

Rev. Eugene Rivers
“What Christian Activists Expect Theologians to Talk About”
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The Conference on Lived Theology and Civil Courage

Omar McRoberts:

Rev. Rivers started going when we were out there, outside the door and I told him, “You need to save some of that for your talk. Rev. Rivers is a difficult man to introduce because he is a very complex man. One might even characterize him as a hydra with many heads, many faces, many facets. By way of introducing him, I’ll mention the many faces of him. There’s Eugene Rivers, the pastor. He is the pastor of the Azusa Christian Community, which is a Pentecostal church affiliate with the church of Christ located in the Four Corners of Dorchester, Massachusetts. He was born in Boston, grew up in the south side of Chicago and northern Philly. He was educated at Harvard. But he has also worked in many areas of community development and Christian activism for nearly 30 years. So there’s Rivers, also the organization builder and the activist, particularly in communities of black poor people. He’s been co-chair of the National Ten Point Leadership Foundation. He’s working to build new grassroots leadership in forty of the worst inner city neighborhoods of the United States by I believe the goal is 2006. He is president of the Ella J. Baker House, which is the separate 501C-3 non-profit originally created by the Azusa Christian Community, which provides street intervention, education, and mentoring for hundreds of young people in Dorchester and Boston each year.

There’s also Rivers the policy advocate and geo-politician. He’s had an interest in foreign policy and geo-politics and is now special assistant to the president of the Pan-African Charismatic Evangelical Congress, which was formed to organize churches in the US to assist their counterparts in Africa in dealing with the AIDS crisis, the AIDS pandemic, as well as advocating for change in foreign and development policies in the US vis-à-vis Africa. He spoke in 1998 at a meeting of the World Council of Churches, in fact, to urge them to act in the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Sub-Saharan Africa.

There's Rivers the public intellectual. He's appeared on CNN's Hardball, Meet The Press.

Then there's the Rivers that I perhaps know the best from my own ethnographic work in the neighborhood where his church is located, that is, the neighborhood of four corners in Boston. And this is the Rivers who I witness on the street, on the block, interacting with young people, finding out what young people's needs were, finding ways to channel them into all kinds of social assistance. This is the Rivers I know as Rev, and I'll read just a quick little paragraph from my book that describes just who Rev is.

“Reverend Eugene Rivers arrived just around 10:00 PM with his wife and daughter. They were returning from a movie. ‘Rev’ – as Christian brotherhood members affectionately called Rivers – Christian Brotherhood is the group of young men and women who would go out in the middle of the night and do this sort of street work with young people – emerged from the car, greeted us, and entered Baker House in search of some paper. He then returned to the sidewalk, and briefly delighted the patrollers with upbeat banter. Rivers would not join the patrol tonight, but other nights, I watched him engage nearly every person he met in the street, sometimes calling them by name. Often he knew the kids congregating or parking near the bus stop across the street, “Hey black man!” he would yell out, already dodging speeding automobiles to get to their side of the road. Sometimes one or two youth would quietly walk away or slouch deep into a back seat to avoid being spotted by the ever jocular, but never naïve, ‘Rev’.”

With that, I have the pleasure of bring to you Eugene “Rev” Rivers.

Rev. Rivers:

Omar, thank you for that lengthy introduction. I'm honored. I am very thankful for the privilege and honor to be with you today, and it's actually turning out to be something that's encouraging in a spiritual way. As many of you know, once you get on the circuit

and you're traveling, you're living out of your suitcase. The airports get very old and the hotels all seem the same. It ends up just being another gig at a certain level, so you're living out of your suitcase, virtually falling asleep in your shoes, and it gets very old and very tiring. What makes this different today, and very interesting for me, is first, the person that extended the invitation to me. I've watched Charles since we were at Harvard and I remember having a number of fascinating conversations with him because Harvard was a challenging experience for me in that, as my friend Randall said, I became exposed to the breadth and depth to the class reality within the black community. And part of my madness was that the reason I'd gone to Harvard was to refine and develop intellectual skills to engage in a new freedom movement – I was actually that naïve at that level – having been inspired by the history of the movement during the 60's, having been inspired by the devotion and the commitment of a whole generation of younger black people who gave their lives so that I might have an opportunity to live. I recognize that I was morally obligated, and all of this proceeded and emanated from a very basic kind of a thing. I was raised in the Pentecostal church -- let everybody say 'Amen' – I was raised in the Pentecostal church, which for some of you sophisticates, you know, is the high octane wing of the little church. And it was actually in the bosom of the black Pentecostal church that my general intellectual and, more specifically, philosophic and politic interests were born, and we're going to talk about that today as we talk about how we think about theology. And how we think about what the theological community should be doing at this time in history. It was out of that context that I get to Harvard, and the goal of going to Harvard was to study philosophy and the history of science. And I wanted to study philosophy and the history of science mostly because as I became familiar with some of the theological work being done, it was amazing to me the major lacuna that existed within theological practice as it related to philosophy, as it was done in the academy and more specifically the history of science, because the theological community and more specifically the general religious community had a very difficult relationship with the natural, biological, and social sciences throughout the 20th century.

So, I said, I'm going to study something that nobody else is studying. And being a Pentecostal, I had a point to prove because I had a complex. So, I was going to be hyper

philosophical, hyper intellectual. I was going to study the most obscure, off-the-wall stuff that nobody read and so I went to Harvard and we did philosophy with a minor concentration on the history of science and why would Harvard -- it's very interesting, I met my good friend Charles -- we would have these conversations about the connections between faith and politics. At the same time I had the privilege of meeting Robert Moses who had just returned from Tanzania and was going to complete his graduate work doing a dissertation on William Quinn -- and so, there was a group of young intellectuals, and it was very interesting, the sociology of this, these were younger black students who were Christian, had a deep religious conviction, were theologically very conservative, but were very left of center on social justice issues. For us, there was no bifurcation or binary opposition. In fact, our radicalism with regard to social justice issues and the economic sphere proceeded logically for us from a pro-life, pro-justice, consistent ethic theme. So, it was in the context of that that we began to do the work.

One of the conversations I remember having with a group of us sitting around was, as we look back at the history of the movement and where it was, and now we're talking 1983 -- twenty years after 1964 -- I asked the question "what happened?" you know, "why wasn't there a more robust intellectual infrastructure that would have assisted the movement in anticipating what it would subsequently run into as the movement escalated?" And so one of the things that was very important for me as I studied, and I came to Harvard in 1979 at the age of 29 after having been involved in just about every black nationalist cult known to man from my 19th birthday to my 29th, and I watched the rise and the decline of the black movement and I saw the externally driven destruction as well as the internal decomposition of the movement.

I remember as a young man at 19 when Fred Hampton, Mark Clark, the Black Panthers in Chicago, were brutally assassinated in what was a government authorized assassination of young activists and it transformed my life. And it was out of the context of my faith as a Pentecostal -- a renegade Pentecostal -- that I began a philosophic and political journey. And, so this afternoon, what I want to talk about is how do we begin to think about, in 2003, how do we begin to think about in 2003, what the theological community and what

the theological project should be in view of the fact that, for many of us, the country is a very different place.

You see, many of us are “peace and justice”, want to do the right thing, warm and fuzzy, politically correct kind of people. We want to do the right thing. We want to hug whales and save trees, but we now advance that agenda in a context for which we have no real historical precedence. And the issue which I want to raise, which is going to be sort of interesting, Charles, is that my concern that I bring this afternoon, has less to do with whether someone does theological practice and runs around the streets of Dorchester at 2:00 at night with me and my crew, hanging out with thugs and brothers. That’s not really my concern here. I actually am interested in reflecting on, and encouraging you to reflect on, the general issue of the responsibility of intellectuals. What is the real social function of the intelligencia in an age of reaction? When the good guys are not in power, at least as you understand them, when there is no real currency for a left-of-center, peace-and-justice agenda and you have been roundly defeated by the bad guys in your opposition? What does theological practice mean when there’s nobody listening? Somebody say ‘Amen’.

I want to break this thing down. Just some general observations. For the last thirty years, in all of my copious free time, I would monitor you people from the planet earth. So, as I was in the hood, running with the brothers, I’d make, every two weeks, Omar just talked about with my wife and my daughter and movies, right? Well, the big high event for Rivers -- the big social event -- is every two weeks Jackie, Malcolm, Sojourner, and Dad will get in the car and we go to Harvard Square. And so we go to Harvard Square and we hit all the bookstores and there’s a Chinese restaurant that my wife and I have been going to for 23 years, and so we go to yin ____, get our spicy something, go down to Harvard bookstore, and we monitor what’s going on. And I want to share with you, initially, some reflections on what you all look like from the planet. And it’s an interesting thing here, right? Because the first proposition that I want to sort of drop, which is sort of fascinating to me, is that the theological community is now engaged in a sort of

intellectual exercise which reflects its fundamental insecurity and obsequious preference to certain forms of theoretical and ideological high fashion. Not feeling fully confident of your fundamental intellectual legitimacy, you appropriate gibberish and jargon and theoretical figures imported from other countries that are themselves in decline and deploy them to shore up your intellectual legitimacy and credentials – somebody say ‘Amen’ – so you invoke all these people who don’t have any real traction either -- except within the context of the cultural studies programs at politically irrelevant universities. So I appropriate _____ and _____ – that sounds good – and you know, and I throw a couple of French in, a little Raymond Williams, a little Stuart Hall, there must be Foucault, Boudoirs, and you appropriate, which has, no analytically significant contribution and has no direct or indirect application to anything that happens on the planet earth. Check it out now. And so, there’s this theological project, where some intellectually insecure academic intellectuals whose credentials and status is suspect, engaging in this kind of theoretical overdressing -- it’s a funny analogy, but this is a PC crowd, although it’s hilarious, I’m not going to cite it because some of you all would be offended, where you overdress with the stuff, almost suggesting that you’re the opposite of what you purport to be. Now some of you all who are very perceptive will catch that. You overdress. You over cite. You over swagger. You over-switch. And as result, out of deference, you have no traction, or real influence.

Think about this: you’ve got flat-out fundamentalists who engage in creation science and all this. You know what? The people you defer to take them more seriously than they take you. Catch that. Stephen J. Gould, before he died, wrote that at least a half a dozen books, forty essays, responding to creation science. Not because of its intellectual sophistication, obviously. But because of its political determination and it was a certain resoluteness of character that these flat-out fundamentalists with their knuckles dragging on the ground brought a certain level of conviction and resolve to the game. Check me out now. And those of us who are kind of knee-jerk, PC liberals, never confident, never exhibiting the boldness that illiterate guy from Rattlesnake, Alabama who read that creationist book, or that, you know, Josh McDowell, or, you know, help me out, THAT guy. He’s serious. But the reality is that they’re political actors and many of us, if not

most of us, are not. Think about it. We suck up to people who disrespect us. We defer, bend and bow to an intellectual community that has complete contempt for religion. We invoke folks who have no respect for the things that we hold sacred. And they perceive the weakness of character. They understand and have contempt for it. For an obsequious suck-up. To their aura of superiority as a consequence we lose. As a consequence, we're not considered intellectual players.

When I was at Harvard, intellectually frustrated with the anti-intellectualism, I tried to go to one of those Intervarsity, warm milk-and-cookies, kumbaya kind of things. You know, one of those kind of Pleasantville, you know one of those numbers. And the thing that struck me, I didn't even care about the racism. I wasn't offended. I was from North Philadelphia, dog. Wasn't nothing you could do to me at Harvard that was going to phase me after coming up under Frank Rizzo, right? I was alright. So, that wasn't the thing that I found offensive. The thing that was offensive to me was the depth of the anti-intellectualism. They were an ignorant bunch of something. And, and, and then to exacerbate their fundamental, visceral anti-intellectualism, they had this kind of Neolithic, racist attitude. What was novel was that a group of us as black students would come every Friday night over to Folk Brooks House and would do the kumbaya and would be strumming that guitar and would be doing those weak songs, and we would sit there, and we'd do the thing, and what was deep was that we would say, "We're at Harvard University. Surely we can do more than huddle in a corner, circling the wagon psychologically and intellectually with the only thing to protect us is some NIV, warm milk and cookies and a guitar. Deep point. I said NO, no no no no. I'm a believer. I believe in God for real because God done brought me from a mighty long way for REAL. And so my conviction, my resolve, my determination, which was built on the backs of my forbearers, who gave their blood and sweat that I might be free, and who introduced me to a faith that's worthy of giving my life. No. I didn't come to Harvard to get chumped by every pretentious person who doesn't have intellectual depth."

And so what was interesting -- and this is an interesting kind of racial sub-text to this whole thing, was that the black Pentecostals, because that's black twice, that's black

twice, that's double barrel twice, you're black and you're a neo-African, somebody say Amen, because that's the juice. It was the Neo-African, double-barrel, black Pentecostals that worked to develop an intellectual community at Harvard. Now, those are two very difficult concepts to keep in your head. Even among the smartest of you, okay. Trying to put that together is a tough combination. So here you had black Pentecostals who organized a society called the William J. Seymour society. And on Saturday mornings, we would sit down and we would read Stephen J. Gould because we were concerned with intellectual engagement. We weren't concerned with confining our discourse, so we engaged in this kind of _____ discourse where I just talk to myself and I reassure myself as we just huddled together where the lame, weak kind of faith that doesn't produce the kind of fruit that would command the attention of the world. So we did Gould. We invited Gould to come speak. The Marxist economist of Paul Sweezy of Monthly Review. We said let's bring him up and we're going to engage in a discussion around neo-classical economics. From the position of a person of faith in the process establishing our intellectual legitimacy because we were willing to go into the public square of ideas and engage in a real dialogue around issues that mattered. After we finished the study, from 9-12, Gould, Sweezy, Dick, _____, a historian of Science at Harvard, we would get on a bus and go into Roxbury where we would run a free food program and a condition of being in the Seymour society is that you had to study and you had to serve. So we were trying to in a Gould-narian, new-class intellectual way, develop a new model and a new image of what the intellectual should be, how should he or she be engaged. And the more fundamental political question that we asked at the time was what was the moral responsibility of black elites? Those black people who experienced extraordinary privilege. How did we make good on the fact that black people had given their lives so that folks would have access to the Harvard, Princetons, and Yales of the world. How did we honor the memories of those who had given their lives?

So, every Saturday morning, we did a little Foucault, a little archaeology analogy, talking about epistemological regimes, and then we said now what has this to do with Jerusalem or Athens or for us more, importantly, the 'hood? So we were testing this stuff every Saturday morning and down in Roxbury Saturday afternoon bagging up bags of food

from brothers who were inebriated when they came in from _____ down in little Roxbury. In this process, we were trying to think through – I mean, I came in when we were talking about fetishizing community – we were trying to think through what does it mean, in 1981 and ‘82, to be a Christian, what does liberation theology, beyond being a cottage industry for elite intellectuals, disconnected from the poor, what does that mean in fact? What does it mean to be in solidarity with the poor for real? Not at the fancy conference in the four star hotel? As I read the declaration of solidarity with the poor who would not be permitted in the same geographic region if we were holding the conference in Sao Paulo or Rio De. So we worked through this. We did a study group session with Bob Moses. As we reviewed SNCC. We went through, as a matter of fact, at that time, Clayborn Carson was the latest thing, 1981, ‘82, and we looked at it. How do we, as a new black church, trying to be the new liberation movement within the context of the United States, engage and build upon the best traditions. What is our responsibility as intellectuals? Because this discussion this afternoon is really not so much about theological discourse and what should you all be talking about, but what is your role and responsibility as an intellectual?

In an age of reaction, when you have been roundly defeated politically, and no amount of moralizing or talking bad or “The people united will never be defeated” – wrong. The people were defeated. We lost. That happens. And because we’re people of faith, we have an appreciation for irony. We understand that defeat has a redemptive role. Come on somebody, work with me now. So, how do we think more deeply? Now, my first point was to talk about this kind of intellectual, this complex, that the theological community has, vis-à-vis the larger academy. You know, where we function in many ways like status-obsessed social climbers who just want to be admitted to the party. I want to be admitted to the party, I want theological language and God-talk to be admitted. Which is different than coming with a more robust intellectual agenda, which is paradigm smashing, paradigm smashing, which means you admitted to the party cause you took the party over. You didn’t ask for permission, you didn’t come begging as some insecure supplicant to the party. You understand that, in fact, if we’re talking about liberation, if we’re talking about freedom, that’s not a pretty party, and you see, our

rhetoric has hijacked us. And you see, we want to talk about freedom, but we don't want to talk about the issue of force. We don't want to understand that there are certain parts of the demands of justice that aren't pretty, philosophically and politically. And here again, because we have been so co-opted by a certain form of ideological and or philosophical liberalism, we have conceded too much of our own philosophic ground, and in the process robbed ourselves of the very moral and philosophic teeth which would give what we say some bite, some juice, and some power.

So the irony of ironies is that in 1982 at Harvard it was black Pentecostals mounting in insurgent intellectual currents. In 1983, _____, who is now the major ecologist, wrote his departing shot for the Harvard Crimson. He says the most interesting and fascinating representatives of a form of liberation theology is the William J. Seymour society, a black Pentecostal group. That was the irony of all ironies. And isn't that something like God? God would take some group that's low-status, marginalized, viewed as the tail, and make the tail the head. And only in a way that God will do. And our quest to imitate the head we are now viewed as the tail. In our quest to be looked upon favorably by the partisans of mammon, we are now disrespected, having in some sense intellectually and philosophically, having sacrificed our birthright, our philosophical birthright, that's rooted in the sacred deep traditions, we have that in our attempt to be assimilated into the corridors of power, to be sucked up by the Egyptians, I've shredded any sense of real oppositional power, I don't have a counter-narrative or counter-paradigm because I've conceded too many central philosophic pre-suppositions.

So, today, the question is, when, let me tell you, it's deep, 2003, we probably going to lose again. John Kerry will run for president, Karl Rove will run on John Kerry's wife, he's going to put the wife out who is an updated version of Martha Mitchell – some of ya'll are too young to remember who she was, okay? And so, if I'm Karl Rove, being the shrewd little devil that I am, I'm going to try and heighten the visibility of Theresa and take some delicious quotes and run that across the American public. Poor John's going to look like the wuss, he's going to look the guy, and then they're going to leap that he's not a man's man, in contrast to the president who's a soldier on that carrier in that army

uniform that he never wore. And as a result, we will be roundly defeated again, and we, the faith community, who actually have a key part of the answer, in our quest to be invited to the party, to suck up to the elite liberals, to ask to be the ones in the back of the bus, we thankful to be at the back of the bus, we who actually have an answer, have surrendered in our quest for acceptance.

And, see, the virtue of being black – see, I love being black – being black has the virtue of being of keeping your head straight – at the point at which I suck up and try to be a part, something happens and I get smacked across my face and I’m re-introduced to blackness, so I keep a sensible portion. That’s one of the great virtue of being black. As much as I might want to be a crack head and tote on the crack of this world, every once in a while something happens to sort of bring me back to consciousness. Some political, historical event goes under my nose like some bad smelling salts, and it just wakes me up and I’m reinvigorated and encouraged to get back on mission and message.

So now, what do we do? What should we be thinking about? What should we be talking about? See, I suggest number one that we, in the theological community, as a function of the core philosophic assumptions that form our faith, should be engaged in a new historiographic project to help the country understand the last 50 years of the last century. I’m going to drop some science on ya’ll here. Check this out, and this is amazing. One of the major developments that resulted in the dramatic shift producing our defeat – check it out now – was the secularization of movement politics from 1964 to 1965. And in view of the fact that that’s one of the pivotal points, no one except my man Charles is working with this because Charles messing around with that thing Freedom Summer was on to something hot. Now, no one has deepened this analysis, that a key piece in analyzing the last 40 years revolves around how a movement – which was faith based – that’s when faith based was kicking, ya’ll, right? – became a secular movement. Because we’re so profoundly a-historical, when George Bush appropriates faith based language, simply appropriating what was the stuff that made the movement great and transformed America, the Liberals, being the idiots that they were, reacted, not realizing that it was actually their legacy that the boy was co-opting for his purposes. And when

you read the commentary on the faith based, not one of the liberal folk of the New York Time or the Washington Post noted the irony that it's SCLC, it's Ella Baker, it's all of that stuff in Montgomery, it's all that stuff in Atlantic City, as a black church woman like Fanny Lou Hamer, re-introduces with others, faith based politics, them folks in Montgomery, that's the mother load of faith based. But because we are so intellectually shallow, no one had a broader historiographic perspective to reintroduce another spin on what was going on. So a dude that's dumber than dirt and the president beat you at your own game. Then you mad at him because we were dumb because we didn't do our homework.

Let me tell you something. Key intellectual issue. The secularization of the movement. The struggle, King and Jim Forman, on the way to Selma, black church, you know, SNCC, the election in SNCC, when we from a John Lewis kind of thing, what was it, Carmichael? From John Lewis to Stokely Carmichael in the Southern theater -- interesting transition conceptually. John Lewis, the voice of faith, Stokely Carmichael, urbane, sophisticated, no religious preference, that process, that event is our kairos moment in a funny kind of way because we shift from the theocratic kind of, you know, theologically embedded understanding of, you know, this brother and sisterhood, to this more secular vision – catch me now. That's the Southern theater. Secularization in the movement in the South. SNCC is downhill from that point, it's just a matter of time. Because it was disconnected from its organizational, institutional base. It was now coasting on rhetoric and fumes.

Catch another move. Same period. February 21st, 1965, the assassination of Malcolm X, in Audobon Ballroom. That was the secularization event in the Northern Theater. Because we go from the death of Malcolm, and the split within his movement as one group went secular and another group went more religious. The next iteration we find by way of Lyons County, Alabama, showing up in Oakland, California, is the Black Panther Party. And we move from a sacred text to a secular text. We're talking Lenin and Miles' book. 1966-67 in Oakland, CA. Now, what's remarkable, in all of the theological stuff that's being done, no one has captured the power and the significance of this pivotal

tectonic shift in the movement which would result ultimately in the defeat in any form of progressive liberalism. The progressive liberal movement was embedded in a religious foundation but because we were so preoccupied with being accepted by the secular liberals who, at best, would be disrespectful and patronizing we surrendered philosophically and intellectually our birthright. In other words, there needs to be a theological re-reading of Taylor Branch. Of David Garrow. Of Aldon Morris. So that we provide a new historiographic lens within which to situate and ground and contextualize whatever politics we produce. Another interesting development. Atlantic City. '64. Another intellectual function. Few saw what the collateral damage would be of the split in Atlantic City and of the defeat of Goldwater because the politics about which you complain today was born in 1964. Catch it now – catch it. Goldwater's defeat precipitates a backlash and a defection from the Democratic Party into the Republican Party. '64 is a complicated game. MFDP, the Regulars, Johnson bleeping out Fanny Lou when she gives a presentation, deep. Powerful. Replete with meaning. But because we were not serious as intellectuals, because all we wanted to be was at the back of the bus with a martini in our hand, being accepted by those who patronized us, as opposed to engaging in an insurgent intellectual guerrilla movement to challenge the philosophic presuppositions of the age, we were defeated. So we've got to re-evaluate. Check it out. I believe it's the 15th of June, '63, that Medgar Evers is murdered. 12th? Thank you. Where are we now – in a few months, it's the King speech. Forty years after the King speech, where are we. Where's the analysis? Where's the deeper understanding? What's the project and the program? Where's the new intellectual movement? What should be the philosophic paradigm that informs and deepens our understanding of social engagement domestically and internationally? Right now, most of us, the best we do is read a Chomsky lecture. Or 9/11, because that's the best we got, you know what I'm talking about. Little thin book by Noam. And Noam's my man. I've been studying Noam's social and political thought for 30 years. And I recognize, as deep as Noam is, he ain't got a project or program. Now ain't that an audacious thing for me to say? Pentecostal preacher got the nerve to say that...about that brilliant intellectual, third only to the bible or Shakespeare in terms of number of folks quoted. Noam ain't got no program, Noam ain't got no project. Noam ain't got no faith. Don't be scared, you can

say amen. See, ya'll so hung up on being on the back of the bus, being accepted, you can't bring a counter paradigm, you ain't got no oppositional culture. You can't bring no challenge the paradigm and the consciousness and the hegemony of (muffled) and its rooted ideology. So, you get chumped, what the kids say in the street. Chomsky got one part of it right. The biblical prophetic critique of the powers that be – Chomsky got that right. His philosophical program ain't working. So that he doesn't speak to the deeper issues of meaning, the existential crisis of the human experience and how you resurrect faith and hope, forget utopia – that's a fancy word to satiate the folk who condescend us. We can talk about faith and hope because we bringing it like that – and we can talk about the politics of faith and hope. Okay, Utopia's nice, and I (muffled) to talk about that, but I don't need that – my stuff is infinitely more revolutionary. Come on, somebody. Dog, I don't need that, and I don't bring it to impress you, because you're easily impressible cause you naïve, so I'll do Ernst Bloch or Habermas -- the dialect of Enlightenment because most of yall who don't know no better will be impressed. You'll think that's erudition and deep. Okay? But I don't need that. Now, I'll do it because I like to read cause I got a quirk that way, you know I like the Frankfurt school because they have some things to say, but they're simply a foot note on biblical revelation. They're just footnotes, and I'll read them all – 1930, this is what you do for social research, Horkheimer, Borkenau, Pollack, got that, right, then they get out of Germany, they bounce because the bad guys get in and they end up in New York as immigrant intellectuals, okay? But the dialect of enlightenment is just a footnote on the Biblical conception of the limitation of human wisdom, so I got the dialect of enlightenment and I got the first chapter of proverbs. The fear of God is the beginning of human wisdom. And you see, we've got to come to the place where we've got to have the boldness to go up into Pharaoh's house, and say let my people go. And the second part of this, and this is really heavy, yall, that Exodus paradigm is really deep, Brother Charles you see, our problem is not that pharaoh has not let us go. See, the challenge for the theologian in the theological community is that you've got to let pharaoh go. We're stuck on pharaoh – we want his approval. We want his sanction. We want him to let us on the back of the bus, and give us kool-aid and call us champagne. And then we swear by it because we were accepted, while the challenge of a revolutionary philosophical project is lost.

Let me get another footnote on this thing. The New York Times ran a cover story eight weeks ago maybe on a dude by the name of Sayid Qutb. Sayid Qutb was the philosophical father of the Wahhabin boys out of Egypt who engaged in his Islamic version of the dialectic of Enlightenment in a multi-volume series called In the Shade of the Koran. Now, Sayid wasn't sucking up. Sayid wasn't like many of us, trying to get some appointment at some prestigious institution. Sayid was a revolutionary. Sayid was an Islamic version of an intellectual Pentecostal. Sayid was engaging in subversive discourse. Literally from a prison cell in Cairo. You see, the challenge for us, which is very heavy. You see Sayid Qutb came to play. Wasn't no joke, so when them boys went to them buildings on 9/11, they showed you conviction and resolve, and that level of whatever it was that animated them, which was the wrong side of the same kind of good stuff that motivated young people to go into Mississippi and do Freedom Summer and give their lives and to keep coming after Goodman, Cheney, and Schwerner were murdered, they kept coming because of the power of their faith – somebody help me here - so now, you and I must engage in a philosophical project that challenges the reigning ideologies. That challenges Pharaoh. That deconstructs if you will, that engages in developing hermeneutic circles, right, you know, to interrogate the ruling paradigms. Right now, we're sucking up, trying to sound scholarly, trying to look deep, when the real philosophic, scholarly work of developing the intellectual machinery for a new movement is lost.

I read the article by Paul Burman who has published a book everybody should read called liberalism and terror – powerful volume – and Burman did this piece – he says what these boys are about is much deeper than just some old bug-eyed, cats wearing towels on their heads, you know, going bananas. There's a much deeper philosophical substructure to what these folks are about. And this cat named Sayid Qutb who is the philosophical kind of Augustinian philosophic figure that informs and deepens and enriches their project and program. We in the church have no philosophical counterpart to that kind of action. What should theologians be thinking about? We need a new philosophical project. We need to interrogate many of the sacred cows that are within our system. We're losing on

every front. We created these interest group theologies. Black theology was a big and robust, noisy, tough-talking theology when Jim Cone, Black Power and Black theology, over thirty years ago now. Now it's simply some little minor league, cottage industry, sub-discipline specialty that doesn't command the attention, and then you got all varieties, you got the feminist one, same thing. But the question you ask, what difference did it make on the ground? For the planet earth? Or with the feminist theology? What difference on the ground? For Martha Six Pack who loves her husband, wants a father in the house, complicated. What's the challenge? We need to have a more faithfully biblically, or biblically faithful, and integrated philosophical and intellectual project that speaks to the lived reality of people. No, this is not my "what I do in the hood" talk. You know, hanging out with the brothers talk. It's an interesting narrative; I'm going to write it up. Right, but that's not this talk, you see, because in some ways, I'm going to find hundreds of, thousands of, brothers and sisters who do the work that I do on the block, who are in some ways infinitely more qualified than I am to do it. Now, we can talk about that, but there's a much more pressing project when we were defeated in '64, you know, the intelligencia, as ya'll were in the trenches that should have been in the intelligencia, outlining the next ten to twenty years. So that we would have known what would have hit us, so that we could regroup from the defeat as a tactical defeat with a longer framework and agenda. We didn't do it.

When Fred Hampton and Mark Clark died, in December of '69, I understood, more deeply than ever, the importance of an intellectual project, a kind of emancipatory politics, rooted in faith, that would connect theory, policy, theology, with the struggle on the ground, never conflating the two. Never insisting that if you did intellectual work, you were somehow obligated to run around the 'hood like it made sense, when in point and fact, you just be the odd dude out, because it didn't make no sense you being down there no how. Now your work should have been enriched by the experience, but we shouldn't have played this kind of goofy game, that somehow if you were doing scholarship, that was illegitimate. Or you weren't "down" as we used to say in the black community. No! That was stupid from the get-go. That's why I went to Harvard. I said we've got to have a new philosophical project, a new political program. There's got to be

one that provides the intellectual and political air cover for the soldiers on the ground. They can't do everything. When you in the trenches, you in the trenches. You know, when the war is on, you just trying to keep your head down and move the ground troops forward. You need some folks who can pull back from the struggle. You need a skybox. I'm going to use a football metaphor. You got a ground game, an air game, and a skybox. You need somebody in the skybox to give you the big picture so you know how to move forward, when you need to pull back, when you need to go to the air, when you're stuck on the ground. What's the project now? We need to engage in a much more intellectually serious project to develop a coherent political theory of the state. I'm just going to drop this concept. Why is that important, Rivers? Well, as it stands today, the liberal, left-of-center project has been defeated. You read the New York Times, they talk about the "Leo Straussians". New York Times did a big week-in-review piece on Leo Strauss, the neo-conservative, paleo-conservative political philosopher from the University of Chicago. Now, He's bringing Jukes, Wolfowitz, and his crew, Richard Perle, they've been drawing on a Straussian paradigm and project to move their political agenda forward. The liberals on the left are in complete incoherence and disarray. There is no intellectual or philosophic leadership. You're probably going to run John Kerry and get crushed. You're going to get mushed, right? Two weeks before the election, George Bush is going to find Osama. And Sadaam in the same week. Right? If I'm Bush, that's the way it's going to go. Keep the boy on ice? And just get the timing right, and when he's down in the polls, one day, it's Osama, the next week, it's Sadaam, and there's Bush in that suit again. With a clinched fist by this time, right? Okay? Joe Six Pack and Martha are going to be loving it. High as a kite, and the boy's going to go in again, and then they're going to start in on Hilary as Frist prepares to run for president. Because that's what that's about. So we're talking about a major ideological regime change which may be for an entire generation.

Now, what's the theological paradigm when you're in the wilderness? What's wilderness theology? When you're out of power, ain't nobody listening, don't nobody care? And you're confused and in disarray. We're talking real politics now, this ain't academy talk. Where it don't mean nothing, where a bunch of us huddle around and read James Cone or

Cal Gilligan, right? Assuming that somehow that therapeutic exercise is going to generate a measurable exercise, somebody talk to me here. Now if you ask me to come engage in the same useless theoretical discourse you engage in, I'm sorry. I'm not going to do that. Because you know what, when I leave here, I've got to go back to the planet earth, and before I came here, this morning, this is how jacked up it is, right? I was supposed to catch a flight at 6:00, but I was out til 2:00, running around getting some dude squared away. Who got locked up, you know, 15 year old boy, who's bout to have a baby with his girlfriend, who got caught with an unregistered car, bad license plates, and no drivers license, so I get the call, because I'm the father figure in the neighborhood, so I got to go to go to that, I get to bed at 2, get to the airport, I'm so tired, I jump out of the car and leave my wallet. So I get there, now the brothers, cause you know that work at the airport, they know Reverend Rivers, you know, "hey, what's up man", they were going to try and sneak me through. "You know, man, we got you man, you my man, come on man, we gonna hook you up." And I said, "no, I'm cool." "No, man, you our man." And I'm going to tell you that, that's a subtle thing, when I see regular folks, they the folks. You never get to a station in life where you never know the folks. So, every time I go in the airport, I see the brothers, the sisters, you know? "What's up ya'll?" and I'm never too busy, because I'm the big shot, going to the conference, talking about social justice to ignore the common folks. So I said, no man, I'm going to go on back home, got the wallet, got back here, so my point is, I'm here to talk to you about how to make a difference on the ground. On the planet earth. So that we can begin to develop a new project, a new agenda. So that we can build on the work of all the martyrs. And so we can build on the work of those who struggled and gave their lives that we could be here, doing what we're doing. Fifty years ago, some of us couldn't have been in here, doing what we're doing. Come on, somebody. But folks laid their lives down so that we're a much more of a diverse community, and wealthier and richer for it. We owe that cloud of witnesses and gave their lives for us, who practiced their theology for real, we owe them a serious intellectually engaged project.

I want to drop a couple of other things here. So one, what would a Christian political theory of the state look like, because right now, our theological (muffled) has no policy

teeth for bearing. My criticism of black theology, thirty years of black theology, there was not one policy recommendation. Not one political project or program that came out of all that black theology. So what did it mean? What is our vision of the state? Everybody in here hate George Bush. Well, you got an alternate theory of state? You got an alternative agenda? You got a counter point or alternative Strauss other than rehash 1960's liberalism, which failed?

Let me drop another thing on you here that's sort of heavy, and it's a heavy on here. We need a political theory of the state. How do we understand the role of the state in an international environment where the power and the role of the state is being diminished as we're squeezed by two different sets of actors? On the one hand you've got capital, as it transforms itself and deepens its power through globalization – that's on the one hand – then you now have non-state actors in certain regions, the most important political actor is not the state. It is a non governmental actor, it might be, called Al-Qaeda, it might Wahhabin, it might be the Church of God in Christ, it might be Lutheran World Relief, in other words, the global environment, at the current stage, is very different. So, I've got to talk about states, and I've got to talk about non-state actors. Because 9/11 was not about a state and you saw the power of one religion and two, the power of non governmental actors in the global international system. We currently have no political theory or analysis to understand that phenomenon. Most of us are hoping for some left-wing, like, lefty Chomsky to write a book for us that we can quote like the Bible about what the recent events were as opposed to bringing some morally rich, new intellectual contribution. Theory of the State.

Let me drop something else on you. This is going to be something sort of deep on you, this is a real left field number. We need a philosophical theology of science and technology. Now some of ya'll that are thinker thinkers will catch what I'm saying. Globalization and the revolutionary transformation of capitalization is being driven by science and technology. Nothing has come from the Christian community that has deepened our understanding of that revolutionary transformation that is now displacing states, creating new political actors, and facilitating the accelerating disequalization of

resources within the global system. Now, let me give you a title for everybody here: Manuel Castells. UCLA. Berkley. The Informational Society, Volumes 1, 2, 3. It's one of the most interesting, theoretically and empirically, studies of how the capitalist system has been revolutionized as a result of the information technology. It's the closest thing we have at this point in history to what Das Kapital was in the 19th century. The Informational Society, Volumes 1,2,3. Blackwells publishers, 1998, 99. There's a new edition out. A philosophical theology of science. And this is important in three different ways. Number one, the creationist scientist thing. It's an interesting debate because as I said, as backwards as our fundamentalist buddies are, they were serious and engaged. And you know, as they morphed into intelligent design creationism right? Okay? So, these folk came, they did what they did, they were not intellectually sophisticated like all of ya'll in here, but they won. They had Stephen j. Gould and Eskridge and everybody ducking and sticking and moving because they were politically engaged, they had an agenda, they had clearly defined objectives. We, on the other hand, are all over the place. New York Times, which is a Democratic paper, ran two articles about two weeks ago, on the Sunday it was about the New Republican error. We may see Republicans in power for a generation. The following Monday, which was whatever our last holiday was, they ran the article on the Democrats, who they said were in complete disarray. A philosophical theology of science and technology. Now, I'm going to wrap this thing up.

A coherent, robust political theory of the state, which would deepen our understanding of what the viable alternatives are for the poor globally. Science, and then lastly, and this is a complicated game. We need to have a theologically deep, philosophically robust, theory of culture. Not simply appropriating third rate, left wing social and culture theory and tagging it on to some already anemic stuff. Some original thinking. Foucault had something to say, but he's limited. Boudoirs and his concept of symbolic domination. And social class stratification mediated along the lines of culture, had enormous power, now, I say this, as if you needed to be fancy, I am a ground-sian organic intellectual. If we need a fancy, goofy, academic, pseudo-radical sounding label. That's what we could say. I work on the ground. All of my theoretical work proceeds and is embedded in the work on the ground. We need a philosophical project.

Let me suggest some other folks we need to revisit, as I conclude. We need to revisit Christopher Lash. Haven in a Heartless World. We need to wrestle with that. Bring some sanity to our discussions around family. The True and Only Heaven which was the last volume before he died, and then they published something on women posthumously, The True and Only Heaven. There's an earlier volume on the culture of narcissism. We need to engage in a really rigorous kind of philosophic re-evaluation of our work. We need to try to connect it, not in some kind of goofy, PC way, cause I'm not rockin' the PC, I'm not looking for sensitivity, I'm not rockin' the black thing, I've done all that. I don't need all of that. I've gone 10 million poor black people who are getting jacked up, so I'm not looking for warm and fuzzy, I'm not trying to be the ink spot at the party with the martini, being the one colored person in the room. I don't need none of that, you know? I don't need that for my self esteem, because some of us get into a thing where we're the professional black at the party. Ain't nobody said Amen? Y'all don't know that, huh? Well, I'm not going to out you, right but it happens. Some of y'all looking at me like you don't know what I'm talking about. I'm not rockin' that. What we need in the black community is a new intellectual project. Rooted in biblical faith, and not rhetoric or a lot of mumbo-jumbo. But rooted in drawing upon the struggles. I've got the history of the Southern movement and all of those mothers and fathers who are my parents. I met in Birmingham Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth. I literally got on my knees and said "Reverend Shuttlesworth, where did we go wrong? How did we mess up? How did we get this thing all jacked up? You getting you head split every way but Sunday, right, and here we are, man, what are we doing?" He said something very deep – I'm talking to black folks now. He said, "Look here, let me tell you something, young preacher, three things jacked us up, Rivers." He said, "We got caught up in worshipping worship." He said, "I'm going to say that again, Rivers. We got caught up in the act of worshipping worship, when the song and the dance and the music and the show was an end in itself. It was live at the Apollo in church drag." Somebody help me. He said, "At the height of the struggle, worship was indivisibly connected to witness and the commitment to witness resulted in the work. So worship that was true worship resulted in witness, and witness produced work." He says, "Now, there is worship without

witness or work. And so worship has now become a commodity. It's televised entertainment, disconnected from any biblical understanding of witness or fruit. It is now all ET Tonight, Live at the Apollo, and it ain't much difference between Comedy View and black preaching on TV. Cedric the Entertainer ain't terribly different in dress or otherwise -- he actually is funnier because his point is to be funny and not pathetic. So, a philosophical theology of the ruling ideology, which is science and technology. Castells, y'all. A political theory of the state, which would deepen our understanding of how we help poor people understand their relationship to states as the interstate system within the global international context is revolutionized before our very eyes and we see the emergence of powerful, non-state actors facilitating the rearrangement of the global system with we the church having nothing to say but some lame stupidity from that dumb boy Billy Graham, Jr. about Islam. And third, culture. And I'm going to leave on this note, because it's black and white and in-between. The emergence and ascendance of hip-hop gangsta and thug-life rap is a logical out-growth of the decline and decay of the paleo--liberal integrationist framework. Hip-hop came out of the death of the movement. And the reason this is relevant to everybody is because hip hop rules. It is within the context of the emergence of the underclass in New York City and the death of the movement, for me, symbolized in the Attica Massacre, in terms of periodization, that the hip-hop game emerged. And its national anthem had words like "It's like a jungle sometimes, makes me wonder how I keep from going under" which was almost the virtual national anthem of the black underclass. And we went from that to gangsta rap as the crack cocaine epidemic exploded. And we've gone now from gangsta rap to pimps and ho's rap as we saw the emergence of a racist and misogynistic form of cultural production which denigrates and humiliates in the most racist way the image of black women. And begins there and spreads beyond as its picked up by Eminem, who becomes the new Elvis Presley for the hip hop generation with Dr. Dre as the perennial Chuck Berry. With a new period, a new epoch. I put this before you for your consideration, God bless you, thank you very much.

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