**#1. Jamelle Bouie, in his essay “Why Coronavirus Is Killing African-Americans More Than Others,”** [**https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/14/opinion/coronavirus-racism-african-americans.html?smid=em-share**](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/14/opinion/coronavirus-racism-african-americans.html?smid=em-share) **writes:**

***“In truth, black susceptibility to infection and death in the coronavirus pandemic has everything to do with the racial character of inequality in the United States….Race still shapes personhood; it still marks the boundaries of who belongs and who doesn’t; of which groups face the brunt of capitalist inequality (in all its forms) and which get some respite. Race, in other words, still answers the question of “who.” Who will live in crowded, segregated neighborhoods? Who will be exposed to lead-poisoned pipes and toxic waste? Who will live with polluted air and suffer disproportionately from maladies like asthma and heart disease? And when disease comes, who will be the first to succumb in large numbers? If there was anything you could predict about this pandemic — anything you could be certain about once it reached America’s shores — it was that some communities would weather the storm while others would sink under the waves, and that the distribution of this suffering would have everything to do with patterns inscribed by the past.”***

**Put Bouie in conversation with a course reading by a womanist author.**

The coronavirus pandemic is exposing racial disparities between the health of white and black Americans that have existed for decades. Jamelle Bouie points out this sobering truth in his recent New York Times article, saying that “the distribution of this suffering [has] everything to do with patterns inscribed by the past.”[[1]](#footnote-1) This astute analysis of the current crisis lays much of the blame at the feet of the American advanced capitalist political economy, believing that racist ideology is an inherent part of capitalism.[[2]](#footnote-2) This is a sentiment that the preeminent Womanist Theologian and Ethicist Katie Geneva Cannon would share. In her essay *Racism and Economics,* she utilized the perspective of Oliver C. Cox, a Trinidadian-American sociologist, who insisted that “racism is always nurtured by economics.”[[3]](#footnote-3) This paper will explore how three of Cox’s “Historical Dynamics of Capitalist Society” particularly address the title question of Bouie’s article: Why Coronavirus Is Killing African Americans More Than Others after a brief summary of the connection between capitalism, racism and healthcare.

The capitalist political economy of the US has a long history of facilitating wealth for white Americans. In contrast, African Americans were systematically excluded from these wealth-generating benefits. When they were able to accumulate land and enterprise, it was often stolen, destroyed, or seized by government complicit theft, fraud, and terror. This campaign of economic exclusion has created vast gulfs not just in overall wealth between white and black Americans, but in education and health as well. Positive coronavirus cases and corona-related deaths demonstrate that Black Americans are suffering disproportionally. As Katie Geneva Cannon acknowledges, there are a myriad of ways in which racism has operated and continues to operate in society to entrap “the Black community in poverty and disease.”[[4]](#footnote-4) What has had a particularly devastating effect during coronavirus, is the reality that medical care insurance in the United States is largely contingent upon employment. This reliance on employers to provide healthcare insurance has had a devastating impact on a population of African Americans. The history of racial discrimination in the labor market is not then solely about lower wages, hiring practices or opportunities for career advancement, it directly impacts whether an individual can access quality healthcare and then pay for the ‘luxury.’

First, in his first dynamic Cox points out that capitalism creates an intricate system of “interdependence”[[5]](#footnote-5) between individuals and groups where the goal of capital accumulation shapes behaviors and thought processes.[[6]](#footnote-6) In this interconnected socioeconomic arrangement, inequality becomes an ‘accepted’ reality. Racial health and wealth gaps become normalized, accepted as our social heritage and obscured by generational privilege and entitlement. Multiple news reports throughout this pandemic have grieved the disproportionate impact of coronavirus on Black Americans. Some journalists and medical professionals have hypothesized as to the underlying reason of this inequality. Suggestions range from general unhealthy lifestyles, large aging population, lower education and distrust of healthcare providers. Few if any, bar Bouie, have observed the connection with capitalist inequality and less still have made direct line between how a profit-drive healthcare economy and employer-provided health insurance compound the deadliness for African-Americans who experience oppression in every arena of American life.

Cox’s second dynamic makes the point that power in a capitalist society is associated with wealth acquired by exploitation.[[7]](#footnote-7) Bouie notes the same, saying that inequality in a capitalist system often falls along racial lines;[[8]](#footnote-8) determining who exploits and who is exploited, who gains and who loses. As daily news reports detail the protests of White heavily armed individuals in tactical gear demonstrating in front of Statehouses to pressure state representatives to end “Stay At Home” orders. This blatant prioritization of the economy over human lives is part and parcel of the disregard the wealthy and privileged have for those who labor on their behalf. Those earning hourly wages in jobs with little or no health coverage are expendable in this capitalist formulation. As Cannon points out, “Everything else is subordinate to the prosperity of the wealthiest business people and to the welfare of the commercial class as a whole.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

Linked to this second dynamic, is his fifth: The capitalist economy will exploit of workers “as systematically and efficiently,”[[10]](#footnote-10) read cheaply, as possible, which means a resistance to labor unions, livable wages, retirement funds or health insurance resulting in African Americans more economically vulnerable than their White counterparts. Bouie mentions in his article that Federal officials have tried to tie the disparities in coronavirus infection and death to individual behavior,[[11]](#footnote-11) this move is not only a political one but an economic one. For if the blame for infection can be pinned on the already marginalized Black individual, then it absolves those in the dominant ruling class, those with wealth, those who are White, from taking responsibility for the disproportionate suffering of African Americans during this time.

Although Cannon does not explicitly connect Cox’s scholarship to the womanist cause, his work clearly identifies capitalism as a threat to the survival and wholeness of all people,[[12]](#footnote-12) a core concern of womanist ethicists and one that directly relates to the health and well-being of African Americans. For womanist ethicists, the persistent health and wealth gaps are of significant concern as they further compound the suffering of Black women and their families, inhibiting their flourishing in American society. What Bouie highlights in his article is that coronavirus has merely uncovered the suffering and marginalization that has been the lived reality for many African American citizens for many decades.

**#2. Cathy Park Hong, in her essay “The Slur I Never Expected to Hear in 2020,”** [**https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/12/magazine/asian-american-discrimination-coronavirus.html**](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/12/magazine/asian-american-discrimination-coronavirus.html) **writes:**

***“After President Trump called Covid-19 the ‘Chinese virus’ in March, the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council said more than 650 incidents of discrimination directed against Asian-Americans were reported to a website it helps maintain in one week alone. ‘I’m afraid to leave my home not because of coronavirus,’ my Asian friends say, half in jest, ‘but because I don’t want to be a victim of a hate crime.’ It doesn’t matter if our families hail from Thailand, Burma or the Philippines. Racism is indiscriminate, carpet bombing groups that bear the slightest resemblance to one another. We don’t have coronavirus. We* are *coronavirus…Asian-Americans have always lived a conditional existence in which belonging is promised as long as we work harder at being good, hamming up acts of courtesy when we help our neighbors, internalizing any racial slights we encounter and always allowing them to go first. The model-minority myth is a lie that silences the structural economic racism Asian-Americans have endured and the intergenerational traumas our families have experienced from years of Western colonialism, wars and invasions. I hated talking about the model-minority myth because it was like being stuck in a feedback loop. After refuting that myth, I was dragged back to refute it again. But when the pandemic struck, I realized how deeply entrenched that myth was in the psyches of not only whites but other people of color.”***

**Put Hong in conversation with the essay by Gale Yee, “She Stood in Tears amid the Alien Corn.”**

Cathy Park Hong’s piece in the New York Times effectively shines a laser-focused beam on the hegemonic power wielded by those of White European descent in the United States of America. The logic of hegemony states that the normative characteristics of an American citizen[[13]](#footnote-13) are shaped by the dominant ideologies of the ruling class. In the case of the United States, this has historically been those with White European ancestry. Therefore, those who cannot make such an ancestral claim are subject to suspicion. The hegemon dictates who belongs and who does not, who is included and who is excluded, who profits and who are exploited. Such a reductionist formulation of society has had a devastating impact on the lives of many Asian Americans historically and during the present global pandemic that we are currently experiencing. This paper seeks to put the article by Hong in conversation with Gale A. Yee, to understand better how two particularly pervasive myths, that of ‘perpetual foreigner’ and ‘model minority,’ effectively constitute an existential threat for many Asian Americans.

           Hong describes how the “indiscriminate”[[14]](#footnote-14) nature of racism disregards the specific ancestry of those it deems inferior, for, in our current climate, Asian-Americans do not have Coronavirus; they are the Coronavirus. This essentializing move is typical of racist ideology and on terrible display in Trump’s choice to rebrand severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus “Chinese virus.”[[15]](#footnote-15) The racist rhetoric of the leader of the United States reveals the hegemonic logic and xenophobic ideology that shapes his view of the world. Asian-Americans are understood as failing to assimilate. Yee asserts that citizenship becomes the axis on which Asian-Americans are judged.[[16]](#footnote-16) However, cultural assimilation here is used as a proxy for American citizenship. Failure to assimilate then is interpreted by those in power as justification to exploit someone’s Asian ethnic identity (perceived or real) as a convenient scapegoat in a global health crisis that had its origin in China. This slur effectively leverages the myth of the “perpetual foreigner” to redirect blame and responsibility away from the United States leadership and pinning it on some offshore entity that is wholly different from ‘us.’

           As the title of Hong’s article bemoans, the myth of the ‘model minority’ was a stereotype that many hoped was a thing of the past. This myth singles out Asian Americans as the group that “has successfully assimilated into American society, becoming financially well-off and achieving the American Dream.”[[17]](#footnote-17) The paradoxical interplay between the myth of the ‘perpetual foreigner’ and the ‘model minority’ and narratives on assimilation is by design. It catches Asian-Americans in an oppressive cycle of cultural contingency, which re-traumatizes individuals and communities.

           The Coronavirus pandemic has provided the dominant White European ruling class ‘proof’ that backed their assumption that all Asian Americans, but Chinese Americans in particular, do not belong in this country. By this racist and discriminatory logic, they are all to be regarded as suspect by those who do belong here. After all, as the President declared, this deadly virus is Chinese,[[18]](#footnote-18) a foreign and invisible enemy, that real Americans must fight to eradicate. This rhetoric not only intensifies the myth of the ‘perpetual foreigner’ but removes any flimsy protection the ‘model minority’ myth might have afforded. The latter was never meant as a badge of honor[[19]](#footnote-19)or a mark of actual assimilation; it was merely a tool of rhetoric discourse welding by an oppressive hegemon.

           Yee notes that Anti-Chinese sentiment has existed since the mid-19th-century shortly after Chinese migrants arrived on the shores of the United States;[[20]](#footnote-20) however, Hong points out that anti-Chinese rhetoric during Coronavirus has led to the rise of hate crimes against Asian Americans.[[21]](#footnote-21)

All this distracts from the fact that thousands of Chinese have suffered and died from the virus, belittling the widespread suffering of Chinese under pandemic conditions. The lack of regard for the health and well-being of the ‘Other’ typifies hegemony behavior that only seeks to shore up its power and capacity to dominate and exploit. What is particularly disturbing about the comments made by President Trump is not their flippant disregard of the physical safety of Asian-Americans, as if that is not bad enough, it is they are the overt manifestation of white supremacy in the United States. A deeply entrenched racist, xenophobic, and hate-filled ideology of those in power who believe themselves to be the rightful heirs of health, wealth, and property.

**#7. In Kwok Pui-Lan’s essay, “Womanist Vision, Womanist Spirit,” she points out parallels between the concerns of womanist ethics and her Asian postcolonial approach. What are some of those parallels? What are ways that womanist reflection remains distinctive?**

Postcolonialism and womanism, although they differ in their specific critiques of metanarratives and societal structure, are both typical of post-structuralist approaches to socio-cultural critical analysis. Kwok Pui-Lan highlights at least four crucial areas in which she sees her postcolonial work paralleling with those in womanist ethics. Namely, the interrogation of dichotomous or binary oppositions that form the basis of hierarchical power structures. An interest in uncovering the discourses that enforce and allow for the reproduction of stereotypes. Both womanism and postcolonialism reject any claim to universal truth, such as the assumption of fixed norms for gender, race, or class. Finally, they share a commitment to creating a body of knowledge that is multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary, accessible beyond the academy, and grounded in the concrete reality of the marginalized. This short paper seeks further to illumine these four commonalities between postcolonial and womanist thought but will conclude by appreciating the distinctive ways in which womanist reflection is unique.

           Post-structuralists always call into question how accepted ‘facts’ and ‘beliefs’ actually work to reinforce the dominance and power of particular actors within society. Postcolonialism and womanism share this desire to expose the assumed hierarchies that are predicated upon dichotomous pairs or binary oppositions. For postcolonialists, the central relationship that shapes inquiry is that of the colonizer and the colonized. For postcolonial feminists in particular, like Pui-Lan, how this relationship impacts the lives of women is of specific interest. Likewise, where feminist theorists focus on the male/female power dynamics primarily, the womanist map how racist and classist intersect with patriarchy. Pui-Lan acknowledges in her essay that womanism’s attention to the layered and intersecting oppressions that hierarchical power structure impose upon women-of-color has provided “a model, a mirror, [and] a pathway”[[22]](#footnote-22) for other marginalized women. The interrogation of dichotomous or binary oppositions that form the basis of hierarchical power structures is of crucial importance for Asian postcolonial feminism and womanism since these approaches center humans whose identities are simultaneously females and members of particular racialized groups, ethnicities, and classes. The world, therefore, cannot be viewed at in binary terms, for such a perspective, refuses to acknowledge the presence of “multiply marginalized women.”[[23]](#footnote-23) Interrogation of binary opposition and the hope of dismantling social hierarchies is a shared concern for both womanism and postcolonialism precisely because these dominant structures frequently erase and silence women of color.

           Closely related to the point above is how power is achieved, and social hierarchies are maintained. It is through the manipulation of discourse. Discourses facilitate the process by which certain information comes to be accepted as unquestionable truth. Postcolonialism and womanist operate to expose such discourses since they lead to the dehumanization and disenfranchisement of those deemed lowest on in the social hierarchy, usually women of color. Oppressive discourses typically employ binary oppositions and stereotyping to justify social ranking. Pui-Lan draws a direct line of comparison between the portrayals of Black slave women and those of other racial and ethnic groups as promiscuous as being “rampant in colonial discourse.”[[24]](#footnote-24) The strength of such dominant discourses lies in their ability to shut out other options or opinions. This silencing is precisely what womanism and postcolonial aims to counteract and problematize. The very act grounding one’s scholarship in the concrete reality of women’s experience seeks to call into question the rationale that undergirds dominant discourse and production of stereotypes in a way that exposes racist, elitist, anti-Semitic, bigoted and nationalistic thinking. There is also a shared understanding that the longer stereotypes proliferate unabated through society, subsequent dehumanization and economic exploitation are allowed to continue. For Pui-Lan, “patriarchy, militarism, violence, and economic domination”[[25]](#footnote-25) are all connected. Both her postcolonial approach and that of womanists seeks to dissect and analyze these connections.

           Both womanism and postcolonialism reject any claim to universality, such as the assumption of fixed norms for gender, race, and class. Pui-Lan states that womanists have revealed the gendered nature of the racist stereotypes used to maintain white hegemony.[[26]](#footnote-26) The dominant discourse around gender works to normalize white, European, male bodies. Such gender stereotypes are pervasive, making generalizations about what men and women are like. They not only lead to faulty assessments of individuals but have a large-scale dehumanizing effect for those occupying the gender perceived as being weaker, less rational, more emotional, typically women or those who cannot be easily placed inside the gender binary. Womanism and postcolonialism both reject gender-based norms, essentialism, and claims to universal truths since it typically has an adverse and disproportionate impact on the lived reality of women of color. Pui-Lan charts out her distinctive approach to the sex/gender system as lying in contrast to white feminist scholars who are often guilty of treating issues of gender discrimination as if it exists in a vacuum.[[27]](#footnote-27) Pui-Lan and womanist theorists both assert that “Sex cannot be separated from economic of politics.”[[28]](#footnote-28) This intersectional approach must also be applied to examinations of race and class and universal claims made on the grounds of skin-color or economic wealth.

           As we have already eluded to, as typical of most post-structuralists, postcolonialists and womanists are intentionally polyphonic, drawing in perspectives from multiple different sources in order to challenge and problematize dominant understandings of the world. Womanists intentionally seek to center the voices and perspectives of Black women, and postcolonialists look to the experiences of those whose land has been colonized. Both approached mine archives for historically marginalized voices, bringing previously marginalized accounts into the light to demonstrate not only diversity of opinion but alternate views of what the world is like. This multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary approach to building a body of knowledge is crucial for the central aim of dismantling the dominant narratives and metanarrative that have contributed to the suffering and oppression of racial and ethnic minorities.

Despite the numerous parallels between postcolonial thought and womanism, womanism remains a distinctive as it sets out to critique the racist and classist aspects of white feminism in the North American context. Womanism specifically claims the agency of Black women, centering their experiences and amplifying their contributions and voices. Finally, as Alice Walker espoused in her 1983 poetic definition, a womanist “*Loves* the Spirit…Loves struggle…Loves herself. *Regardless*.”[[29]](#footnote-29) This embrace of spirit, struggle, and self-love is emblematic of womanism’s highly personal approach to critical analysis that frequently draws in secular and non-academic sources to illuminate the wisdom and insight of Black women.

1. Jamelle Bouie, “Why Coronavirus Is Killing African-Americans More Than Others.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela Davis, Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela Davis, Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela Davis, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela Davis, Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela Davis, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela Davis, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Jamelle Bouie, “Why Coronavirus Is Killing African-Americans More Than Others.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela Davis, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela Davis, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Jamelle Bouie, “Why Coronavirus Is Killing African-Americans More Than Others.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Alice Walker, In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Gale A. Yee, “‘She Stood in Tears amid the Alien Corn’ Ruth, the Perpetual Foreigner and Model Minority,” 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Cathy Park Hong, “The Slur I Never Expected to Hear in 2020.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Cathy Park Hong. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Gale A. Yee, “‘She Stood in Tears amid the Alien Corn’ Ruth, the Perpetual Foreigner and Model Minority,” 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Gale A. Yee, 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Cathy Park Hong, “The Slur I Never Expected to Hear in 2020.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Gale A. Yee, “‘She Stood in Tears amid the Alien Corn’ Ruth, the Perpetual Foreigner and Model Minority,” 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Gale A. Yee, 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Cathy Park Hong, “The Slur I Never Expected to Hear in 2020.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Kwok Pui-Lan, “Womanist Visions, Womanist Spirit: An Asian Feminist’s Response.” 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Kwok Pui-Lan. 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Kwok Pui-Lan. 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Kwok Pui-Lan. 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Kwok Pui-Lan, 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Kwok Pui-Lan, 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Kwok Pui-Lan, 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*. xii. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)