757156/poll-americans-say-were-angrier-than-a-generat ion-ago) and Forbes coverage (https://www.forbes.com/sites/bowmanmarsico/2018/12/17/how-angry-are-we-what-the-polls-show/#2f54673d2a65)

## **"Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired"**

Throughout her public life Fannie Lou Hamer famously described herself as "sick and tired of being sick and tired." She variously used this phrase to describe her feelings regarding the state of America and its pervasive systemic racism; white citizens who refused to stand up for integration all the while "integrating at night"; black preachers who refused to join the civil rights movement; and white politicians who accused her of lacking the qualifications to run for office while upholding a fundamental violation of black citizens' human rights.[3] Though her words refer to illness and fatigue, the emotion underlying this self-description is undoubtedly anger. Fannie Lou Hamer was angry and unafraid to let her listeners know that. She said as much in a 1972 interview reflecting on her previous decade of civil rights activism: "For a long time I was very angry." And she certainly had well-grounded reason to be.

Hamer was born in the Mississippi Delta in 1917. At the age of two she moved with her parents and 19 siblings to Ruleville, Mississippi. Beginning at the age of six she joined her siblings and her parents in the fields picking cotton, having been lured into the work by the plantation owner promising her treats from the general store. By age 12 she was working full-time in the fields and picking 200-300 lbs of cotton a day. Until the age of 45 she worked nearly nonstop, both in the cotton fields and in the homes of the plantation owners, under a sharecropping system that was an "exploitative credit-based system against which blacks had no recourse."[4]

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[3] Regarding "integrating at night" Hamer noted in several speeches that her light-skinned black friends and family members could not be so light skinned if white men were as completely opposed to integration as they claimed to be.

[4] Maegan Parker Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army: Fannie Lou Hamer and the Rhetoric of the Black Freedom Movement* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 12

In addition to the backbreaking work of cotton farming, Hamer lived in the absolute vulnerability of life with no protection from the law. When she spoke at the University of Wisconsin in 1971 she told the story of her family finally gathering enough money to buy a couple of extra animals that would allow them to build some wealth and escape the cycle of grinding poverty. Nearly as soon as the animals arrived, a white man poisoned their feed trough with the insecticide Paris Green and none survived. Hamer recalled, “That poisoning knocked us right back down flat. We never did get back up again.”[5] Even more intimately, she only once told the story of her forcible sterilization at the hands of the state-backed doctors who, with impunity, led her to believe they were simply removing an ovarian cyst. Her life was marked by consistent, intentionally inflicted suffering for which the legal-political system of mid-20th century Mississippi offered no recourse.

Though horrifying, Hamer’s story was not unique. It was the familiarity of her story, in fact, that was most angering and eventually became the fuel for her fight. Her suffering, along with that of fellow poor black Mississippians, generated her anger and a related sense of agency long before she joined the Civil Rights Movement. As she would later gleefully recount, she found ways to subtly rebel throughout her life: “I used to have a real ball knowing they didn’t want me in their tub and just relaxing in that bubble bath. . . . So when they was saying that I couldn’t eat with them, it would tickle me because I would say to myself, “Baby, I eat first!” . . . You know— we had— I was rebelling in the only way that I could rebel.”[6] Knowing this history of secret domestic rebellion better explains what otherwise looks like a sudden turn in her life toward anger. That being said, this wealth of kindling exploded into a burning fire in 1962 when Hamer stepped into the Civil Rights Movement.

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[5] Charles Marsh, *God’s Long Summer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 12

[6] Fannie Lou Hamer, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell It Like It Is,* ed. by Maegan Parker Brooks and Davis W. Houck (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 124

This kindling did not solely consist of suffering and anger, though. Hamer's voice, both spoken and sung, had been honed from a young age. Hamer never received a formal education past sixth grade and was forced to work full-time in the fields alongside her parents and siblings, and later her husband. Yet her life in the black church and her childhood surrounded by the rhythms and gifts of black Southern Baptist preachers, including her father, armed her with a rhetorical skill set. She excelled at reading, writing, spelling, and poetry, and was encouraged by her parents to perform often.[7] Misportrayed in many historical renderings as a simple sharecropper who spoke simply and intuitively, Hamer was, according to Maegan Parker Brooks' rhetorical biography,  gifted with words at a young age. She honed those skills through church and informal family spaces, and then shaped her public voice and image with intentionality and skill.[8]

Central to her rhetorical training was the formation offered by the black church. Hamer learned to lucidly connect scripture to the practical challenges facing members of her community and over time honed a contagious style.[9] Her rhetorical capacity consistently demonstrated a mastery of the black preaching tradition's core sermonic characteristics: "an abiding faith in divine justice, [and] a pragmatic theology … delivered in her community's vernacular."[10] As we will later examine in detail, the particular register of the black Jeremiad, a part of the larger black preaching tradition, welcomed Hamer's anger and gave her the tools to transform it into collective action.

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[7] Hamer, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer,*  xvii

[8] Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army,* 5

[9] Hamer, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer,* xv

[10] Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army,* 33

In addition to her natural verbal acuity and mastery of this tradition, the editors of her collected works, Maegan Parker Brooks and Davis Houck, note that Hamer also stood out, at least in part, because she was a woman:

> Although the training Hamer received and the biblical types she utilized were part of southern black Baptist heritage common to many African Americans, Hamer nevertheless emerged as a distinctive voice within her rural black southern community. Part of that uniqueness can be attributed to Hamer's gender. Given the patriarchal structure of the southern black Baptist church, for instance, the leadership role and preacher persona Hamer adopted were indeed unusual.

Inhabiting this role as a woman, and particularly a poor woman without formal schooling, made Hamer unique. Her position outside of traditional clerical power may also have been a source of her freedom to join and lead within the Civil Rights Movement.

As she was quick to highlight and condemn, Hamer saw the majority of the male clergy refusing to support, and often standing in the way of, organizing for voting rights and desegregation. She saw their failure as indicative of the larger failure of her community to heed God's calling: "Now you can't tell me you trust God and come out to a church every Sunday with a bunch of stupid hats … and paying the preacher's way to hell and yours too."[11] Hamer had little patience for what she diagnosed as the pomp and circumstance of church displacing the fulfillment of God's call.

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[11] Hamer, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer,* 50

The hesitation of clergy to engage in organizing is not difficult to understand, of course, since the patriarchal system of the black church was deeply tied to the system of racial segregation in the south: “Black preachers often relied on funding and protection to run their parishes, which bound these ministers to their white benefactors.”[12] So, not only did Hamer’s adoption of the black Southern Baptist preacher persona set her apart as a woman; being a woman and neither male nor clergy meant she was uniquely suited to throw off the bonds within which the black church continued to struggle.

Hamer was shaped by where she came from and also uniquely willing to break from that heritage. Being a woman speaking in the tradition of the male Southern Baptist preacher was one way in which she broke from tradition. Choosing to walk off the sharecropping field and into the Civil Rights Movement was another. Hamer’s capacity to continually connect back to the roots of her community’s traditions while also bringing her unique contribution became vital for her public leadership.

Fannie Lou Hamer’s public life began in 1962 when she begrudgingly attended the first voter registration mass meeting in Ruleville and heard organizers from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), James Bevel and James Forman, speak. In one later speech, she recalls learning that night of the 15th Amendment and her constitutional right to vote.[13] In another, she recounts the calling of Christ to take action.[14] Whether her explanation was immanent or transcendent, she answered the altar call that night and signed up to register to vote.

A few weeks later, this act of attempting to register to vote would get her fired from her work as a sharecropper and kicked out of the home where she had lived with her husband and adopted daughters for eighteen years. As she would retell in speech after speech, her boss demanded that she remove her application to vote if she wanted to stay. Hamer refused, telling her audiences: “He wasn’t ready but I been ready a long time.”[15] Reading her telling of this story suggests that in that moment she found some new freedom to risk what little material security she had through a combination of long suffering, deep faith, and anger: “In 1962 I was fed up.”[16]

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[12] Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army,* 34
[13] Hamer, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer,* 107
[14] Ibid, xix

Now homeless and dependent on the charity of friends and neighbors, Hamer continued to show up at the courthouse in Indianola every thirty days to register to vote until she finally passed all the required tests, including an analysis of the Mississippi Constitution. She then became the first black woman registered to vote in Sunflower County, and after that, “it was like I become a hunted person, criminal,” she recalled.[17] Far from being deterred, Hamer ignored pleas from family and friends to avoid her hometown: “I’m going back to Ruleville, and if I get killed in Sunflower County I’ll still be a part, but I’m not running any further.”[18] She would soon take the risk even further. Less than two years later, in 1964, she voted for the first time and she herself was on the ballot: “The first vote I cast, I cast my first vote for myself, because I was running for Congress.”[19] Her audacity and seeming fearlessness in the face of terror would soon win her a national following. But before she ran for public office or made a name for herself nationally, Hamer would endure a brutal beating at the hands of the police in Winona, Mississippi, an event which would, in retrospect, become central to her story of transforming anger.

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[15] Hamer, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer,* 48

[16] Ibid, 106

[17] Ibid, 110

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid, 154

The story, which she told in almost every speech or interview she gave, began on June 9th, 1963, when she and a group of organizers from SNCC and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) returned to Mississippi from a voter registration training conference. Following a stop at a roadside restaurant, Hamer and several other organizers were arrested by local police after a few members of their group attempted to be served.[20] They were transferred to the local jail where they were divided into different cells and beaten one by one. Hamer was beaten by two black male inmates with a "long leather blackjack that was loaded with some kind of metal" under threat of punishment from three white police officers who watched.[21] When Hamer screamed too loud or the beating was not severe enough, one officer beat her in the head while another groped her under her dress.[22] The beating would leave her permanently physically scarred, with a blood clot in one eye and a permanent kidney injury. In a federal lawsuit brought by the Justice Department six months later, the police officers were found not guilty by an all-white Oxford, Mississippi jury.

In the years that followed Hamer would capitalize on her experience to draw attention to the brutality of Mississippi: "Hamer's Winona narrative . . . became a central tenet of her rhetorical signature and established her credibility as one who has walked through the shadows of death."[23] She retold the story in graphic detail each time, using her body and its scars as exhibit A for her case before her audience, many of whom could not imagine the harrowing injustice of Jim Crow Mississippi.

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[20] The Interstate Commerce Commission had banned segregation in interstate travel facilities in 1961 so this attempt was not an act of civil disobedience but rather well within the law.

[21] Hamer, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer,* 113

[22] Ibid.

[23] Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army*, 61

Within two years of joining the Civil Rights Movement, this story and Hamer's well-prepared voice, fueled by collective suffering and anger, would carry her from the backwoods of Ruleville to a spot on the national news in 1964 challenging the all-white delegation of the Mississippi Democratic Party in Atlantic City. After this, Hamer became a sought-after speaker around the country, while also leading local efforts, first joining SNCC to register voters and later running for office several times herself. Given her well-grounded anger, and her capacity to transform that anger into a force for her own and her country's transformation, Hamer will thus be our guide in seeking to understand the nature of anger and what we might learn from her experience and that of the tradition out of which she comes. Before returning to Hamer, though, we will venture through a series of ethicists who offer dramatically different perspectives on this emotion. They will offer us analytic resources to further understand Hamer, just as Hamer will serve as a critical resource for evaluating their theoretical work.

## Martha Nussbaum and the Dangers of Anger

We now step from the concrete experience of Fannie Lou Hamer to a theoretical discussion of anger so that we might return to Hamer with better resources to understand what she teaches. Michael Jaycox, a Catholic ethicist, frames the theoretical discourse on anger in the public square as split between a "dominant discourse" and a "critical discourse."[24] The dominant discourse, exemplified by philosopher and ethicist Martha Nussbaum, is concerned by the narcissistic, reactive and retributive tendencies of anger. The emotion itself is this discourse's focus and it concludes that anger needs to be chastened if not avoided entirely. In contrast, the critical discourse, exemplified by a series of black thinkers including poet activist Audre Lorde and Catholic ethicist Bryan Massingale, defends the vital role of anger in fighting against injustice and entrenched institutional oppression. This line of thought argues that the object of the anger deserves the attention and concern that the dominant discourse places on the emotion. In essence, it is the oppression and injustice that needs reversing, not the emotion.

As the leading contemporary voice of this dominant discourse on anger, Martha Nussbaum will be our starting point for understanding this debate. In her recent work, *Anger and Forgiveness*, she seeks to scuttle common defenses of anger in the various realms of human life, and condemns the commonly accepted recourse to forgiveness as well. Given the focus of this paper on Catholic ethics and the black church, it may seem odd to begin with a secular philosopher. However, Nussbaum is one of the leading philosophers studying emotion in general and anger in particular today, and she does invite in religious resources. More interestingly, she takes the extreme position against anger, arguing it is inherently normatively problematic, and for this reason alone it is worth taking time to consider her arguments.

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[24] Michael P. Jaycox, "The Civic Virtues of Social Anger: A Critically Reconstructed Normative Ethic of Public Life." *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 36, no. 1 (2016): 125

Here we will see the dangers of anger in its tendency toward irrational or immoral retribution, the common narcissistic grounding of anger in imagined slights rather than reality, and the vital difficult work of directing anger in situations of revolutionary justice. Here we will also see the shortcomings of an analysis that focuses on the individual experience of anger rather than on the collective; assumes certain degrees of power or security in the agent experiencing anger; defines anger as conceptually tied to retribution but not to any of its more constructive potential outcomes; and fails to offer resources for overcoming anger beyond returning to rationality and sanity.

Nussbaum starts this work by surveying western intellectual history to assemble a working definition of anger. She grounds her understanding in Aristotle's definition of anger from *Rhetoric*: "A desire accompanied by pain for an imagined retribution on account of an imagined slighting inflicted by people who have no legitimate reason to slight oneself or one's own."[25] Anger is "an unusually complex emotion" that involves pain, in its focus on an imagined act of wrongful damage, and pleasure, in targeting the people responsible with imagined retribution.[26] She highlights and agrees with Aristotle's repeated use of the word "imagined" in reference to the wrong done and the desired retribution. Anger is tied to the agent's perception of the situation regardless of objective truth, and the agent's "view of what matters in life" shapes his or her movement toward anger.[27]

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[25] Martha Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, and Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 16

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

According to Nussbaum, this retribution takes two forms. The road of payback imagines that the offender's suffering would actually make things better.[28] This thought employs "magical thinking" and makes no rational sense because another's suffering does not actually repair harm. Alternatively, the road of status imagines retribution as a cosmic righting of the scales where the offender's status can be down ranked, allowing some relative shift upward for the aggrieved. Where this alternative is intelligible (i.e. does not employ magical thinking), she argues that it is inherently morally flawed, converting all "injuries into problems of relative position, thus making the world revolve around the desire for domination and control," a wish at the "heart of infantile narcissism."[29] Thus, anger is conceptually defined by either magical thinking or narcissistic moral error.

In turn, her thesis is that anger is always normatively problematic whether in the personal realm, the realm of revolutionary justice, or anywhere in between. The alternative is to prevent anger in the first place or quickly opt for what she calls the "Transition."

The Transition is the state arrived at after passing through the hotter state of anger to take action from a cooler rational state. Transition is the "healthy segue into forward-looking thoughts of welfare," the movement from "anger to compassionate hope."[30] Nussbaum uses Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream Speech" to show an effective performance of this movement. He moves the crowd from anger at the injustices of racism to the image of a bad check, which she argues is a cooling image suggesting that payment not retribution is required, and then finally toward an "intelligent and imaginative effort toward justice."[31] In her estimation, King recognized the dangers of anger like she does and moved quickly past the emotion in order to marshal the moral energy of his followers toward more constructive ends. In her view, this movement towards Transition is the only normatively defensible option in response to anger, and King is an exemplar of this work, which is particularly difficult to achieve when marshalling the anger of the masses.

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[28] Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness,* 21
[29] Ibid, 29
[30] Ibid, 31
[31] Ibid, 33

Before moving to the various realms of human life where she argues her thesis, let us examine a few helpful distinctions and two caveats she offers. First, anger differs from grief. Unlike grief, anger has a target, which grief need not have, and requires "causal thinking" along with a "grasp of right and wrong."[32] Grief is intimately related to anger insofar as an unwillingness to grieve and accept the helplessness that is part of every human life may lead us to anger and the road of payback or status.[33] Where Nussbaum idealizes the acceptance of helplessness that accompanies grief, later ethicists will celebrate the agency that accompanies anger.

Second, she distinguishes anger from rage or fury, indicating that the two are merely cases of an anger of unusual intensity and unusual suddenness, respectively.[34] As we will see, other ethicists discussed below will offer a strikingly different understanding of rage. Finally, she effectively dispenses with suggestions that words like "resentment," "indignation," "irritation," and "annoyance" can be useful. They are either slippery and non-technical or already fall within the genus of anger.[35] Though her definition of anger will be critiqued, these distinctions are important because her overall schema is our starting point for understanding what anger is and what it is not.

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[32] Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness,* 17

[33] Ibid, 29

[34] Ibid, 264

[35] Ibid, 262-264

In her first caveat to her thesis Nussbaum does allow for anger to have a "very limited but real utility."[36] Anger can serve as a signal to a person or to the world that something is wrong. Given the potential result in magical thinking or moral error, the guidance of the signal is dangerous, but she allows that if the signal prompts welfare-improving action, it is useful. Anger can also be a motivator. She admits it can be a spark plug to correct action in a way that "love is not always enough."[37] But again, the utility is brief and dangerous. Finally, anger can be a deterrent insofar as it deters the violation of a person or group. Yet there are better deterrents, and the deterrent of anger has the potential for breeding instability because of its tendency toward irrational or immoral action. She consistently argues that her thesis allows for limited utility, warns against dire potential consequences, and ultimately shows that alternatives to anger are better.

In her second caveat Nussbaum acknowledges the existence of a rare borderline case she calls "Transition Anger." Where Transition otherwise refers to the off ramp from anger demanded by the rational mind, Transition Anger is a unique form of anger that vitally includes the welfarist bent of seeking to take generative action. The emotion is expressed in the reaction: "How outrageous! Something must be done about this."[38] While the common experience available to most of us is anger then Transition, "exceptional individuals" typically shaped by "long self-discipline" experience the emotion as one singular movement.[39] What that long self-discipline might look like she does not say immediately, but she believes it is rare enough not to threaten her thesis. Put differently, transition anger is the rare exception that proves the rule that anger consists conceptually of a retributive impulse.

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[36] Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 39
[37] Ibid, 39
[38] Ibid, 35
[39] Ibid, 36

Moving ahead to the central work of her argument, Nussbaum makes her case against anger in four realms of human life: the personal, middle, everyday political, and revolutionary justice. The personal realm is that of intimate relationships including those between parents and children, between spouses, and with oneself. In these relationships anger is often "well grounded," by which she means cognitively correct in all parts other than the payback wish.[40] That is, both the perception of the wrong and the attribution of cause are accurate. She distinguishes "well-grounded anger" from the common term "well-justified anger" because she holds anger to be normatively problematic and thus will not call it justified.

Intimate relationships are distinctive because they are pivotal to our lives, they involve great trust and great vulnerability with people we typically like or even love, and issues within them often cannot be addressed by the law. These distinctions mean that breakdowns often warrant grief, as a result of the vulnerability which is a "necessary consequence of giving love its proper value."[41] Here she diverts from the Stoics who would refuse this notion of love and vulnerability. Anger may be well-grounded in these breakdowns as well, but "it's just that it gives such bad advice."[42] Anger not only leads to a payback wish for someone cared for, but it can be a form of sealing the self off from the mourning and vulnerability that might enable healing.

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[40] Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 93

[41] Ibid, 27

[42] Ibid.

Her arguments here are compelling for the types of breakdowns she considers, ones considering individual relationships, as opposed to group dynamics, and isolatable incidents, as opposed to ongoing multi-factorial mistreatment. These breakdowns are those for which retribution makes the least sense since it ultimately affects someone for whom we care deeply. And these relationships are those over which we have the most agency. We can change our circumstances, end a relationship, or heal one where concrete circumstances are isolated and a clear solution is established. Although the desire for retribution and the experience of helplessness are common in this realm, the immediate self-defeating nature of retribution and the reality of agency are far greater here than elsewhere.

Her argument, however, does not account for other potential breakdowns. An example might be a relationship with a long-term pattern of abuse, where isolating particular incidents is difficult for the victim, the victim's agency is objectively limited, and healing the relationship is not the primary concern. Such long-term abuse could be imagined within a spousal relationship or a parent-child relationship. Perhaps Nussbaum would suggest that this situation is where the limited utility of anger as a signal, motivator, and deterrent is relevant. At the very least, though, her resorts to grief, vulnerability, care for the victimizer, and seeking healing within the relationship are not of utmost importance. Though anger in the personal realm is seemingly distant from the focus of this essay, it is important to note that even here Nussbaum's argument depends on the types of agents and types of breakdowns she chooses to address. As we approach situations demanding revolutionary justice or the life experience of Fannie Lou Hamer, we will need a theory that works not just for individual relationships and isolated incidents but collective experience and ongoing systematic mistreatment.

The middle realm is a second part of human life where Nussbaum argues the normative problem of anger. The middle realm consists of those relationships including colleagues, casual acquaintances, and strangers encountered briefly. Here she argues that Seneca – the Stoic philosopher who wrote *De Ire* warning against the dangers of anger – was "right to say that a lot of people's anger in this realm is the result of mistaken attributions of insult and malice" resulting from "a hypersensitivity often caused by morbid narcissism."[43] Anger often results from "socially engendered overvaluation of honor, status, and rank" existing only in the offended eye of the recipient and ultimately unworthy of our emotional attention. Here she makes a compelling case that much of what she calls "garden-variety anger," whether in traffic or in line at the DMV, is indefensible and ought to be dispensed with as quickly as possible.

Alternatively, anger in the middle realm may result from very serious moral wrongs, such as wrongful termination or sexual assault. In these cases the "productive road" is to "turn matters over to the law."[44] Once the law has taken over the offended party need not worry about further interaction. This possibility stands in contrast with the personal realm where easily moving on is not an option. Yet, we must press the question as to whether moving on in the middle realm is as simple as Martha Nussbaum suggests. Doing so leads to two additional questions that lead us to the limitations of the larger work.

First, how does one simply move on? Doing so seems easier said than done. This question is never explicitly addressed in the book even as she often frames this movement as central. Put another way, how do we execute the Transition, whether that be in moving from anger toward productive problem-solving or releasing anger once the law has taken over? What can be parsed from her examples and her theorizing is that the Transition is the result of the triumph of reason and sanity. Repeatedly, she suggests that after rationally understanding the reality before oneself, Transition will be the only viable choice. This triumph of reason and sanity is assisted by the practices of self-teasing or amused self-detachment that make oneself an objective observer.[45] But, in the end, moving on is what a sane person would do, she tells us.

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[43] Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness,* 147
[44] Ibid, 140

Nussbaum's theory of emotion, detailed in a previous book *Upheavals of Emotion* and summarized in the appendix of this work, centralizes the cognitive function within emotion. In anger's case there is a cognitive judgement of wrongful harm, and then causality and responsibility are assigned. A cognitive judgement moves one into the state and thus, a cognitive judgement can move one out of the state. The failure to do so is in turn a cognitive failure, a failure of right reason or even sanity, she claims.

Yet common human experience would suggest this movement is not so simple. Knowing the irrationality of one's emotional state does not relieve one immediately of it. Even Nussbaum's personal examples of anger in her own life, particularly anger in reaction to men trying to lift her bag for her on airplanes, show this to be true.[46] So, what more is needed? Furthermore, what is needed when the experience of anger is not merely individual but collective? Fannie Lou Hamer and the rhetorical and contemplative practices of the black church will help us answer these questions.

Second, the discussion of the middle realm and the usefulness of the law leads to the question about the viability of the law as recourse. What if you have good reason not to trust that the law will offer you protection as a citizen? Or what if seeking out the law risks significant harm such as might be the case for an undocumented American resident or someone living in a society without the rule of law? Nussbuam tells us that for the case where the law falls short, we must look ahead to the final section of revolutionary justice.

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[45] Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 168

[46] Ibid, 149

Yet this anticipated section falls far short of answering these questions. Even if her arguments on chastening anger in the realm of revolutionary justice held strong, they still would not address the plight of the person who has been wrongfully terminated or sexually assaulted in the middle realm. Perhaps that person would be inspired to rally for political or even revolutionary change, but what of the individual's experience of harm and the inability to take it to the law? Nussbaum offers no answer to this question and thus leaves a hole in her universal critique of anger. Recourse to the law is one of her reasons why anger is unnecessary. The lack of recourse to the law weakens her argument's claim to apply to all people, even within a stable liberal democracy. For those who do not have that degree of power or security associated with recourse to the law, her analysis falls short.

Before reaching this anticipated section on revolutionary justice we must pause in the penultimate section on everyday justice, the realm where wrongs are addressed "within an ongoing legal framework that its not itself based, at least at the most abstract and general level, upon fundamental injustice."[47] To what standard of justice "the abstract and general level" refers she does not say, but she certainly assumes that the United States of America meets it. Here, in the realm of political and legal institutions, anger and its retributive impulses have no place. She convincingly argues that, with roots in the Athenian legal transformation of the 5th century BCE, the modern law has largely internalized her critique of anger, prizing, at least in theory, impartiality.

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[47] Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 172

The remaining area of debate regards the value of retributive punishment, which she argues has no place in a properly-orientated welfarist system. Anger and retribution, embodied and enacted by the legal institution of the state, cannot be justified. Her elucidation of the debate over retributive punishment shows the continued work needed to maintain and extend this 2500-year-old insight through our modern legal system.

Finally, we reach revolutionary justice, those circumstances where the legal and political system is unjust and corrupt. Nussbaum argues that contra the common instinct that such times require anger, the examples of Gandhi, MLK Jr. and Nelson Mandela "help us see why the idea of 'noble anger' as a signal, motivator, and justified expression is a false guide in revolutionary situations."[48] These men decidedly prove that the repudiation of anger can and should be at the heart of the work of revolutionary justice: "Gandhi's noncooperation campaign against the British raj, the U.S. civil rights movement, and South Africa's struggle to overcome the apartheid system were all highly successful, and all repudiated anger as a matter of both theory and practice."[49] Yet Nussbaum's choice of these three leaders and her description of their careers give immediate pause.

Her description contains three problematic assumptions. First, that these movements were led by singular men who deserve credit for the entire movements' successes. In reference to the Civil Rights Movement, Fannie Lou Hamer's biographer Maegan Parker Brooks notes the problem with this narrative: "The master narrative's focus on a few larger than life leaders, its emphasis on national victories and its triumphalist overtones belie the work that remains to be done, conceal the range of advocates with the potential to participate, and mask the ideologies that perpetuate white privilege and continue to disempower African Americans."[50] Similar claims could be made about the movements in India and South Africa. Nussbaum uncritically depends on this master narrative and ignores the complexities of these movements with their diversity of leaders, organizations, and strategies for affecting revolutionary justice. Doing so allows her to continue to approach anger from an individual perspective rather than dealing with the complexity of collective anger.

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[48] Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 212

[49] Ibid.

Second, she assumes that the repudiation of anger in theory and practice was comprehensive. Given the diversity of these movements this claim does not withstand pressure, and certainly needs support, which she does not offer. Michael Jaycox cites Gay Seidman's study of South Africa, where he argues that the strategic coordination of "clandestine, violent tactics with the 'aboveground,' nonviolent tactics employed by the majority of the anti-apartheid movement was integral to their attaining the desired outcome."[51] Of course, violence and anger are not one in the same, but if nonviolence was not as ubiquitous as a first glance might suggest, then we can safely assume that the repudiation of anger may not have been as well. Again, the complexity and diversity of the movement makes a universal claim about the nature of anger in these movements difficult.

Finally, Nussbaum uncritically assumes that these movements were successful. When Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated he had an undelivered sermon written called "Why America May Go to Hell." Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu Nationalist who judged him to have been too generous to Muslims in the partition of India, a partition which Gandhi desperately sought to prevent. Clearly neither man died seeing his own work as an unmitigated success. Without pursuing a full historical analysis of each of these cases we can still say confidently that calling all three movements highly successful requires more defense than she offers – that is, any at all.

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[50] Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army,* 7

[51] Jaycox, "The Civic Virtues of Social Anger,*"* 139

Nussbaum's dependence on these assumptions weakens her argument for the repudiation of anger in the revolutionary realm. If we cannot reliably say these men were responsible for these movements and their successes, that these movements were fueled entirely by the repudiation of anger, and that these movements even were definitively successful, then we must question the underlying claim that these men and their uses of anger show us that anger is necessarily a false guide in revolutionary situations.

That being said, let us take each leader in turn to understand what each does teach us about anger in the public square. Mahatma Gandhi famously led the nonviolent effort for spiritual and political revolution in India, seeking the departure of the British colonial government and the rise of a new socio-political era defined by nonviolence and the return to communal rural living. Of the the three leaders studied, Gandhi is the most demanding and most stoic in his approach to anger, seeking to rid himself of the emotion entirely. His was as gravely concerned for the internal spiritual consequences of anger as the external socio-political ones. And he may have taken these demands too far. Nussbaum cites Eric Erikson and George Orwell's assessments that Gandhi's demand on himself for absolute non-anger was deeply problematic, renunciation itself becoming an expression of self-anger. Nussbaum argues that this conclusion shows that non-anger and complete renunciation do not go hand in hand.

However, this claim is slightly confusing because the renunciation of anger appears to be at the heart of her thesis. Gandhi is her only example of the three men who sought pure non-anger. So, by impugning the pursuit of total renunciation she seems to also impugn the pursuit of non-anger. Neither King nor Mandela renounced anger entirely, but rather marshaled the emotion, in themselves and their followers, away from retribution and toward their desired ends. So, Nussbaum's critique of Gandhi and her greater dependence on King and Mandela suggest that anger is not the primary issue after all, nor is it healthily avoidable. Retribution should be our central concern.

In contrast to Gandhi, King experienced plenty of anger and used anger in public speeches as Nussbaum herself earlier shows in her reading of his "I Have a Dream" speech. She admits that King "allows for some real anger," not just in himself but in his compatriots, "holding that demonstrations and marches are a way of channeling repressed emotions that might otherwise lead to violence."[52] His greatest concern is the "strike-back mentality," which she argues is proof that he holds, as she does, that "anger is inherently wedded to a payback mentality."[53] Yet her description of King raises the question of why the payback mentality is inherent in anger but the Transition is conceptually apart. Would King allow and even encourage anger the way he does if payback were far more likely than transition?

Diana Fritz Cates offers a useful adjustment to Nussbaum's definition of anger in her review of *Anger and Forgiveness*: "Anger does not necessarily include a desire to make someone suffer for what she did, although this form of anger appears to be common. Some anger, for example, is more a desire to block an offender or strip her of her power to injure us."[54] Here Cates opens up conceptual room between Nussbaum's "garden-variety anger" that always includes retribution and the rare case of transition anger available to only an exceptional well-disciplined few. Anger can elicit defensive action that might appear like payback but honestly seeks to solely prevent further harm. An example of this would be a punch thrown in the midst of a fistfight in order to fell one's opponent and stop the fight, in contrast to seeking out a victimizer to level a punch and even the score after a fight has ended.

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[52] Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 221

[53] Ibid.

With King and Cates' assistance we see the limitation of a definition of anger that conceptually includes payback or retributive action and excludes productive action of any kind. King sees that anger can lead to productive action just as it can lead to payback. Cates sees that anger can lead to defensive action just as it can lead to payback. In this new frame anger becomes less universally problematic, and more ethically ambiguous.

Finally, Nelson Mandela is critical to Nussbaum's case because where King and Gandhi rely on religious metaphysics, Mandela relies on the pragmatic politics that are far more satisfying to her philosophical inquiry.[55] She tells the story of Mandela's emotional discipline, generous spirit and refusal to take revenge despite a lifetime of brutal apartheid and twenty-seven years in prison. Her examples include when Mandela worked closely and cordially with the man who had run the Department of Corrections and Justice that had imprisoned him; when he invited a hybrid anthem where anti-apartheid and pro-apartheid anthems were intertwined; and when he united the country in support for the national rugby team, a team and a sport which had previously been associated solely with white apartheid oppression. It is noteworthy, though, that the most detailed examples she offers of Mandela's repudiation of anger are drawn from the time during and after his release from prison. Problematically, she uses these examples to make a normative claim about the repudiation of anger in situations of revolutionary justice without acknowledging that she uses the triumphant end of the final act of Mandela's life.

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[54] Diana Fritz Cates, "You Deserve to Suffer for What You Did." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 46, no. 4 (December 2018): 781

[55] Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 226

Of course his leadership choice to reject violence and revenge once in power are praiseworthy and no one could argue that such triumph and peace were inevitable. His decisions, his emotional discipline, and his capacity to marshal his country through dangerously dire waters are remarkable. But what about the younger Mandela who advocated violent rebellion? What of the angry young activist who was sent to prison for nearly three decades? Nussbaum's emphasis on the successful, pragmatic, Nobel-Prize winning leader only reinforces her earlier note that "forgoing retribution is a mark of personal and societal strength."[56] She meant this statement as an admirable association between strength and repudiating retribution. But she implicitly admits that acting from a position of strength, both personal and social, makes the rejection of retribution easier.

Admittedly, Nussbaum does tell the story of Mandela's generous and non-angry treatment of guards while imprisoned, a position of deep vulnerability. While his behavior suggests tremendous personal discipline and gives us some insight into how he achieved this transformation – namely, in solitudinous suffering and introspection – it still does not prove the case for non-anger in pursuit of revolutionary justice.

Beyond this problematic emphasis, her examples of Mandela forgoing retribution reinforces the need for the conceptual adjustment noted above. What she ultimately argues for is an end to retribution rather than anger. Her crosshairs settle on anger because she argues that anger conceptually requires retribution, not allowing for the additional space provided by King and Cates. But, Mandela, like King, shows this not to be the case. Let us put aside her caveat for the rare case of transition anger, where no payback in contemplated. Mandela shows that Transition is a possible outcome of anger just like the road of payback and the road of status. Our real concern should be whether anger leads down the first road versus the second two.

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[56] Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 208

Nussbaum's leading icons of non-anger fail to rid themselves of anger. Gandhi's renunciation is actually self-anger. And the Stoic Seneca along with Mandela find themselves deep in self-examination, finding anger continually lurking into their later years. Nussbaum argues in the conclusion that the difficulty of ridding ourselves of anger should not stop us from pursuing it.

However, I argue that, given her examples, ridding ourselves of anger may not be good or even possible for most people, and this pursuit is not the greatest concern. Retribution is the serious danger and she illuminates the either immoral or irrational nature of it. Those she admires do experience anger, and they spend their lives working to assure their anger leads to forward looking benefits to the general welfare rather than retribution. What we need is not a shaming of anger but a directing of anger, an unavoidable experience she calls "understandable and human."[57]

Martha Nussbaum is right in undermining common defenses of anger, particularly in matters personal and petty. She is right to warn us of the dangerous impulses and bad advice that anger often offers. She is right to highlight leaders who have masterfully supported masses of angry people in marshalling their anger toward revolutionary and just ends. Nonetheless, she fails to make the case that anger is universally normatively problematic. Her analysis is limited by her focus on individual experience and her failure to treat collective emotion as anything other than a collection of individual experiences. It is further limited by the solely cognitive view of emotion which leads her to understand the move toward transition in only cognitive terms. She fails to see that, in recommending a recourse to the law, she assumes a degree of power, an assumption that is not addressed by her section on revolutionary justice. And finally, she defines anger in a way that assumes it to be normatively problematic, conceptually tying it to retribution while removing potentially beneficial outcomes. King and Cates open up an ethically ambiguous understanding of anger that will find support in scholars that follow. Before we reach those advocating an ethically ambiguous understanding of anger, we encounter a theorist who also posits a normatively determined definition of anger only with near opposite conclusions to Nussbaum.

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[57] Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 7

## Michael Jaycox and the Demands of Anger

Michael Jaycox is a Catholic ethicist who counters Nussbaum's concern for the dangers of anger with a concern for the demands of anger. After framing the discourse on anger in terms of the dominant discourse represented by Nussbaum and the critical discourse represented by Audre Lorde and Bryan Massingale, Jaycox calls on his fellow Catholic ethicists and the Catholic tradition to furnish tools that might strengthen the latter's argument. Here we will see the value of a social understanding of anger with a focus on power and marginalization, as well as the difference in approaching anger from the perspective of demand rather than danger. In contrast, we also will see the shortcomings of disregarding anger's retributive impulses entirely and baking a normative evaluation into a definition of anger.

Jaycox agrees with Nussbaum's theory of emotion that anger is primarily an evaluative judgement and a cognitive act. Here he notes that he is diverging from the Thomistic view of anger and emotion well articulated by Cates in her book, *Aquinas on Emotion,* where she sees emotion as a layered relation between the cognitive and sensory faculties. This cognitive understanding informs Jaycox's definition of anger. Like Nussbaum, he defines anger in a way that bakes in a normative claim, only with opposite normative views.

In contrast to Nussbaum, Jaycox focuses on communal experiences of anger, what he calls "social anger," and does not address individual experiences of anger at all. He claims, "Social anger is a cognitive interruption of the ideological rationalisations for oppression and privilege," or put differently, "a transgressive judgement that systemic injustice is stymieing the basic flourishing of a vulnerable social group."[58] In defining social anger this way, he shifts the ethical question from one of permissibility – whether anger should be allowed – to one of demand – whether anger should be obligated. His answer to this new question is a resounding "yes":

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[58] Jaycox, "The Civic Virtues of Social Anger," 128-129

> Social anger is required by the commitments of Catholic social ethics in the sense that it is simply the most appropriate name for the realization that economic inequality and systemic poverty, for instance, are not social inevitabilities but injustices, that extreme class stratification need not be, and that political action is necessary to ensure that it does not continue.[59]

The perspective of the marginalized is central to this understanding of and demand for social anger.

Citing theologian Roberto Goizueta's case for "Knowing the God of the Poor," Jaycox argues that the Catholic social ethic of the preferential option for the poor demands that we not only tolerate the poor but offer an "epistemological preference for [their] critical moral perspective."[60] Thus, the social anger of those on the margins, and the transgressive judgement it carries, will be more accurate and more trustworthy than a view from the center.

In order to structure and further this demand for social anger, Jaycox offers three civic virtues "to determine the extent to which specific instances of this emotion may be regarded as a right realization of universal moral ends in public life."[61] The first of these is restorative justice. Here he argues that retributive justice is the dominant discourse's defining standard and this standard focuses on doling out appropriate individual justice in order to maintain stability.[62]

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[59] Jaycox, "The Civic Virtues of Social Anger," 130

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid, 131

[62] Retributive justice should not be confused with retribution in Nussbuam's sense of the word.

After reading Nussbaum we can see the validity of this claim. In the discussion of her caveat for the limited utility of anger, she is concerned with anger's tendency to breed instability. Jaycox would argue that instability should not be the primary concern in a situation where injustice is rampant. Breeding instability may be exactly what is needed.

Restorative justice, in contrast, focuses on healing social divisions, and highlighting the "irreducibly institutional dimension of human agency."[63] He defines this virtue as "the disposition to participate rightly in the common good of a society in which the pursuit of private interests predominates, to the end of restoring fairness and equality in the distribution of social goods and in access to the social bases of participation itself."[64] Thus, social anger expressed as resistance to systemic injustice should be judged good and actually necessary by this standard. For the civic virtue of restorative justice to be pursued, the cognitive interruption of rationalizations of oppression, or anger, is needed.

Jaycox's second civic virtue is conflictual solidarity. He pulls this virtue from Bryan Massingale's exploration of Malcolm X's contribution and challenge to Catholic theology:

> As long as religious believers must live in the midst of social injustice, authentic faith-inspired solidarity forbids an attitude of neutrality and demands an unambiguous commitment on behalf of the victims of injustice. The acid test of authentic solidarity is how it is lived in the midst of reality, that is, in the midst of social conflict.[65]

Here Massingale is responding to certain Catholic notions of solidarity, including that of Pope John Paul II, that gloss over the need for conflict in the call to solidarity.

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[63] Jaycox, "The Civic Virtues of Social Anger," 132

[64] Ibid, 133

[65] Bryan N. Massingale, "Vox Victamarum Vox Dei: Malcolm X as a Neglected "Classic" for Catholic Theological Reflection," *CTSA Proceedings* 65 (2010): 83

Conflictual solidarity depends on Goizueta's epistemological option for the poor: "Solidarity found among members of the oppressed groups provides an epistemological standpoint from which to distinguish between accurate and inaccurate judgements of social injustice, which is to say righteous anger and ideological social anger."[66] Conflictual solidarity calls on the privileged to listen to the perspective of the marginalized and judge their own social anger accordingly. Further, it provides an ethic for evaluating claims among marginalized groups, preferencing those claims with significant solidarity across groups as the most accurate.

Jaycox, here, demonstrates that with a social understanding of anger individual discernment is trumped by collective discernment. In the circumstance of Fannie Lou Hamer and the systemic collective abuses suffered by her community, an individual understanding of anger is insufficient. Conflictual solidarity offers an important tool for distinguishing between the anger of her poor black community and their similarly angry neighbors who belonged to local White Citizens Councils.

Finally, prophetic prudence is the third civic virtue and here Jaycox uses Thomas Aquinas to turn traditional Thomistic reasoning about anger on its head. Where Aquinas's notion of interpersonal anger is chastened by his notion of temperance, Jaycox points to the limitations for the contemporary ethicist. Aquinas lacked an institutional frame and thus temperance "risks the possibility of giving further credibility to the dominant, ideological discourse on anger."[67] In contrast to the chastening effects of temperance, Jaycox adapts Aquinas's notion of prudence to make the argument that the prophetic form of prudence actually demands social anger. Prophetic prudence "enables ethicists to look beyond the superficial question of whether expressing this emotion is likely to escalate conflict in view of the more salient question of how this emotion might be necessary to save the soul of society that has betrayed its own conscience."[68]

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[66] Jaycox, "The Civic Virtues of Social Anger," 135

[67] Ibid, 128

Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" exemplifies the way prophetic prudence demands the transgressive judgement of institutional abuse, or in other words social anger. King refuses the patience and pragmatism of the white ministers in favor of the righteous social anger of his own community. Again, anger is not simply understandable or defensible in this case but absolutely demanded.

Yet Jaycox also shows a shortcoming of his analysis in this description of prophetic prudence. He papers over the concern with the escalation of conflict, calling it a superficial question. Nussbaum effectively shows that King, Jaycox's exemplar of prophetic prudence, was absolutely concerned with the potential for the escalation of conflict inherent in anger. It was anything but a superficial question. Jaycox makes the same mistake as Nussbaum in baking a normative claim into his understanding of anger, and then claiming King as his proof. King, unlike Nussbaum and Jaycox and as shown by their own arguments, understood anger to be ethically ambiguous. Just as anger is demanded by social anger as Jaycox defines it, it is also dangerous as Nussbaum defines it. Here we land at the nexus between the two ethicists, seeking a better understanding of anger as ethically ambiguous, while containing both individual and social elements, and with an understanding of the role that power and positionality play in its nature. Bryan Massingale and Carmichael Peters offer us this guidance in their exploration of "black rage."

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[68] Jaycox, "The Civic Virtues of Social Anger," 140

## Bryan Massingale and Carmichael Peters on Black Rage

Nussbaum argues that anger is always normatively problematic with certain caveats. Jaycox argues that social anger is normatively required for both marginalized people and centralized groups in solidarity with those on the margins. Both scholars bake their normative conclusions into their definitions. Meanwhile black Catholic scholars Carmichael Peters and Bryan Massingale argue that "black rage" is ethically ambiguous with both liberative and sinful potential. Both are keenly aware of what they call black rage's criminal and pathological manifestations, such as violent crime and psychic scarring, respectively.[69] They seek not to ignore these manifestations but highlight a third possible understanding, an existential one that leads to anger's liberative potential.

For context on the two articles discussed here, Massingale's "Anger and Transcendence" is a response to Peters' "A Rahnerian Reading of Black Rage." Massingale uses rage and anger interchangeably in his response, though Peters begins with a clear distinction. Anger, Peters argues, is akin to fear in being related to a specific thing with the possibility of remediation. Rage, in contrast, is akin to anxiety in the Kierkegaardian sense of being unconquerable and ontological. Note that this understanding of rage is far from Nussbaum's understanding of rage as merely anger of an unusual intensity, and from her conception of anger grounded in individual experiences and isolatable incidents. In contrast to both Nussbaum and Jaycox who regard anger as a cognitive act that can be ethically evaluated, "black rage" is an ontological reality, only the outcome of which can be ethically evaluated. Black rage is the unavoidable reality of black

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[69] Bryan N. Massingale, "Anger and Human Transcendence: A Response to a 'Rahnerian Reading of Black Rage,'" *Philosophy and Theology* 15, no. 1 (2003): 220

Americans surrounded by the consistent socially constructed message that they are less deserving of the freedom and rights of being American or even human.

Peters brings us toward an existential and potentially liberative understanding of black rage by way of Karl Rahner's theological anthropology. In short, "Rahner discovers human ex-sistence to be essentially a free, knowing, and absolute transcendence towards [God], who's self-offer brought us into being and claims as well as sustains us through [God's] constitutive indwelling in us." Though this indwelling is given to us by grace, it requires an act of will, a "reaching for the absolute," in order to be accessed.[70] But, each of us must by necessity complete this act of will within the world in which we exist given "there is no such thing as worldless human subjectivity."[71] Thus, the socialization we experience shapes how we respond to and reach for God's self-offer.

In the case of black Americans, Peters continues, this socialization has been shaped by white supremacy. White supremacy, both in its historical forms that faced Fannie Lou Hamer and its more subtle manifestations today, limits the "actual possibilities of black ex-sistence," which in turn "denies the spiritual character of black ex-sistence" and ultimately "rejects the fact of the graced indwelling in black ex-sistence."[72] White supremacy both inhibits exterior pathways of growth, such as limiting education and economic outcomes, and infects interior self understanding, such as in the internalization of prevailing racial prejudices. In severely limiting the possibilities for the lives of black people, white supremacy rejects God's vision for the world and becomes a form of idolatry. Furthermore, it directly limits the black individual's capacity for transcendence towards God, the central purpose of a human life according to Rahner.

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[70] Carmichael Peters, "A Rahnerian Reading of Black Rage," *Philosophy and Theology* 15, no. 1 (2003): 200

[71] Ibid, 208

[72] Ibid, 205

The tension between this inevitable reaching toward transcendence and the denial of spiritual potential by the world becomes untenable. Black rage is the result of this fundamental act of will – an orientation towards God – being frustrated by the reality of a world "which incorrigibly refuses to accept, understand or, at times, even concede black humanity."[73] The only other option is resignation. Resignation results when the necessary spiritual transcendence is either overlooked or concealed, and the horizon of transcendence is reduced to the definitive horizon of its lifeworld.[74] No longer able or willing to look beyond what is immediately apparently possible, resignation leads to a concession to the colonized socialization of a world marked by white supremacy.

On the other end of the spectrum from resignation is separatism. If resignation is the suppression of black rage, separatism results from the "inadequate understanding of rage."[75] By separatism Peters means the tendency of ontological rage to degenerate into anger or hatred toward the "other" when "we choose the familiar as the primordial source and ultimate horizon of our capacity for self-transcendence."[76] Just as white supremacy is idolatrous in limiting the capacity for spiritual transcendence, separatist assumptions are idolatrous in imprisoning one "in the constricting confines of the familiar" and making the familiar absolute. Though Peters does not point to it specifically, he seems to suggest that the separatism of movements like the Black Power movement are limited in this way. This implicit claim is interesting since leaders within this movement like Malcolm X are some of the best known advocates of black anger. According to Peters, black rage, properly understood, navigates a road between resignation and separatism toward something more.

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[73] Peters, "A Rahnerian Reading of Black Rage," 193

[74] Ibid, 207

[75] Ibid, 194

[76] Ibid, 194

What Peters' Rahnerian reading of black rage ultimately suggests is that this ontological rage is a condition for the leap towards God, the creation of moral agency, and the struggle for universal justice:

> Interiorly, this process . . . [turns] black ex-sistence beyond resignation towards resolute participation in that absolutely free act of creative love which constitutes the abysmal ground of its unconditional worth. . . . Exteriorly, this process of decolonization initiates and sustains a moral agency which promotes neither separatist agendas in the divided world of white supremacy nor assimilationist solicitations for admission into that world. And this is so because the ground of this moral agency is the re-enactment of that love which posits, sustains, and orients to itself the whole world and all its many beings."[77]

Black rage allows a black individual to overcome worldly obstacles frustrating his or her movement toward God. Black rage creates a sense of agency for moral action in contradiction of those worldly obstacles. And black rage leads to loving action in imitation of the loving action of God, reaching beyond the limits of any one social group.

Massingale follows Peters' work with a series of insights regarding how Rahner's transcendental theology and Peters' concept of black rage illuminate each other. First, Rahner's theological anthropology grounds the possibility and legitimacy of black rage: "Black rage, then, becomes . . . a categorical expression of the transcendental freedom to define and dispose of oneself."[78] This insight is vital in mapping out an understanding of black rage beyond its criminal and pathological manifestations. To return to Nussbaum and Jaycox, Massingale here shows how this understanding of black rage makes possible the demand of anger in Jaycox's work while not ignoring the dangers of anger in Nussbaum's.

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[77] Peters, "A Rahnerian Reading of Black Rage," 212

[78] Massingale, "Anger and Human Transcendence," 221

Second, "black rage, rightly ordered, expresses a passion for truth and protest against idolatry."[79] As in Jaycox's understanding of social anger, Massingale sees black rage as expressing a truth about the unjust circumstances under which black people live. In a step beyond Jaycox, Massingale and Peters see these circumstances as not only as unjust but as an affront to God and as a form of idolatry.

Third, "black rage potentially is a categorical mediation of forgiveness, grace, and right relationship with God."[80] He repeats the word "potential" to draw attention to the ethical ambiguity of rage, which can also manifest in criminal or pathological ways. This potential, however, is both socially generative and transcendently oriented. Massingale argues that rage, in breeding freedom and agency, leads one outward to social transformation: "Rage . . . not only demonstrates the existence of an inner (that is, transcendental) dynamism, freedom, and responsibility; it also shows how this rage can be the occasion of healing, insight, and grace for others."[81] In discovering the agency and freedom to respond to God's grace, one is called to imitate God's loving act with others.

Here he draws attention to the role of God in black rage. Black rage is part of a right relationship with God that is constitutive of individual will and God's grace. To refuse it in resignation or misunderstand it in separatism is to refuse God's offering of grace. Black rage cannot be had without God's grace, and God cannot be reached without black rage.

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[79] Massingale, "Anger and Human Transcendence," 221
[80] Ibid, 222
[81] Ibid, 225

These two scholars move our exploration of anger beyond an immanent frame. Massingale continues, "Black rage, then testifies to the dynamism of the human spirit and becomes an impetus not only for social transformation but also for encountering the Holy Spirit." [82] Black rage, thus, is the road to personal freedom and agency, social connection and transformation, and finally the individual and collective experience of the indwelling of God.

To recapitulate what we have learned here, Martha Nussbaum and Michael Jaycox offered us normatively determined understandings of anger as a cognitive act, the former focused on its danger and the latter focused on its demands. Nussbaum also began from an individual lens and Jaycox from the collective lens. Bryan Massingale and Carmichael Peters, in contrast, introduce black rage as a form of anger that is ontologically unavoidable and ethically ambiguous. Further, black rage is not individual or social but both. And black rage is not solely an immanent experience but part of a transcendent relationship that both requires the grace of God and becomes an avenue for the experience of God.

Most importantly, we gain an understanding of anger, or a variant of anger, that is transformative. Black rage transforms the one experiencing it toward moral agency, love of others, and relationship with God. Black rage also must be transformed by the agent. Black rage is chosen in contrast to resignation and it must be diligently marshalled so as not to fall prey to the dangers of separatism. Black rage has the potential to be transformative should the individual, the community, and the grace of God enable it.

While this analysis may seem to limit the scope of our study solely to the ontological experience of marginalized people like black Americans, Jaycox's civic virtue of conflictual solidarity and application of the preferential option for the poor invites us to widen the scope. While Peters and Massingale argue that black people have no choice but to confront black rage, conflictual solidarity demands that all people give epistemological preference to these claims in their own discernment. White Americans are called to listen to the anger, and particularly bear witness to the black rage, of black Americans and heeds its liberative wisdom. Peters concludes that the indicator of participation in the transformative power of black rage is a "fundamental maladjustment-in-the-world."[83] He continues, "After all, we cannot be 'in' the world and affirm what the world deliberately and fundamentally denies about us without being maladjusted-in-the-world."[84] Jaycox's analysis invites all people into this experience of being maladjusted-in-the-world through social anger that rightly judges systemic oppression to be stymieing the flourishing of a vulnerable social group.

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[82] Massingale, "Anger and Human Transcendence," 226

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[83] Peters, "A Rahnerian Reading of Black Rage,"  212

[84] Ibid.

## Cathleen Kaveny and the American Jeremiad

In what may feel like a sharp turn we pivot now from these various understandings of anger to a practical exploration of a rhetorical form known as the American Jeremiad. This pivot will allow us to move anger out of the theoretical sphere and into the practical sphere and specifically the political sphere. We are seeking to understand how anger can and should manifest in the public square. The American Jeremiad, named for the fiery moral indictments of the Prophet Jeremiah, is one of the most concrete ways that Americans have channeled anger into the public square throughout the country's history. This rhetorical form will allows us to evaluate the ethical claims about anger encountered in the work thus far. Furthermore, for our analysis of Hamer nearly all of the content we have to analyze is her rhetorical life's work, and very little personal or interior reflections. A rhetorical lens will help us to approach Hamer's experience of and use of anger.

In Cathleen Kaveny's study of the American Jeremiad, *Prophecy Without Contempt,* she begins with the distinction between "condemnation" and "contempt."[85] In this mode of prophetic indictment to condemn, the pronouncement of judgement or declaration of a moral wrong, is necessary. In contrast, to contemn is neither necessary nor beneficial, and means to cut away the other, treating them as vile or worthless. The former rightly indicts a moral violation where the latter wrongly banishes the violators from communal membership. Kaveny argues that the balancing act of condemnation without contempt is at the heart of this rhetorical tradition, and understanding this balance is vital in an increasingly pluralistic liberal democracy. Although she is not using the language of anger that has been central to the previous sections, we should note how Kaveny here acknowledges the dangers and demands of anger in the public square. In the importance of condemnation, we can see the demand for anger. In the concern for contempt, we can see the real tendency of anger towards retribution. Rhetorically holding together the dangers and demands of anger is the work of the American Jeremiad.

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[85] Cathleen Kaveny, *Prophecy Without Contempt: Religious Discourse in the Public Square* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), ix

The American Jeremiad began as a socially constructive rhetorical practice in early Puritan America intended to remind the community of their covenant with each other and with God, and then call the community to repentance for breaches of the universally understood covenant's demands. The notion of covenant was central to Puritan life both theologically and politically. Theologically, the notion of covenant was central because it was the Puritan's "ingenious way to provide for cosmic predictability" in imagining God and man in a contractual relationship that "affirm[ed] the necessity of morality and protect[ed] the overriding sovereignty of God."[86] Politically, the notion of covenant, and the contract metaphor that undergirded it, structured communal life together and "justif[ied] subordinating individuals to collective will, provided that the state was properly designed, instituted, and managed to promote the common good."[87] This shared understanding of communal and divine relationships meant that the community always had a shared foundation to which to return. The Jeremiad's function was to alert the community to a violation of the covenant and exhort members to change their ways through penance and repentance.

The exhortations were often harsh and wrath-filled, but Kaveny tells us the tone of these exhortations can be misleading to modern readers. The American Jeremiad can be deceiving because "despite its trenchant criticism of the community's patterns of behavior, the Jeremiad generally functioned as an instrument of social unity."[88] The preaching forged unity because the community had a shared understanding of the covenant. The speaker condemned violations of that covenant and warned of potential communal disaster but did not contemn the violators. The call to repentance was "meant to invite forgiveness and redemption" rather than contempt.[89] As the American colonies grew and became the United States of America, this once crucial element of the rhetorical form began to fade.

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[86] Kaveny, *Prophecy Without Contempt,* 137
[87] Ibid, 141

The Jeremiad evolved through early American history into a rhetorical form that often divided rather than united. With the rise of religious pluralism, Lockean natural-rights-based reasoning, and capitalist interests, the notion of a founding divine covenant faded and debate as to the "true" founding principles of the national community grew.[90] As the covenantal foundation of the practice faded, contempt for the violator – often a religious, racial, or ideological other – became more common.

The Oracles against the Nations replaced the scriptural model offered by the Oracles against Israel or Judah. The critical distinction between the two is the presence of contempt or lack thereof.[91] The former demonstrates the dangers of condemnation with contempt, where prophets called down the judgement of an unforgiving God on enemies and celebrated their complete destruction. The latter demonstrates the possibility of condemnation without contempt, where prophets spoke to their own people regarding the demands of conversion and urged a return to their original covenant with God.

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[88] Kaveny, *Prophecy Without Contempt,* 127
[89] Ibid, 193
[90] Ibid, 209, 234
[91] Ibid, 352

Here we see the dangers of the Jeremiadic tradition pivoting toward contempt. Rather than orient toward restoration, the practice orients toward scapegoating and social division. When those held in contempt are fellow citizens – of a city, state, or nation – we can immediately see the danger posed to a political body by a rhetorical form that encourages one group to see another as less than human or undeserving of equal protection or dignity. To provide further guardrails, Kaveny offers four key elements of an effective Jeremiad.

First, it must be oriented toward reform not destruction. With reform as its objective, contempt must be avoided. Second, the speaker must place themselves within, not apart from, the sinful community. Rather than standing outside of the community and pointing to sin or failure within, the speaker must position themselves within and align themselves with the rest of the community. Third, the speaker must express true sorrow. He or she must truly experience the pain of the community and the consequences of the failures to which the speaking draws attention. Fourth, the speaker must point to a horizon of hope. If reform and a hopeful future are not present in the speaker's rhetoric, then the form no longer works in its original intention and loses its constructive use.

While we will see that Hamer absolutely fulfills criteria three and four, expressing true sorrow and pointing toward a horizon of hope, she both fulfills and transgresses the demands of criteria one and two. These transgressions are the result of her position as a black American. She does orient toward reform and yet she clearly believes some destruction may be necessary. She is at once a part of the sinful community as an American, and also apart from it as a black American where the most transgressive sinful community is made up of white Americans. The black Jeremiad, the particular Jeremiadic tradition within the larger American Jeremiadic tradition of which Kaveny speaks, gives Hamer the structure within which to walk this fine line. This tension within the Jeremiadic tradition leads us to see where Kaveny's work needs extending into a consideration of power and position.

Kaveny's project begins with the critique of limiting notions of moral discourse in the late 20th-century philosophical discourse. Alisdair MacIntyre, John Rawls, Stephen Carter, and John Murray Cuddihy draw too strict a limit on what lies within the bounds of permissible moral discourse. MacIntyre argues that moral thinking and deliberation can only happen within the context of a well-functioning moral tradition, limiting what is possible in a pluralistic society. Kaveny's concern is with his focus on moral deliberation and failure to see the vital role of moral indictment, which she argues has a key role to play in "protecting the basic conditions under which such deliberation can be fruitful."[92] Moral discourse must allow for both reasoned deliberation and fiery indictment.

She similarly critiques Stephen Carter for his focus on civility. Carter claims that rooted in the biblical call to neighborly love, we are all called to self sacrifice in the form of self restraint in dialogue with those with whom we disagree.[93] Among a series of concerns Kaveny points to the failure of his notion of civility to elucidate the heated rhetoric of abolitionists, civil rights workers, and modern day culture warriors. John Murray Cuddihy identifies this problematic call to civility as grounded in a subtle but pervasive protestant denominationalism rather than any defensible notion of neutrality.[94] This protestant ethic draws the line on what or who belongs, and what or who does not. Thus, civility cannot help us conceptually in cases where these border lands are debated. Yet Cuddihy's critique also comes up short for Kaveny because it explains the civility of protestant tradition but not the uncivil discourse of the most controversial flashpoints in American history.

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[92] Kaveny, *Prophecy Without Contempt*, 45
[93] Ibid, 93
[94] Ibid, 102

John Rawls limits public dialogue to the use of publicly accessible reason. Kaveny levels a common critique at this limitation suggesting that his anthropology requires citizens to be abstracted from their lived experiences of religion, culture, gender and socioeconomic status among others. More importantly she critiques his failure to see, like MacIntyre, moral discourse as anything more than reason giving. Without the analytical resources to understand moral indictment, whether infused with religious or secular appeals to a higher law, Rawls fails to understand a vital, society shaping, and inescapable form of moral discourse.

Thus, Kaveny's project is one of expanding moral discourse in the public square to include a broader swath of moral reasoning. I argue that it must be expanded further, beyond the limits that her analysis implicitly sets for prophetic rhetoric in its focus on people and institutions with political power. In order to build an ethical framework for prophetic rhetoric, she calls on the resources of prosecutorial ethics and just war theory. From the former she uses the constraints designed for prosecutors in their decision regarding whether or not to prosecute an alleged criminal. Prosecutors, for example, must stay rooted in the widely shared vision of the good community, whereas "cranks and revolutionaries" stray from that center.[95] From the latter she develops a "just prophecy theory" using the demands of just war theory tenets like competent authority.[96] Both these resources, along with towering figures like Abraham Lincoln, belie a bias toward those speaking from a position of power – the prosecutor, the nation state, the Presidency.

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[95] Kaveny, *Prophecy Without Contempt,* 323

[96] Ibid, 340

King would appear to be an exception as a black man in mid-20th century America fighting for civil rights. But in contrast to a leader like Fannie Lou Hamer, King is decidedly powerful. He delivers his most famous address, which Kaveny highlights as exemplary of the American Jeremiad, at the Lincoln Memorial after negotiations with the Kennedy Administration. Kaveny's prescriptions are useful for those who hold some modicum of power, particularly those for whom the legal and political systems are viable routes for change. King sits on the edge of this group, having fought within his own movement to maintain the hope and belief that such routes were viable. So, we must ask what we might learn from those decidedly outside the lanes of power regarding the expression of anger in the public square, and where that marginalized experience leads us toward Kaveny's framework and where it leads beyond.

## Fannie Lou Hamer's "Signature Jeremiad"

Fannie Lou Hamer's rhetoric grew from a long and rich tradition of the black church and the black Jeremiad, where the speaker's anger and God's anger feature prominently. The black Jeremiad has a storied history inside and beyond the black church and has been employed extensively by everyday pastors and rhetorical figures ranging from Frederick Douglas and Booker T. Washington to Ida B. Wells and Jesse Jackson. Hamer's capacity to shape this tradition to meet her own needs and the needs of her audience propelled her to prominence within the Civil Rights Movement. Maegan Parker Brooks places Hamer's "signature Jeremiad" at the heart of her transformation from a "plainspoken sharecropper to a warrior and ultimately an uncompromising truth-telling prophet."[97] We will focus on one particular speech of hers.

In 1964 Hamer grabbed national attention when her testimony before the credentials committee of the Democratic National Convention (DNC) aired live on national television. She went to Atlantic City to testify as part of the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party (MDFP), which was attempting to unseat the all-white Mississippi Democratic delegation. Though brief, Hamer used her voice to forcefully call the country's attention to the suffering of black people under the white supremacist regime of Mississippi. Her testimony included the graphic story of her brutal beating by police in a Winona, Mississippi jail; it gripped and split the nation.

With the presidential election approaching, Democratic leaders were desperately trying to hold together a party that included the white southern Democrats, like those from Mississippi, and the activists who were pushing for national civil rights legislation. The MDFP's antics, fueled by Hamer's rousing testimony, made that challenge even more difficult. In the days that followed Hamer's speech, the effort to disrupt the DNC and seat the MDFP faltered. President Johnson's political maneuvering led by Vice Presidential candidate Hubert Humphrey quelled the disruptive effort and momentarily prevented dramatic change.[98] However, the nation now knew who Fannie Lou Hamer was and they knew of the painfully impoverished and oppressed circumstances of her community.

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[97] Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army,* 8

One month later, as her star rose rapidly and she gained national attention, Hamer gave a much longer speech to a mostly black audience at a mass meeting in Indianola, Mississippi, a town twenty-five miles south of her hometown of Ruleville and the county seat of Sunflower County, which she visited several times to attempt to register to vote. The first mass meeting of its kind in Indianola, the event likely only took place because of Hamer's newfound fame and influence.[99] Fellow impoverished black folks from the Delta had witnessed one of their own share the unvarnished truth about life in Mississippi on national television. And she did it while sounding and looking like them, much to the chagrin of some middle-class civil rights organizers. Brooks recounts an incident where NAACP executive secretary Roy Wilkins objected to both the "ugly flowery thing" Hamer wore and her ignorance in the ways of politics. [100] Hamer did not fit the polished middle-class representative of the black race that Wilkins and others sought. She spoke and looked like a sharecropper from the Delta, and for the people of Indianola that was intriguing.

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[98] Brooks notes the debate among participants as to the success of this action. While some regarded it as a failure, Lawrence Guyot, chair of the MDFP, regarded it as the founding moment of a new Democratic Party in Mississippi. Though MDFP would dissolve a few years later, the DNC would never again seat a segregated delegation. See: Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army,* 106

[99] Hamer, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer,* 46

[100] Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army,* 100

While her appearance and voice stayed true to her roots, this performance represents a transformation in Hamer's speech that developed further in the years that followed.[101] Previous to Atlantic City she had trusted that if only Americans knew the truth about her community's suffering, the powerful systems of politics and law would shift to uphold America's commitment to its citizens. However, as she witnessed the choices of leaders of the country and of her political party, as well as what she saw as the piecemeal compromising of mainstream civil rights leaders, she ultimately decided that her trust was unfounded. Hamer realized that many already knew these truths and had done little or nothing in response. Thus, her rhetorical style shifted, moving toward "a more incisive and provocative Jeremiadic appeal."[102] Her speech in Indianola exemplifies this shift as Hamer comes home to her own community and fully embodies the practice of the black Jeremiad.

According to David Howard Pitney, "The black Jeremiad adapts the familiar western rhetorical structure to reveal the paradoxes embedded in the African American experience," particularly the position of a "chosen people within a chosen people."[103] "By virtue of their bondage," he continues, blacks claim "a messianic role in achieving their own and others' redemption."[104] Hamer lived into this tradition in Indianola as she set out to convince her fellow Mississippians to take the dangerous step of registering to vote, alternating between moments that highlight their oppression and ones that highlight their messianic chosenness.

Brooks shows how Hamer brings this tradition to life through three central claims:

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[101] Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army,* 106
[102] Ibid, 106
[103] Ibid, 110
[104] Ibid.

> First, that Mississippi blacks are God's chosen people . . . . Second, Hamer argued that God was not pleased by the ill treatment of his people . . . . Third and finally, Hamer coupled the assurance that God was on the side of the oppressed with pitiful depictions of white supremacists . . . . [and] urged black Deltans to exhibit a charitable attitude toward their fallen white brethren, challenging black Mississippians to fulfill their moral responsibility as God's chosen people in an effort to save their crumbling nation.[105]

As we will see, Hamer's anger is central to her success in performing the tradition of the black Jeremiad effectively and in making her particular case.

She begins by recounting in painful detail both the injustice she suffered at the hands of her boss when she first tried to register to vote, and the later injustice and violence she suffered at the hands of the police in Winona. Brooks points out that beginning her speech with her experiences of debilitating violence might appear counterintuitive given her goals of inspiring voter registration. Yet this was crucial for highlighting the senselessness of such injustice, and in establishing her own authority as a fellow traveler on the hard journey of life as a black person in Mississippi.[106]

Anger is undoubtedly at the emotional core of this rhetorical choice in all three ways that we have encountered anger in the theoretical literature: Nussbuam's notion of identifying a wrong and the wrongdoers responsible, Jaycox's social anger as the transgressive judgement of systemic oppression, and Peters' understanding of black rage as "the ethical response to a society which incorrigibly refuses to accept, understand, or . . . even concede black humanity."[107] While Hamer tells her stories in a matter-of-fact manner, she peppers her speech with repeated questions that both convey her anger at injustice and invite the anger of her listeners. She asks her audience, “Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave? Where people are being murdered, lynched, and killed, because we want to register to vote?”[108] A few lines later shes asks sarcastically, “Can you see how justice is working in Mississippi?”[109]

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[105] Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army*, 109
[106] Ibid, 110
[107] Massingale, "Anger and Human Transcendence," 218

Beyond attesting to an all-too-familiar story of abuse, Hamer’s anger provided an antidote to the resignation, fear, and hopelessness that reigned. She established herself as a member of her listener’s community and invited them to share in her anger at injustice in hopes that they too would be spurred to action. The story of injustice would not do this work alone. The emotional content of her message, in this case anger, was vital. Ironically, these stories that seemed to strip Hamer of her agency form the backbone of her case for her own agency and that of her listeners. She does not focus on herself as a victim but rather as someone who is powerfully capable.[110]

To use Nussbaum’s terms, anger in Hamer’s rhetoric plays the dual role of signal – jolting her audience from any sense of resignation or hopelessness to one of action-oriented anger – and motivator – rallying them to a proper response. Where Nussbaum argues that this utility is limited and dangerous, Peters and Massingale show how black rage, in particular, breeds moral agency, social justice-oriented outreach, and a right relationship with God. Far from limited, its utility is vital and ongoing. To use Jaycox’s notion of conflictual solidarity, Hamer uses anger to invite listeners into the shared struggle spurred by shared systemic suffering. Cate’s notion of anger as seeking to disarm ongoing harm, rather than exact retribution, is also apparent.

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[108] Hamer, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer,* 48
[109] Ibid.
[110] Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army,* 96

This shared anger at oppression and the shared determination to end it was not solely shared between Hamer and her listeners, but also with God: "Hamer emphasized the exceptionally oppressive nature of their experience to establish Mississippi blacks as God's chosen people and to indicate why he is angered by their mistreatment."[111] Now, in full prophetic register, she tells her listeners how God feels about the situation: "God is not pleased. God is not pleased at all the murdering, and all the brutality, and all the killing for no reason at all. God is not pleased."[112] Anger is a shared emotion and experience with God, Hamer, and her listeners. This shared experience binds them together and compels them to action.

Bound together in shared suffering and anger with God on their side, Hamer telescopes outwards to the fate of the country. Here the black Jeremiad holds the tension of a chosen people within a chosen people. On the one hand, blacks Americans are a chosen people set apart from white Americans. Early in her speech blacks are typologized as Israelites in contrast to the white oppressors typologized as Pharaoh and the Egyptians: "God made it so plain He sent Moses down in Egypt-land to tell Pharoah to let my people go. . . . And He sent Bob Moses down to Mississippi, to tell all of these hate groups to let his people go."[113] White Americans are the enemy in this typology, and if Hamer needed any more evidence for the snug fit of this typology, Bob Moses was the name of the man who God sent to lead SNCC's efforts in the Delta.

On the other hand, black Americans are also part of the American people, a chosen people themselves who hold a unique covenant with God. In this instance the black Jeremiad aligns with the larger American Jeremiad, the history and the development of which we gained from Kaveny's analysis. The oppression of black people is a sign of the failure of America to fulfill its covenant and thus, America is at grave risk of divine retribution. All of America is at risk, not just one part. Hamer warns her audience with the Proverbs 14:34: "Sin is a reproach to any people. Sin is beginning to reproach America today."[114] In a later speech she will put it more bluntly: "America is sick and man is on the critical list."[115] Brooks explains, "More than pointing out America's failure to live up to its principles, the biblical structure that Hamer summoned forces a choice: either America will recommit itself to its principles by making democracy a reality for all its inhabitants or the nation will crumble."[116] Such a simplifying forced choice is a mainstay of the American Jeremiad.

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[111] Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army*, 111
[112] Hamer, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer,* 52
[113] Ibid, 49

In the tension within the black Jeremiad we witness the two forms of Old Testament prophetic speech that Kaveny distinguishes: the Oracles Against the Nations and the Oracles Against Israel. Kaveny warns against the former because it calls for the destruction of the violator rather than reform and reparation. For example, typologizing white Americans as the Egyptians implicitly assumes a desire for them to share the same fate as the biblical Egyptians. Hamer does not stop there though.

Throughout her speaking career she quoted Psalms 37 to assure her listeners to trust in divine justice: "Fret not thouselves because of the evildoers, neither be thy envious against the workers of iniquity for they shall be cut down like the green grass and wither away as the green herb."[117] The use of such violent imagery was intimately tied to Hamer's upbringing and survival: her childhood "biblical instruction, combined with her mother's wisdom, endowed [her] with an abiding sense of divine justice, giving her faith she needed to persevere in the face of gross inequality."[118] Central to this divine justice and faith is the belief that God deals violently with those who transgress God's will. Hamer uses this sense of divine justice to build up the dignity of her listeners and invite them to trust that God is on their side while "whites were in no position to envy."[119] Hamer rallies her listeners: "We don't have anything to be ashamed of."[120] The notion of God's choice of blacks and retribution toward whites was central to her efforts of restoring pride and building agency.

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[114] Hamer, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer*, 49
[115] Ibid, 183
[116] Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army,* 48
[117] Hamer, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer*, 49

To continue building black agency Hamer reinterprets white violence from acts of power to a "sign of shame, fear, and stupidity."[121] She asks, "Do you think anybody would stand out in the dark to shoot me and to shoot other people, would you call them a brave person?"[122] Having repeatedly questioned whether America could consider itself the "home of the free and the land of the brave," her questioning of white nightriders not only indicted those individuals but the entire American myth. Counterintuitively it is exactly this damning portrait of white America that enables her pivot from an instance of the Oracles Against the Nations to one of the Oracles Against Israel.

After building up black agency and defanging white violence, Hamer invites a turn toward compassion: "Exposing white supramacists as shameful, fearful, and ignorant, Hamer encouraged blacks to exhibit a charitable attitude towards their pitiful white brethren."[123] First and foremost, she makes the case that white Americans are in fact brethren. Only a few lines after quoting Psalms 37 she turns to another biblical verse: "The seventeenth chapter of acts and twenty-sixth verse said, 'he has made of one blood all nations.' So whether you black as a skillet or white as a sheet, we are made from the same blood and we are on our way."[124] White segregationists are both evildoers to be "cut down like grass" and pitiful brethren with whom the audience shares blood.

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[118] Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army*, 27
[119] Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army*, 114
[120] Hamer, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer*, 53
[121] Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army*, 115
[122] Hamer, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer*, 50
[123] Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army*, 115

This latter characterization leads to her seemingly most radical conclusion:

> We are not fighting against these people because we hate them, but we are fighting these people because we love them and we're the only thing can save them now. We are fighting to save these people from their hate and from all the things that would be so bad against them. We want them to see the right way. Every night of my life that I lay down before I go to sleep, I pray for these people that despitefully use me.

To fight for and love one's oppressors is certainly a high demand. Yet Brooks tells us that, in addition to echoing Jesus's teaching, the invitation to see blacks as the last hope for America and themselves places Hamer squarely within the black Jeremiad tradition: "From abolitionism onward, advocates of social and political change in the United States have featured the messianic characterization of blacks to establish a moral imperative."[125] Hamer not only sought to breed a sense of agency, freeing her listeners from a "plantation mentality," but sought to inspire them to urgent action. God was on their side but God would not do the work for them: "You can pray until you faint but if you don't get up and try to do something, God is not going to put it in your lap."[126] As Peters argues, black rage here enables the moral agency to answer God's call.

Hamer's speech resonated deeply with her audience and this resonance was "derived in no small part from Hamer's familiarity with the shared black Baptist tradition in which the majority of her audience was reared."[127] As we have seen she expertly wielded the black Jeremiad holding the tension of a chosen people within a chosen people, and balanced the divine retribution of the Oracles Against Nations with the reformative nature of the Oracles against Israel. Yet Hamer also brought a unique impact beyond the tradition out of which she worked. Her distinctiveness lay in the tensions she embodied.

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[124] Hamer, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer*, 49
[125] Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army*, 116
[126] Hamer, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer*, 53

According to Bernice Johnson Reagon, Hamer was both plainspoken and complex, and she invoked the "most intense danger and yet communicated a sense of peace and safety." Perhaps most tellingly, "she was so mad and so loving."[128] She communicated anger in a way few others did. Her anger was personal and grounded in the telling of her own physical and emotional trauma. Her anger was aligned with God's anger and God's justice, predicting fatal retribution. Her anger was unvarnished and by no means limited to white targets. Black preachers who failed to open their doors to the movement were a consistent target. Meanwhile her love was bold and demanding, positioning those who so deserved her anger as most in need of her love and prayer. She exhorted her listeners and her oppressors into loving familial relationship, advocating a "selfless, morally superior type of love, one that is rooted in the promise of the gospels and in the inescapable interconnection between the races."[129] Her capacity to hold these tensions enabled her unique impact.

Nussbaum argues that anger's utility is limited, that the same ends are best served by other emotions, and that love is a more compelling force for change. Hamer's performance here refutes these arguments on two fronts. First, we must ask what other emotion could serve the ends Hamer sought. Grief, which Nussbaum counsels at times, has no impulse to action and provides no sense of agency. Love, which she counsels at other times and particularly in pursuit of revolutionary justice, could never have achieved success on its own in this speech. Furthermore, anger is part of the cultural fabric into which Hamer weaves herself in performing the black Jeremiad. Without these personal and interpersonal connections, she would not have had the impact that she did.

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[127] Brooks, *A Voice That Could Stir An Army,* 117
[128] Ibid, 118
[129] Ibid, 116

Second, Nussbaum's analysis suggests that anger and love are oppositional. Anger leads to retributive impulses while love leads to reparative impulses. Hamer's example denies this opposition. She shows how anger and love can be held together and even enable each other. Anger without love may indeed lead to retributive impulses or even to hate, which Hamer refuses. She said, "I refuse to bring myself down to the depths of hell to hate a man because he hated me."[130] Meanwhile, Peters and Massingale show how the particular variant of anger, black rage, can form an entrance to an individual and collective experience of God, and the pursuant imitation of God's love in outreach to others and the pursuit of universal justice. This anger can transform the individual and collective into moral agents, and also be transformed by them into the enactment of love. Yet, given the ethical ambiguity of anger, Hamer needed the tools to experience that transforming anger and avoid its problematic and even violent manifestations. Theologian Barbara Holmes introduces us to the contemplative practices of the black church tradition and shows how Hamer's contemplative gifts enabled this transforming anger to triumph.

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[130] Hamer, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer,* 115

## Barbara Holmes and Hamer the Contemplative Exemplar

In *Joy Unspeakable*, Barbara Holmes charts the oft-overlooked history and presence of contemplative practices within the black church. In the first of a few definitions that purposefully evade clear boundaries, she defines the black church as “the dynamic religious entity forged in oppression and sustained by practices that were often covert and intuitive.”[131] It is the “invisible institution,” “a spiritual idea” that is distinct from the African American denominational churches and their walls, both literal walls and figurative ideological ones. While Hamer was raised within the particular denomination of the black Southern Baptist church, we can see, particularly in her singing and rhetoric, the mark of this distinct black church tradition. Holmes also defines contemplation in a way that defies easy re-creation. Variously she calls contemplation a “sustained sympathetic reverent attention” in the words of Ronald Grimes, and “the experience of God’s love poured forth into our hearts by the Holy Spirit” in the words of Ernest Larkin, OCam.[132]

A singular technical definition seems to run against the grain of this project that evades rigid categories. But Holmes is clear that contemplation rests at the heart of the human task, which is threefold:

> First, the human spirit must connect to the Eternal by turning towards God’s immanence and ineffability with yearning. Second, each person must explore the inner reality of his or her humanity, facing unmet potential and catastrophic failure with unmitigated honesty and grace. Finally, each one of us must face the unlovable neighbor, the enemy outside

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[131] Barbara Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church,* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), xxiii

[132] Ibid, 2

> our embrace, and the shadow sulking in the recesses of our heart. Only then can we declare God's perplexing and unlikely peace on earth.[133]

Here we see remarkable parallels with Peters' and Massingale's understanding of black rage and the central task of human life. Like Holmes, they begin with the yearning and reaching for God, then move to the act of turning inward to overcome obstacles interfering with that transcendent reach, and finally turn outward toward the other, both the loved neighbor and unlovable neighbor. Where Holmes calls the end God's perplexing and unlikely peace on earth, Peters calls it universal justice.

Peters and Massingale position black rage as the experience that enables this vital human task for black Americans; Holmes centers contemplation:

> These tasks require a knowledge of self and others that only comes from the centering down that Howard Thurman advocates. It is not an escape from the din of daily life; rather it requires full entry into the fray but on different terms. . . . Contemplative practices can be silent or evocative, still or embodied in dance and shout. Always, contemplation requires attentiveness to the Spirit of God.[134]

While we could view Holmes as offering an opposing method of completing this human task, Hamer invites us to see anger and contemplation as necessarily intertwined in the face of systematic injustice.

The contemplative experience leads to nothing less than an altered reality according to Thomas Keating, a Trappist monk and leader of the modern-day contemplative prayer movement: "A new world appears within and around us and the impossible becomes an everyday experience."[135] Holmes notes how important such paradigm shifts are for communities in crisis, such as the one out of which the black church emerges. Peters similarly highlights the importance of black rage in defying the reality that the world provides, especially when marked by ideologies such as white supremacy. Contemplation and black rage are vital for envisioning and reaching toward an alternate reality.

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[133] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* 4-5

[134] Ibid.

Following the work of Howard Thurman and Basil Pennington, Holmes offers three categories of the contemplative experience: entry, engagement, and effect. These movements of the experience help us to understand Hamer's contemplative gift:

> Entry entails the shift from everyday world to the liminal space that worship creates . . . . Engagement refers to the willingness to involve body and spirit in the encounter with the holy. . . . Effect is specific to the participating person or community . . . and is either a profound resting in divine presence or a 'fire shut up in the bones' that inspires action.[136]

The contemplative experience creates the opportunity for novel and alternate realities through encounters that are beyond the cognitive realm and lead either to rest from exhaustion or action from complacence.

While she explores and acknowledges the roots of European and African monastic traditions, Holmes seeks to expand her reader's view of contemplation beyond the image of a silent monk sitting in solitude. Just as preaching, song, and dance and other stereotypical mainstays on the black church can be distractions from the contemplative moment, they can also be "conduits to indwelling" or, put differently, invitations to contemplation.

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[135] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* 6

[136] Ibid.

Preaching, for example, can form a collective invitation to contemplation. Yet, according to Holmes, this preaching moment only leads into the contemplative "when word, song, or movement melds with the internal knowing and recognition of those who participate. When the invisible chord is plucked, the everyday socially constructed world recedes, and joy unspeakable unfolds."[137] In reading Fannie Lou Hamer's speeches, listening to her recordings including her audiences' reactions, and following the testimony of those who experienced her, she seems to have accessed this joy unspeakable for and with her listeners. Her voice, both spoken and sung, invited her listeners to consider an alternate reality where hope could be found amidst hopelessness and safety could be found amidst turmoil. Audiences invariably engaged with their body and soul as they shouted, clapped, sang, and responded out loud to her questions and entreaties. Finally, the 'fire shut up in the bones' that inspires action effectively describes how many people experienced Hamer – as an inspiration and challenge to action.

In her brief section on Hamer, Holmes identifies our main character as a contemplative exemplar for her "spiritual focus and resolve." She explains, "In the face of catastrophe, Hamer worked, loved, sang and resisted the powers that be."[138] Holmes, though hesitant to be overly laudatory, celebrates Hamer's "piety" and "commitment to the spiritual disciplines of civil rights activism [which] required that she love the crucifier, bless the torturer, embrace the jailer, and pray for his or her salvation."[139] As true as this description may be, our study of Hamer would suggest it is only part of her story. Piety and nonviolence do not adequately encompass the woman whom we met in Indianola. In her study of contemplation, though, Holmes gives us the resources to understand Hamer's radical freedom, her orientation toward community, and her capacity to transcend the limiting dichotomies presented to her. In these three facets of Hamer we see the vital work of contemplation in the creation of transforming anger.

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[137] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* 6

[138] Ibid, 127

[139] Ibid.

First, Hamer spent most of her life at the margins of the margins of society as a sharecropping black woman and granddaughter of a slave in Jim Crow Mississippi. She could not even determine the fate of her own womb. Laura Swan, scholar of the Egyptian Desert Mothers, explains how the "desert may seem initially barren, dull, coloreless, but eventually. . . . we empty ourselves of our own obstacles to God. . . . [and] the desert becomes the place of mature repentance and conversion toward transformation into radical freedom."[140] Holmes builds on this understanding of the nascent monastic movements to argue that "there are so many deserts within reach" in the modern world, and "perhaps contemplative spaces can be found wherever people skirt the margins of inclusion."[141] Thomas Merton echoes this intuition in *New Seeds of Contemplation* when he posits that the "surest ascetism [*sic*]," out of which contemplation grows, "is the bitter insecurity and labor and nonentity of the really poor."[142] Both Holmes and Merton are quick to avoid the glorification of poverty and suffering, or the suggestion that marginalization magically guarantees contemplation. Yet we can see the validity of their claim in the correlation between Hamer's lifelong suffering and her contemplative gift.

In both her words and her actions we witness an individual who has reached radical freedom through suffering and deprivation. As Hamer repeated the stories of death threats and police beatings, she also communicated deep peace, Reagon tells us. The loss of her home and employment seem to matter little to her well-being, as she refused to be turned around. Most radically, Hamer cared little for worrying about losing her life, and she talked about it often. In

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[140] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable*, 11

[141] Ibid.

[142] Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 2007), 250

1968 she told a mostly white audience in Kentucky, “If I die here in Kentucky, I’ll fall five feet and four inches forward for freedom and I’m not backing off it.” Freedom from concern for her life and freedom to continue forward in the face of insurmountable odds suggest that her desert experience in the fields and jails of Mississippi enabled her “transformation into radical freedom.”

A second key characteristic of contemplative practice in the black church that resounds through Hamer’s life is its communal nature. Holmes explains that communal contemplative practice of the black church and its African roots contrast with the more individualistic monastic tradition, which is more closely associated with stereotypical images of contemplation. As noted above, preaching is not a conduit to contemplation through any supreme power of the preacher but through a relational moment wherein the preacher and community strike a chord of shared interior knowing and enter a liminal space together. As the previous section shows, Hamer orchestrated and participated in such moments with her audiences across the country.

In addition to preaching, Holmes makes a similar argument about song. Song can be an invitation to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit: “All must be of one accord for the transformation to take place . . . not just any singing but consecrated singers . . . ‘those who have really committed their lives to Jesus Christ.’”[143] Here Holmes offers us an explanation for the power of Hamer’s singing. Harry Belafonte said that in Hamer’s “voice he could hear the struggle of all black America. . . . When she sang there was indeed a voice raised that was, without compromise, the voice of all of us.”[2] Her singing voice rallied crowds, filled churches, soothed mourners and inspired young activists to risk their lives.

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[143] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* 84

Surely Hamer had a beautiful voice but there was an ineffable effect that does not appear to be captured by audio recording, a movement in the room for those that were present. Perhaps it was the contemplative moment created in partnership with her community of listeners. Although many listeners were black and came out of a shared tradition, many were also white, Jewish, atheist, northerners, or all four, and they described similar enrapturing experiences.

Finally, Holmes identifies the destruction of false dichotomies as a key mark of contemplation. Merton similarly explains how contemplation guards against the human tendency to exaggerate "distinctions between this and that, good and evil, right and wrong" becoming "irreducible divisions."[144] To return to the heart of this paper's focus on anger and its transformation, this transcending of dichotomies and refusal of exaggerated distinctions and divisions is central to Hamer's teaching on two levels. First, as noted above, Hamer shatters the opposition between anger and love implicitly posited by Nussbaum. Hamer shows an alternative path which transcends this dichotomy – "so mad and so loving."

Second, Hamer's demonstration of transforming anger refuses the temptation to dichotomize people into groups of good and evil. Her determination of shared underlying unity refuses such dichotomy. And her insistence on this underlying unity is grounded in the contemplative gift to see and invite others to see an alternate reality apart from the one obviously presented. Of course Hamer grounded her claims on scripture that many Americans claimed to believe. But few were willing to take the text of Acts 26 to the universal ends that she did. Her contemplative gift enabled her to use this scripture to alert her listeners to a radical alternate reality, where all are "of one blood."

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[144] Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation,* 96

Through an alchemy of life experience, individual decisions, and God’s grace, Hamer struck upon a “radical freedom” that allowed her to act and speak in a way that was liberated from the normal human concerns for life and wellbeing. Just as her freedom grew from this desert experience, so too did her anger. At first glance anger might seem oppositional to freedom, the former enveloped by the injuries of the world and the latter released from them. Yet with Hamer it appears that the freedom she gained did not release her from the ties of anger but enabled her to transform it. In response to what she identified as God’s calling, she brought forth contemplative moments to audiences across the country through speech and through song. Her audiences were shot through with moral agency, invited into relationship with God and each other, and ultimately turned towards a vision of universal justice. In this way, just like the concrete rhetorical tradition of the black Jeremiad, the spiritual tradition of contemplative practice in the black church enabled Hamer to lead thousands of audience members in the experience of transforming anger.

## Conclusion

Martha Nussbuam alerts us to the dangers of anger, while Michael Jaycox alerts us to the demands of anger. For both, anger is normatively determined. Carmichael Peters and Bryan Massingale reveal a variant of anger, ontological black rage, and show, with Karl Rahner's assistance, how it leads the individual inward in transcendence toward God and leads the individual outward into the pursuit of universal justice, navigating the dangerous waters between resignation and separatism. While black rage is ethically ambiguous, leading to potential criminal and pathological manifestations, they demonstrate the reality of this lesser-understood existential manifestation. With the offer of God's grace, black rage transforms a person or people, and is transformed by that person or people toward love and liberation.

Cathleen Kaveny walks us through the history of the American Jeremiad, the fiery tradition of moral indictment central to moral discourse and yet overlooked in more limited contemporary accounts. Yet she is limited by the lack of consideration of power and position. Maegan Parker Brooks and Fannie Lou Hamer show how the black Jeremiad offers additional tools for moral indictment for a person with the particular marginalized experience of the black American. Finally, Barbara Holmes reveals how Hamer and the black church practice a particular form of contemplation shaped by life on the margins, constitutive of collective experience, and transcending the dichotomies apparent in our everyday reality. Hamer's growth from this tradition and demonstration of these contemplative gifts allow us to see how one might actually experience and lead others in experiencing transforming anger. Where Peters and Massingale point to the theoretical potential for love and liberation, Hamer, through the analytical frameworks of Brooks and Holmes, proves the reality of such love and liberation through transforming anger.

In *Encountering Religion* Tyler Roberts exhorts scholars toward an "encounter" with religion that is critical and constructive:

> "There are good arguments to be made that these tools [of critique] are essential, today more than ever. But 'more than ever' does not mean 'exclusively,' for such exclusivity may well lead us to ignore, among other things, powerful religious resources for responding to violence. This would be a double failure, one ethical and one academic. That is, it would be a failure to attend to practices and ideas that may offer alternatives to dominating and destructive ideologies, either religious or not, and it would be a failure to know religion in all its complexity and power."[145]

While this essay does take both a critical and constructive view of anger, it is decidedly constructive in its approach to Fannie Lou Hamer and Christianity. It takes Hamer and Christianity seriously as resources for responding to destructive ideologies like white supremacy while revealing the complexity and power of Christianity as well.

One could argue that a shortcoming of this essay is the lack of a critical eye towards Hamer and Christianity. Perhaps her numerous strategic failures deserve greater attention. After all, Hamer was unsuccessful in many of her concrete goals, from seeking to unseat the all-white delegation of the Mississippi Democratic Party in Atlantic City to losing all five of her campaigns for elected office. And despite her efforts, the Mississippi Delta today remains an area of grinding poverty, especially for black residents.[146] A further line of inquiry could examine the role of her anger in those failures. Hamer was criticized in her own time by opponents of the Civil Rights Movement and more moderate members of the Movement for being too angry and uncompromising. Her landlord told her Mississippi was not ready for the change she was seeking and leadership of the SCLC criticized her for not understanding politics well enough to know how to compromise with Lyndon Johnson.

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[145] Tyler Roberts, *Encountering Religion: Responsibility and Criticism After Secularism,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 6

Conversely, she was also criticized by members of her own organization, SNCC, for being too compromising and dedicated to interracialism. As the 1960s progressed, the grassroots organizers of SNCC moved rapidly toward the tenets of black power, ridding their ranks of white people entirely. When Hamer objected and refused to go along with this, executive secretary Stanley Wise said, “Hamer is ‘no longer relevant,’ and no longer ‘at our level of development.’” Clearly her anger was not an unmitigated popular success.

One could also approach Christianity with a more skeptical treatment than it has received here. The same black church that produced and enabled Hamer also produced the complicit black preachers she unflinchingly criticized. Peters and Massingale adapt Rahner’s work to their ends of lifting up the liberative potential of black rage, but Rahner himself was all but silent through the Nazi regime of his native Germany. Many of the white moderates who resisted dramatic change filled the Sunday pews of Roman Catholic Churches and evangelical Christian churches. Many of the white extremists who led the active resistance to the Civil Rights Movement used

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[146] “All but one Delta county . . . fell within the bottom third of the nearly 3,000 communities scored across categories like area economy, equity, public safety, housing and population health” in US News’ ranking of the countries healthiest communities. See: https://www.usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/articles/2018-03-27 /in-mississippi-delta-counties-advocates-working-to-make-a-difference

Christianity as their foundation for defending segregation and perpetrating racial violence.[147] Even though Hamer's ends were ultimately universalist, one could understandably express concern at her willingness to call down God's violent hand on fellow humans.

However, the goal of this paper has not been to show Hamer to be a highly successful saint. Nor has the intention been to paint Christianity as the exclusive home and fuel of transforming anger. Rather this paper has sought to demonstrate that at the alchemical meeting of the black church's contemplative practices, the black Jeremiad, and the gifts, suffering, and anger of Fannie Lou Hamer, something remarkable occurred. That something remarkable was the revelation of the difficult yet vital possibility of a transforming anger.

Transforming anger is an anger that transforms those who experience it into moral agents who transcend the limits of the world toward right relationship with God and who venture into the world in pursuit of universal justice. Transforming anger is an anger that is transformed by those same people away from payback and retribution and toward an understanding of the underlying unity of all humanity. Most importantly, transforming anger is an experience we are utterly in need of today.

From national political debates to hot-button cultural issues we are often forced to choose between resignation and separatism, compromise and righteousness, unity and truth. Fannie Lou Hamer and transforming anger offer us an alternative way that transcends these dichotomies. Her life and work illustrate that the liberative and loving potential of transforming anger is not the result of any one person, but rather the confluence and collaboration of a person who has found radical freedom, a community grounded in practices that can discern and hold collective anger, and last but not least, the grace of God.

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[147] See Charles Marsh's profile of Imperial Wizard of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Sam Bowers, who saw himself as leading the fight for the "one true God, the 'Galilean Jesus Christ,'" during the 1960s in Mississippi. Marsh, *God's Long Summer,* 49.

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