



Mixology and Theology

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Week Thirteen: Mint Julep and African American Theology

Mixology: Mint Julep

The Mint Julep is likely the first truly American cocktail, and the first to have ice as an essential ingredient. Ice was a uniquely American development in mixology, and bars in Europe that featured iced drinks were called “American Bars.” The Mint Julep likely first appeared in Virginia in the late 1700’s. The article linked below gives a fascinating review of the history of the drink and its likely creation by African-American bartenders and slaves who would most likely have mixed the drinks for those drinking them. From the article: “By 1820, the Julep was a legacy in Virginia and had been adopted as an item of local identity. We have only occasional glimpses of the drink’s first acknowledged expert, Jasper Crouch, a Free Person of Color (as he identified himself) from Richmond.” The article traces a fascinating history of the influence of Black mixologists shaping the early history of American cocktails.

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-lost-african-american-bartenders-who-created-the-cocktail>

Mint Julep

2 1/2 oz bourbon
2 sugar cubes or 2 tsp simple syrup
6 to 8 mint leaves
crushed ice
mint sprig for garnish

1. Add the sugar and mint leaves to the glass (julep glass, double old fashioned, or other). Muddle well.
2. Add bourbon and fill glass with crushed ice.
3. Stir well until glass is frosty.
4. Garnish with mint sprig.

Mint Julep Mocktail

4 oz ginger ale
1 sugar cube or 1 tsp simple syrup
1 tbs lemon juice
6 to 8 mint leaves
crushed ice
mint sprig for garnish

1. Add the sugar and mint leaves to the glass. Muddle well.
2. Add ginger ale, lemon juice, and ice. Stir.
3. Garnish with mint sprig.

Theology: African American Theology

The first M & T session on this topic focused on 20th century African American theology, with an emphasis on the influential Black Church leaders that shaped the rise of the civil rights movement: Benjamin Elijah Mays, Howard Thurman, and Martin Luther King, Jr. We also looked at the rise of Black Theology from James Cone and others, and a brief look at the emergence of Womanist theology from Jacquelyn Grant, Delores Williams and others.

African-American Theology is a broader label for the diversity of theologies emerging from African-American experience, including Black and Womanist Theologies, but also others. Given the diversity of beliefs and practices among African-American Christians, we should not be surprised that there has been a diverse development of theologies.

There are many individuals who are important to the history of African American faith and theology. One interesting list can be found here. It's worth reading the short descriptions of these persons: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/february-web-only/black-theologians-authors-scholars-list-african-americans.html>

African American Theology by Frederick L. Ware

I'm using as my starting point for this discussion this book I have been reading. Ware is Associate Professor of Theology at Howard University School of Divinity. In this book, he seeks to explore what African American theology is and how it relates to other, white Protestant theological methods. Ware says that the origin of African American theology can be found in four phenomena:

1. Resistance to discrimination and oppression
2. The body-soul problem
3. Religious humanism
4. Black ethnic identity

Early African American Religion

This quote from the web page linked below is a helpful place to start:

At the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade, African religious beliefs and practices were numerous and varied. In addition to a wide variety of polytheistic religions, a significant portion of the continent had for centuries fallen under Islamic influence. Despite this diversity, there were some common threads across cultural groups. For instance, West African societies, the largest source for American slaves, shared a belief in a Supreme Creator, a chief deity among lesser gods, to whom they prayed and made sacrifices. Through laws and customs honoring the gods, the ancestors of one's people, and the elderly, West Africans sought a harmonious balance between the natural and spiritual worlds. Further, they made music and dance vital components of their worship practices. Enslaved men and women kept the rites, rituals, and cosmologies of Africa alive in America through stories, healing arts, song, and other forms of cultural expression, creating a spiritu-

al space apart from the white European world.

<https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/slavery/experience/religion/history.html>

Origins of African American Christianity

Summary of this history from here: <https://pluralism.org/african-american-christianity>

1619—1730's Christianity made few inroads into the African slave population, which had its own religious traditions. To some extent, whites resisted missionizing the slaves, fearing perhaps that converted slaves would have to be freed and treated with the respect that would be accorded to fellow Christians.

1730's—1740's First Great Awakening. Jonathan Edwards leads a religious revival movement in the colonies. George Whitefield emphasizes evangelizing Native Americans and enslaved African Americans. Methodist and Baptist churches are the major influence.

1760's and after: Autonomy was an important issue for black Christians, for interracial fellowship in the churches was predicated upon the subordination of black rights and interests. Though they remained few in number until the demise of slavery a century later, separate black churches began to emerge in the 1760s. For example, the African Baptist Church of Savannah was founded in 1788 and, by 1830, boasted over 2,000 members, free and slave. A former slave and licensed Methodist preacher named Richard Allen, who had formed Philadelphia's Bethel Church in 1794, founded a distinct denomination called the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.) in 1816. The A.M.E. Zion denomination was founded in New York in 1821, having seceded from a mixed-race church in which blacks could take communion only after all the whites had received it. Many of the independent black Baptist congregations and associations formed after the Civil War merged to form the National Baptist Convention in 1895.

In the 1920s, the "Back-to-Africa" movement of Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association gave voice to a powerful and positive black nationalism. While the UNIA was largely political and economic in its orientation, it emphasized the responsibility of African American Christians to missionize and build an independent African homeland. Garvey's vision of a black God in whose image black people were created would be developed decades later in the writings of a new wave of African American theologians. The powerful "Afrocentric" sentiments of the UNIA would be forcefully restated in the late 1960s with the emergence of black nationalism and liberation theology.

Black Radical Christianity

Only a note here for more conversation: How do you evaluate Nat Turner, Baptist preacher who led one of the more well-known slave revolts?

James Cone: The Cross and the Lynching Tree

Quotes from separate chapters of the Kindle edition of the book:

The cross and the lynching tree are separated by nearly 2,000 years. One is the universal symbol of Chris-

tian faith; the other is the quintessential symbol of black oppression in America. Though both are symbols of death, one represents a message of hope and salvation, while the other signifies the negation of that message by white supremacy. Despite the obvious similarities between Jesus' death on a cross and the death of thousands of black men and women strung up to die on a lamppost or tree, relatively few people, apart from black poets, novelists, and other reality-seeing artists, have explored the symbolic connections. Yet, I believe this is a challenge we must face. What is at stake is the credibility and promise of the Christian gospel and the hope that we may heal the wounds of racial violence that continue to divide our churches and our society.

That God could "make a way out of no way" in Jesus' cross was truly absurd to the intellect, yet profoundly real in the souls of black folk. Enslaved blacks who first heard the gospel message seized on the power of the cross. Christ crucified manifested God's loving and liberating presence in the contradictions of black life—that transcendent presence in the lives of black Christians that empowered them to believe that ultimately, in God's eschatological future, they would not be defeated by the "troubles of this world," no matter how great and painful their suffering. Believing this paradox, this absurd claim of faith, was only possible through God's "amazing grace" and the gift of faith, grounded in humility and repentance. There was no place for the proud and the mighty, for people who think that God called them to rule over others. The cross was God's critique of power—white power—with powerless love, snatching victory out of defeat.

The lynching tree—so strikingly similar to the cross on Golgotha—should have a prominent place in American images of Jesus' death. But it does not. In fact, the lynching tree has no place in American theological reflections about Jesus' cross or in the proclamation of Christian churches about his Passion. The conspicuous absence of the lynching tree in American theological discourse and preaching is profoundly revealing, especially since the crucifixion was clearly a first-century lynching. In the "lynching era," between 1880 to 1940, white Christians lynched nearly five thousand black men and women in a manner with obvious echoes of the Roman crucifixion of Jesus. Yet these "Christians" did not see the irony or contradiction in their actions.

Martin King lived the meaning of the cross and thereby gave an even more profound interpretation of it with his life. Reinhold Niebuhr analyzed the cross in his theology, drawing upon the Son of Man in Ezekiel and the Suffering Servant in Isaiah; and he did so more clearly and persuasively than any white American theologian in the twentieth century. But since he did not live the meaning of the cross the way he interpreted it, Niebuhr did not see the real cross bearers in his American context. The crucified people in America were black—the enslaved, segregated, and lynched black victims. That was the truth that King saw and accepted early in his ministry, and why he was prepared to give his life as he bore witness to it in the civil rights movement.

Cone, James H.. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* . Orbis Books. Kindle Edition.

Leading Voices Today: Women

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/six-black-women-center-gravity-theological-education-n780101>