

GOD OF THE OPPRESSED

A film by Danté J. James

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**God of the Oppressed An Independent Feature Documentary
Black Pearl Media Works
1914 Burroughs Drive
Dayton, Ohio 45406
919-475-9879**



Summary/Synopsis

This is a story about Black American and Black South African Christians who see Christianity as a tool for justice and liberation. Through the stories of Bishop Henry McNeil Turner, Rev. Paulie Murray, Rev. Albert B. Cleage Jr., Rev. Katie Cannon, Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright, Rev. Traci Blackmon, and others, the independent feature documentary film, *God of the Oppressed* will explore the history and relevance of Black Liberation Theology. These stories and characters, coupled with spoken word, gospel music, jazz, blues, poetry, art and, hip-hop as essential storytelling elements will explore and affirm Black Liberation Theology in framing a perspective of God within the context of a gifted and resilient yet oppressed people.

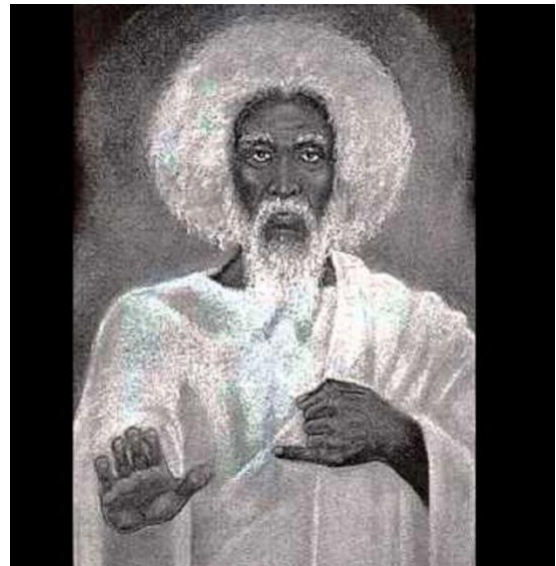




Why Now?

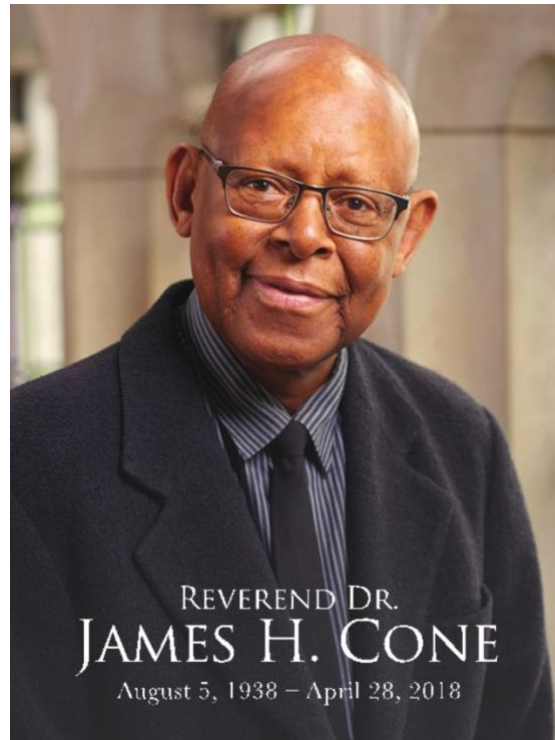
Rationale: Inequality in our religious faiths and our churches impacts race relations and our interactions as human beings. Black Liberation and Womanist theologies openly explore these concerns but remain unknown or misunderstood. Too often, religious leaders and practicing Christians, black and white know little about these theologies. That was the case in March 2008, when black liberation theologian Reverend Jeremiah Wright, President Obama's former pastor, preached a sermon stating, "Goddam America for its treatment of Black people." In response, Obama gave his, "A More Perfect Union" address placing Wright's sermon in historical and sociological contexts. Our film goes further to highlight contemporary and historical figures of liberation theology. In the 1890s Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, told his congregants, "God is a Negro." Nat Turner was convinced that he "was ordained for some great purpose in the hands of the Almighty," and challenged slaves to fight for their freedom. While some constructed a religion calling for submission to the religion of white people, many heard God speak in a way that demanded resistance.

God of the Oppressed explores heightened racial tensions, black womanist theology movements; the political power of white evangelical Christians, and the controversial influence of black prosperity ministries. The incredible stories and characters in these conflicts are the lenses for the first-ever documentary film exploring Black Liberation and Womanist theology.



"Any message that is not related to the liberation of the poor in a society is not Christ's message. Any theology that is indifferent to the theme of liberation is not Christian theology."

James H. Cone (1938-2018)



Rev. Dr. James Hal Cone was widely considered to be the founder of Black Liberation Theology. Cone described it as “an interpretation of the Christian Gospel from the experience and perspectives and lives of people who are at the bottom in society — the lowest economic and racial groups.”

Dr. Cone was searing in his criticism of the Christianity practiced by most white Americans, as well as the theology taught by most white theologians. He told the *New York Times* in 1969 that "white theology is basically racist and non-Christian" and once called himself "the angriest theologian in America," due to the failure of white theologians to forcefully condemn institutional racism and lynching. Dr. Cone drew on the full experience of black culture in the United States to present a systematic theology not dependent on Euro-American definitions. He constructed an approach to the gospel that brings together black music, folklore, art, and the historical black struggle for survival and liberation.

He was the Bill and Judith Moyers Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary. His books include [A Black Theology of Liberation](#), [Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare](#), [The Cross and the Lynching Tree](#). His final book [Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody](#) was published in 2018. He served as the chief academic adviser to the project and approved using his book title, [God of the Oppressed](#) as the title of the film.

The Filmmaker

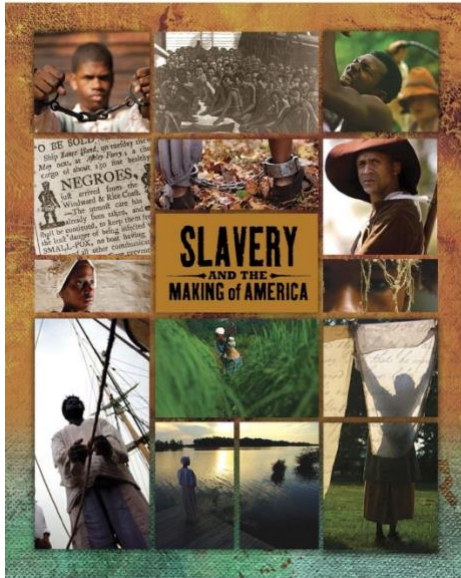


Dante James is a multiple Emmy award-winning independent filmmaker whose work has been described as visually stunning. He received an Emmy for his role as series the producer of the critically acclaimed PBS series ***Slavery and the Making of America***, narrated by Morgan Freeman. His documentary, ***Harlem in Montmartre: A Paris Jazz Story*** screened at film festivals in Paris and Biarritz, France, and was awarded the best documentary at the Pan African International Film Festival in Cannes, France. He wrote, produced, and directed the dramatic short film ***The Doll***. It was awarded the best dramatic short film at the Hollywood Black Film Festival.

For Blackside Films in Boston, Massachusetts he executive produced the PBS series, ***This Far by Faith: African American Spiritual Journeys***. His earlier work at Blackside was honored with the DuPont Columbia Award. He is currently producing the feature documentary, ***God of the Oppressed***, and ***In Our Own Words***, a series of short films based on short stories by African American writers.

Dante James has a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Grand Valley State University and a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from Duke University. He is a member of the DGA and WGA and the owner of Black Pearl Media Works.





Artistic Approach

With the many challenges, Black people face, I'm compelled to tell stories that affirm and respect our history and culture within the context of a gifted and, resilient yet oppressed people. In many of my PBS projects, presenting station political and funding concerns impacted my ability to do so. Now, with my current projects, I'm determined to explore humanity through the lens of Black experiences "unfiltered."

Our story spans from the arrival of enslaved Africans to contemporary times. However, it will not be told in chronological order. The narrative spine of the film will interweave historical and contemporary stories and characters that connect thematically and theologically. Music of all genres, excerpts from sermons and letters, spoken word, poetry, archival footage, art and, original recreation footage will all be essential elements of the visual pallet.

James Baldwin said, *"Music, Black music, is the only place where the Negro, the Black, has told their story. Now, we have some great preachers. We have some great poets and literary people, but the music is where we've told our story, in the spirituals, in the blues, in jazz, in hip-hop, the music. If you look at the Black story through music, you get the story."*

God of the Oppressed, will feature all of the art forms Baldwin references along with interview excerpts from Dr. Cone, scholars, ministers, musicians, singers, activists, and Black Christians; all of them calling for a Christianity constructed from the experiences of Black people that demands social, political, and economic justice.

Budget/Production Plan

Compiled utilizing Directors Guild of America and Writers Guild rates, the total budget for the God of the Oppressed is \$1,050,366. The film will be completed in 11-12 months.

The treatment, which has been vetted by theologians, and historians frame the editorial and artistic approach to the storytelling. A general production timeline includes three months for pre-production and research. However, research will continue throughout the entire production until the film is locked.

For this project, pre-production includes research, location scouting, in the USA, and South Africa. During the South African pre-production trip, we will develop the required logistical connections, conduct pre-interviews, conduct archival film and photo research, identify and book support personnel and prepare to return for 10 days of shooting. Production requires three to four months for principal photography, including the return to South Africa, pick-ups, and finally, four to five months for offline editing, online editing, and final packaging.

The film will also be of interest to African American women, the core of Tyler Perry's loyal, religious audience. And finally, telling the story of Black Liberation Theology in the context of dismantling apartheid, coupled with the explosion of digital cell phone use across Africa positions **God of the Oppressed** for tremendous viewership across digital platforms in Africa.

In a world of limitless choices for consumers, the winners will be those who own their content and a specific brand and experience. The BPMW brand is exploring black experiences from within the culture, showcasing our Black creativity, fulfilling our individual and collective need for self-definition, coupled with meeting the larger society's ongoing fascination with Black history and culture. Content is king but as the media landscape quickly evolves the key is producing, controlling, and owning digital programming that can be provided to distribution partners and directly to consumer mobile devices.

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