Hidden Black and Brown Bridges: The Mutual Influences of Dr. Martin Luther King and Hispanic Theologian Dr. Justo González

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Hidden Black and Brown Bridges: The Mutual Influences of Dr. Martin Luther King and Hispanic Theologian Dr. Justo González

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By

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Dr. Justo L. González’s work is a window through which we can see how prominent leaders within the Latino/Hispanic theological world were shaped by Martin Luther King’s approach to public activism. Scholars have thoroughly described the substantial work that Martin Luther King did with regards to activism among African-Americans. However, the ways in which he influenced Latino and Latin American civil rights activists and theologians working for social justice initiatives remains largely unexplored. This paper describes how his personal interactions with Latino and Hispanic leaders developed and how these relationships looked on a personal level. I approach this subject from the perspective of an Afro-Latino, having grown up in a West Indian context, possessing a unique experience of being bi-cultural, and wrestling with understanding what it meant to be Black as well as Hispanic.

My bi-cultural experience was also impacted by the fact that I grew up with an understanding of society based on Christianity, which is a religion centered on the person and teachings of Jesus Christ.\(^1\) King once said “Every time I look at the cross I am reminded of the greatness of God and the redemptive power of Jesus Christ” (as it concerns being passionate for truth and devoted to sacrificial love) and he also noted that there was no other example of someone who had a “more sublime example of the consistency of words and deeds.”\(^2\) His stance on Jesus helped me to connect Christianity to public activism since it was his understanding of Jesus’s life and death that shaped his deep concern for addressing social justice in African-American communities. It is difficult to find Hispanic theologians who were as prominent as King in proclaiming Christ as the root cause for their involvement in addressing social injustices.

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in minority communities. There is very little attention in scholarship showing how King worked with Hispanic theologians or showing that King had personal connections with Latino theologians in the Civil Rights era.

This study also explores whether King was ever influenced in his public activism by the stances of Latino theologians. For this reason, the work of Dr. Justo González is highly significant, especially considering his status in the Latino community globally and the personal interactions he had with King. Personal exchange and dialogue is important for shaping thought. Consequently, this study set out to understand whether Hispanic theologians who mirrored King’s work did so because they were observing his public actions from a distance or if they were inspired by interpersonal relationships with King where exchanges of ideas led to a more enriched perspective on how to represent Christ during the Civil Rights era. In the existing literature on liberation theology, Latino/a Studies, and coalitions between the black and brown freedom struggles, few works mention Justo González or the ways in which Hispanic theologians were impacted by King. Justo González was a microcosm for how these relationships developed and were mutually beneficially for both African American and Latino/a communities.

The Historical Influences behind Dr. Justo González and His Works

Since most people are unaware of González, this section summarizes major transitions in his life with regards to his works and the chronology in which they were developed. Dr. González is a Cuban American Methodist who has written more than 50 books and 300 articles in the field of Hispanic theology. This resulted in him being considered among the prominent voices of Hispanic Spirituality in the 21st century and being seen as the leading scholar in U.S
Latino theology, church history and contextualizing Christianity within the Hispanic experience.³ González founded the first academic journal dedicated to the impact of Latino theology, known as Apuntes.⁴ A sponsorship by the Mexican American Program of Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University enabled González to found Apuntes.⁵ Moreover, in 1984 through 1985, González wrote a two volume textbook known as The Story of Christianity which gives an overview of the entire history of all the differing expressions of Christianity.⁶ The history ranges from the early church in antiquity to modern times.⁷ This was followed later in 1987 with his work entitled A History of Christian Thought (rev. ed., 1987) which reincorporated much of the material in The Story of Christianity and is considered “the preeminent work in the field.”⁸

González was able to increase in prominence because of the circumstances he experienced growing up. Dr. González was born in Rancho Boyeros, in Havana Cuba on August 9, 1937.⁹ He was born in a Christian home that was strongly connected to the Protestant community. This can be seen in in the fact that his father (Justo González Carrasco, also known as Don Justo) was a prominent Methodist Christian in the town in which he lived.¹⁰ Protestantism was a minority religion within Cuba but had managed to develop significant gains due largely to Cubans fleeing to the U.S for refuge during the 1850s because of the severely

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³ Arturo J Bañuelas, Mestizo Christianity: Theology from the Latino Perspective (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 53–82.
⁷ Espín and Nickoloff, An Introduction, 498.
⁸ Ibid, 498.
⁹ Association for Hispanic Theological Education, A Legacy of Fifty Years: The Life and Work of Justo González (Abingdon Press, 2014), 17.
¹⁰ Ibid, 17.
weakened economy. They settled places such as New York, Key West and various cities along the Eastern seashore.\textsuperscript{11} Compared to what they had in Cuba where Catholicism was the dominant religion, Cubans found a greater amount of freedom of religious expression in Protestant communities.\textsuperscript{12} Prominent ministers who developed in the U.S after seeking refuge there, such as H.B. Someillan, were later commissioned by the Southern Methodist Church in 1879 to begin missions in Cuba and had initial success there during the Cuban War of Independence since the political climate of the time allowed for more religious expression once the war began to gradually come to a close.\textsuperscript{13} However, Someillan later abandoned the parishes in which he worked for the sake of working with upper-class parishes in white communities. This led to Methodism developing in a limited manner since the parishes he established among the lower classes were not strengthened.\textsuperscript{14} However, Methodism came back into view during 1898 but faced difficulty alongside other forms of Protestantism since Protestantism was associated with revolutionary ideas and viewed with suspicion by Cuban Catholics. Protestantism was able to gain significant ground with those in the lower-class communities (such as tobacco workers) prior to 1898, but in subsequent years, Protestants focused extensively on seeking to win converts from the middle and upper classes in Cuban society.\textsuperscript{15}

The difficulties that arose for Protestants, which lingered for decades afterwards, was that they became associated with American imperialism, particularly or their advocacy of bringing in educational structures based on the American model. The schools developed by Protestants

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Armando Lampe, \textit{Christianity in the Caribbean: Essays on Church History} (University of the West Indies Press, 2001), 231.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Lampe, \textit{Christianity in the Caribbean: Essays on Church History}, 231.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid, 23.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 232.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 241.
\end{itemize}
allowed for individuals to become a part of the American school systems and provided an entry point into American Universities. However, the school systems largely benefited those in the upper classes and furthered the belief that Protestantism was exclusively the domain of elitist society and Protestants from the lower classes would not benefit from missionary endeavors.

This was problematic since the war for Cuban Independence from Spain resulted in Protestants being seen as secretly trying to bring in one imperial power in place of another, leading to their marginalization in the lower classes. However, Roman Catholicism was able to stay in dominance in part because it did not seem to be associated with any ideology associated with American imperialism. Moreover, due to the marginalization of differing Protestant groups in Cuba, there was fierce territorialism and the territories that were developed (i.e. Quakers in Gibara, Oriente and Methodists located in all provincial capitals) did not alter for decades.

Don Justo developed within this cultural and theological context and the era of revolution in Cuba deeply impacted him later. Don Justo was known as a revolutionary due to his opposition to the government of Machado (and later imprisonment by Machado’s regime), as he was a leader in the ABC. Whitney noted that ABC was truly “the first mass movement in first century Cuba.” The ABC movement was a highly secretive nationalist group that was structured in cells, with those cells ranked in importance by their letters (i.e. the primary cell

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16 Ibid, 245.
17 Ibid, 244.
18 Ibid, 244.
being "A" while the secondary cell was “B” and so forth).\(^{21}\) Whitney also pointed out that the ABC movement was significant because it reflected the sentiments of middle and upper class Cubans who were Americanists (who believed in following American trends while allowing Cubans to have economic control of their future rather than ceding it to the U.S).\(^{22}\) The government of Machado and Morales was in economic decay since 1898 and simply wanted to avoid U.S. military intervention while also having a Pan-Americanism which allowed for Cubans to truly work with Americans in developing economic independence through oligarchic capitalism. Machado refused to work with other social classes in Cuba who were wanting to be represented. Machado even refused to work with a U.S ambassador (Sumner Wells) in finding ways to address the problem through compromise when the ambassador suggested he leave office early by one year. Consequently, because of Machado’s policies, the stratification between social classes began to break down. Additionally, the varying groups began to work together for the first time, finding creative ways to challenge the economic problems of their nation and greatly undercutting Machado’s authority.\(^{23}\) The elite classes were the most vocal. Their opposition to Machado led to a rise in violent repression by his government, ranging from imprisonments to the police being ordered to attack student protests at rallies and many other acts of violence which galvanized Cuban exiles in the U.S to return to Cuba in support of the protests.\(^{24}\)

The rise of moderate middle-class nationalism was expressed especially in the ABC because they were against continuing “the politics of class struggles” in preference for

\(^{21}\) Ibid, 84.  
\(^{23}\) Ibid, 82.  
\(^{24}\) Ibid, 83.
developing movements that would transcend class in order to promote the common welfare of all Cubans. The ABC was against monopolies in Cuba that hindered the success of small rural businesses and wanted all social classes to cooperate in promoting social justice for the disenfranchised. The ABC was highly controversial not only for its willingness to cross class divides to accomplish their goals, but their willingness to use violence to accomplish their ends. Alex Ant and Roger E. Hernandez note that the ABC chose to fight “in the cities, with a campaign of bombings.” Additionally, Clifford L. Staten noted how the organization had the expressed goal of killing Machado and how it was highly secretive. Don Justo was deeply impacted negatively by this legacy of violence, even though he was an advocate for the economic and community goals of the ABC.

Don Justo’s work with the ABC movement (founded by Joaquín Martínez Sáenz, a close associate of his) influenced his son’s understanding of what it meant to reflect the values of Christ since it was not seen as an inconsistency for one to espouse love for Christ and neighbor and yet be involved in revolutionary movements that protested oppressive governments. Furthermore, Justo González identified this as a point of transformation in his own thoughts on the power of non-violence since his father later lost interest in the revolutionary movements following 1933 and did not wish to participate in violent actions anymore. González went on to become the director of publications in the Ministry of Agriculture and he, alongside his wife,

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started literacy programs in order to help rural Cubans learn to read from 1941 to 1966.\textsuperscript{29} Don Justo also continued to find nuanced ways of maintaining the revolutionary spirit in which he raised his family while also finding ways to avoid violence, as he chose to create books such as \textit{The Citizens Revelation}.\textsuperscript{30} The book was written from a Christian perspective that warned against the revolutionary regime change occurring in 1952 (during the reign of General Batista and his leanings toward eradicating labor movements) while also critiquing the systems of capitalism promoted by America. This time coincided with Justo González going to the University of Havana (from 1954 to 1957) to complete his bachelor studies.\textsuperscript{31} Justo continued with his studies, despite his father ending up in political danger.

Dr. Justo González later completed his undergraduate degree at United Seminary and received his Masters at Yale University and later received his Ph.D. in 1961.\textsuperscript{32} Additionally, he taught at the Evangelical Seminary in Puerto Rico from 1961 to 1969 and at Emory from 1969 to 1977.\textsuperscript{33} In the 60s, González had a significant shift in focus when he began to explore Liberation theology. He wrote several key works in this field such as \textit{Liberation Preaching} (1980), which illustrated the ways in which preaching is meant to speak to the needs of the consistently oppressed.\textsuperscript{34} González also wrote the seminal work in U.S Latino theology known as \textit{Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective} (1990). The work noted the ways in which Hispanic (or Iberoamerican) experiences have much to contribute to the religious perspectives of

\textsuperscript{30} Association for Hispanic Theological Education, \textit{A Legacy of Fifty Years: The Life and Work of Justo González} (Abingdon Press, 2014), 24.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 24.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, 24.
\textsuperscript{33} Association for Hispanic Theological Education, \textit{A Legacy of Fifty Years: The Life and Work of Justo González} (Abingdon Press, 2014), 32.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, 32.
Christian institutions. He argued that Hispanics and minorities have an understanding of Christ that is more faithful to the person of Christ than what was presented by European versions of Christianity that supported oppressive models such as colonialism and imperialism. González noted this directly when stating how the Bible was used repeatedly to condone injustices and systematic discrimination of minority races (i.e. African American, Indigenous Peoples, Hispanics, etc.). He also commented on its use to oppress those in rural occupations such as farm laborers. Furthermore, González affirmed that the duty of Hispanics was to remind white culture of “their immigrant beginnings, of the Indian massacres, of the rape of the land, of the war with Mexico, of riches drawn from slave labor, of neocolonial exploitation, and of any other guilty items that one may be inclined to forget in an innocent reading of history.”

González noted the ways in which this innocent view of reading the Bible (if seeking to use scripture as a means of supporting the status quo even when it is corrupt) is based on a Western worldview in denial that only chooses to deal with theological perspectives that paint their actions in a positive light. González indicated that American history chooses to see itself as benevolent when speaking of scripture while ignoring where scripture condemned many of its own actions and scripture’s examples of injustice and violence (i.e. using David as an example of God’s grace for human sin while ignoring God’s judgement on David’s life when he took advantage of Uriah the Hittite and had no regard for people who were considered minorities in Israel). González proposes that “because we cannot, or will not, confront the moral failures of so many of the heroes of the Bible, we cannot (or will not) confront our own moral

35 Justo González, Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 25
36 González, Mañana, 23.
37 González, Mañana, 39.
38 Ibid, 39.
failures.” 39 Jacobson Douglass noted that González’s work illustrates how a truncated view of Bible stories told to children and to one another by whites is the root behind why there is an unwillingness to honestly address the candidness of biblical morality. Douglass noted that the truncated view of the Bible reproduces “the polite morality of middle-class North American culture and reinforces the innocence North Americans so easily ascribe to themselves.” 40

Whereas American history is told from an “innocent” perspective, Justo believes that Hispanics have no such illusions since many of their icons are people who inspire while there are other heroes (i.e. revolutionaries, saints, soldiers, etc.) who did horrendous things which scripture highlights directly. González pointed this out when noting how Hispanics are able to be honest about the many injustices their own people have done when he noted “we knew our ancestors were not guiltless…some of our Indian ancestors practiced human sacrifice and cannibalism while some of our Spanish forefathers raped our Indian foremothers…it is not a pretty story, but it is more real than the story that white settlers came to this land with pure motivations and that any abuse of its inhabitants was the exception than the rule.” 41 González points out that actions which result in the harm of others (on the part of Hispanics) are a part of “painful identity” and this unique sense of identity is something González proposes to be held in tension with the portrayals of Hispanics as fully guilty in their actions. 42 It is through the pains of those abused by U.S. expansionism that one gains a true understanding of U.S mythology. 43

39 Ibid, 39.
41 Ibid, 40.
42 Ibid, 40.
43 Bruce Ellis Benson and Peter Goodwin Heltzel, Evangelicals and Empire: Christian Alternatives to the Political Status Quo (Brazos Press, Oct 1, 2008), 151.
The aspect of painful identity can be illustrated in the Lope de Vega play, *Fuenteovejuna*, which illustrated a town that chose to rebel against an oppressive master while crying out “Fuenteovejuna todos a una!” (all for one). The master’s murder at the hands of the town led to the Grand Master of the Order to which the commander belonged appealing to King Fernidad and Queen Isabella. A judge inquisitor was sent to investigate and eventually tortured many in the town, asking who was responsible for the murder. Their only response was to say “the town did it.” González takes the story to be emblematic of Hispanic solidarity, calling it “Fuenteovejuna Theology” recognizing that the reality of community suffering unites Hispanics to revolt against tyranny.\(^{44}\) González and other Latino scholars (such as Pablo A. Jimenez) describe this as “a praxis of liberation that seeks the transformation of the oppressive reality of the Latino people.”\(^{45}\)

There are many other contributions that Justo González has made of significance and some of these contributions are directly related to African Americans. Dr. González has been vocal on the need for Hispanics to show solidarity with Afro-Americans, as evidenced when he pointed out the realization of shared struggles between the two ethnic groups.\(^{46}\) González notes that national magazines claiming Hispanics will outnumber blacks as the new minority is not a reason to celebrate as if Hispanics were finally getting recognition. Instead it is an attempt by the dominant culture (white, Anglo-Saxon, etc.) to pit minorities groups against one another in combat so that both groups would be suspicious of the other.\(^{47}\) Furthermore, González has noted that Hispanic causes pertain to Hispanics due to the nature of being Hispanic but those causes are

\(^{44}\) Justo L. González and Pablo A. Jimenez, *Púlpito: An Introduction to Hispanic Preaching* (Abingdon Press, Sep 1, 2010), 25.
\(^{45}\) Ibid, 25.
\(^{47}\) Ibid, 36.
always rooted in the larger narrative of pursuing the cause of justice that unites minorities from multiple spectrums. This is something that is very personal for González since he witnessed the difficulties Hispanics faced in joining with Blacks. Mervyn C. Alleyne discussed how difficult it was for Puerto Ricans to identify with the civil rights movement in the U.S. due to the complex realities behind Puerto Rican identity, as neither Stokely Carmichael nor Martin Luther King were able to rally others to the cause of American Blacks when they visited the island in the 1960s. King visited Puerto Rico twice, with his first visit in 1962, when he was invited by the Fellowship of Reconciliation (a Mennonite group) to speak at the Interameric University in San Germán (at the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras). King later returned to Puerto Rico after his acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1965 and spoke at the World Convention of Churches of Christ as well as the University of Puerto Rico. King was told by the island’s Secretary of Education that racism was a remnant of the colonial system imposed upon the Indigenous people and the blacks there, pointing out that “in the United States, a man’s color determines what class he belongs to; in Puerto Rico a man’s class determines what color he is.”

48 Ibid, 36.
49 Mervyn C. Alleyne, The Construction and Representation of Race and Ethnicity in the Caribbean (University of the West Indies Press, 2002), 139.
51 Ibid.
52 Beresford Hayward to MLK, February 7, 1962, in Letter from Beresford Hayward to MLK.
Fig. 1 - *Photos of Dr. Martin Luther King at the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico*, retrieved from Martin Luther King, Jr and Justo L. González - Dr. Pablo A. Jiménez (https://drpablojimeneznetwork.wordpress.com/2015/01/19/martin-luther-king-jr-justo-l-gonzalez-in-puerto-rico/) on November 21, 2015.

It was here that King met Dr. Justo González, as González (who was teaching at the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico) was his translator and admired King greatly. González shared common ground with King in his stance against U.S. Militarism since King decided to publically speak out against the Vietnam War.
Many were skeptical in Latin America of the work that King did with non-violent resistance since they felt that the history of non-violence had a different impact in Latin America than in the U.S. G. Simon Harak (an Arab-American Jesuit priest and peace activist who was a contemporary of González) noted how non-violence and armed resistance are not necessarily seen as separate.\(^{53}\) Harak noted that there were certain forms of non-violent revolutions that did

make a significant impact.\textsuperscript{54} Specifically, he gave examples of nonviolent civilian insurrections that occurred in response to the regimes of Jorge Ubico and Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez (in Guatemala and El Salvador respectively, between 1931 and 1944), even though there were no stable governments made afterward leading to more violence.\textsuperscript{55} Additionally, Harak also noted the extensive ways in which people in Latin America were not as prone to cite King’s stances on non-violence as much as they focused on his sacrifices and the legacy he left to stand against tyranny.\textsuperscript{56}

Nonetheless, although there was common ground to stand against U.S. militarism and be active in resistance toward oppressive governments, Hispanics still seemed to be radically marginalized when it came to identification with Blacks in the U.S. Again, Dr. King as well as Dr. González faced significant difficulty trying to convince others in Puerto Rico of the need to have solidarity with Blacks in the civil rights struggle. Alleyne noted that racial categorization was very nuanced since there were Puerto Ricans that did not accept being forced to identify as either Black or White and wanted to have another designation, such as Hispanic, whereas some Puerto Ricans already faced discrimination for having darker complexion and had no problem identifying as black in America and Puerto Rico.

Moreover, Alleyne noted that racial identification was a result of the American system of institutionalized racism that forced all of the oppressed minorities to compete with one another in seeing which group was the most oppressed. Colorism was a means to both identify with the marginalized and compete with other groups who were deemed as either greater or lesser based

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, 149.  
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, 149.  
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, 150.
on their skin tone.\textsuperscript{57} This is problematic for Dr. González in light of the realization that Latino and Hispanic history revealed many points where there was no problem with people choosing to identify with ethnic groups that are today seen as being in competition. González brought up several examples of this when discussing historical accounts, such as priests showing solidarity with the oppressed and actively rebelling against the Spanish crown, as was the case with St. José Gabriel de Tupac-Amaru and St. Petrus Claver (from the Catholic tradition within Christianity).\textsuperscript{58}

González noted that St. José believed himself to be a descendant of the royal Incans and was able to lead the Indians of Upper Peru in a rebellion while claiming to be the true representatives of Catholicism. They saw the church as administered by the Spanish crown to be a representation of power used to oppress the marginalized and believed open rebellion was the only means of establishing justice.\textsuperscript{59} St. Petrus Claver did not seek to establish justice by violent means, but he did identify with oppressed groups and utilized subversive means of resistance to colonial powers. González pointed out that St. Pedro was deeply grieved by the enslavement of blacks that he witnessed. As a Catalonian cleric, he added to the standard set of priestly vows another: "Petrus Claver, aethiopum semper servus (Pedro Claver, forever a slave to blacks)."\textsuperscript{60} Petrus Claver was highly significant to González in illustrating solidarity with ethnic groups to which one does not belong, as Claver organized freed blacks in movements that would provide assistance for black communities and he also took care of deserted lepers and poor individuals (of whom many were former black slaves) while going out of his way to warmly greet

\textsuperscript{57} Alleyne, \textit{The Construction}, 139.
\textsuperscript{58} González, \textit{Mañana}, 50.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, 58.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, 59.
blacks/poor slaves rather than greeting slave owners. Additionally, González shows how Claver would refuse to offer confession to slave owners or the rich who showed no concern for the lower classes and instead chose to assist the poor because of his belief that God’s Divine order always required the poor to come first. González was surprised when he first learned this history and believes that some of the middle-class peers he grew up with were not aware of it either. Still, he has used this history to show the need for solidarity between marginalized ethnic groups. Moreover, he has used the history of heroic figures within Hispanic culture to illustrate that the resistance of marginalized groups is often expressed theologically as well as politically. Consequently, the battle to give repressed peoples in Latin America a voice plays out in the form of debates on biblical interpretations and arguments about who truly represents Christ. As González illustrates, the arguments themselves about who represents Christ are not always verbally explicit since some argue for true Christian philosophy through their lifestyles rather than verbal expression alone. Their associations and the institutions they choose to identify with publically are a means of representing the teachings of Jesus.

**Justo González’ Work in Regards to Nationalism, Liberation Theology and American Studies**

Having summarized the key points of Dr. González’s work, a survey of the literature of liberation theology is necessary since it shows several gaps that need to be considered in regards to what González illustrates. This section summarizes what existing literature on liberation theology reveals. The intertwining of religion and grassroots resistance can take many shapes and it is important to understand why those shapes are formed the way that they are. The myriad

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61 Ibid, 59.
of ways in which Hispanics chose to represent Christ are again among Justo’s unique contributions to the field of Latino Theology, which is well situated within the realm of Latino and Cultural Studies when it comes to understanding the ideology behind how Hispanics expressed their identity. Juan Flores noted that “the previous generation of Latino students and faculty activism coincided with a tie of radical challenges to persistent colonial oppression on a global, national and local scale.”"63 Events such as the aggressive protesting of the Vietnam War, the Cuban Revolution, and the various Black and Brown power movements shaped the ideology of Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies. Although the fervor and visibility of those movements may not be present in the debates in which González participates, the movement that he represents in the realm of theology is no less radical. Justo González’s work deals extensively with issues of “translocality” and “racialization” when it comes to marginalized groups in Latin America.64 The different experiences along the lines of identity (as seen in examples such as Black Latinos or those of mixed background, as well as those identifying with a culture that is not part of their ethnic background) demonstrate that there is no one way to express all facets of Hispanic identity and yet there are common experiences for Hispanics that are seen as transcending nationality or geographical location.65 Dr. González’s work deals extensively with showing the common threads that unite Hispanics across a global backdrop and his framework for doing so is within the religious realm.

One of main forms of theology used to unify Hispanics is known as Liberation Theology. Dr. Philip Jenkins pointed out that the twentieth century saw a rise in Third World churches

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64 Flores, *From Bomba*, 211.
65 Ibid, 211.
being associated with reform as well as revolutionary movements.\textsuperscript{66} Jenkins described how churches in the Roman Catholic world increasingly began to spread liberation theologies after the Second Vatican Council of 1963-65.\textsuperscript{67} Liberation theologies are based exclusively on the ideology that men should be willing to take political action in order to not be associated with unjust governments that neglect the physical circumstances of the poor/marginalized in order to truly represent what it meant to serve Christ. There were papal decrees given calling for the need to redistribute wealth in light of where it was misused – a concept that crossed both Catholic and Protestant theological borders since both had factions that despised oppressive governments and both had a history of movements that sought to address systemic racism, economic exploitation and institutional discrimination while using scripture to do it (such as examining passages in Exodus pertaining to ending enslavement and punishing those who were either kidnappers or disdainful of the foreigner in their midst).\textsuperscript{68} Jenkins noted how often those who were liberationists found ample resources within the New Testament alone to call for radical reform and critique of oppressive systems.\textsuperscript{69} Over a period of time, people began to resist their governments publically (as jailing priests would make Western media see the governments in a negative sense) and churches became both sanctuaries for radical clergy as well as places from which to stage national resistances since the appeal to God and the Church held sway over governments that identified with the Catholic Church from a nationalist perspective.\textsuperscript{70} The best known published work of Liberation Theology on the issue was done in 1971 by Gustavo

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{66} Philip Jenkins, \textit{The Next Christendom: The Global Coming of Christianity} (Oxford University Press, 2002), 143.
  \item \textsuperscript{67} Jenkins, \textit{The Next Christendom}, 143.
  \item \textsuperscript{68} Ibid, 144.
  \item \textsuperscript{69} Ibid, 144.
  \item \textsuperscript{70} Ibid, 144.
\end{itemize}
Gutierrez in *A Theology of Liberation*. Inspired by Gutiérrez's work, radicalism increased among the clergy, priests began to have open conversations with Marxists, and Christians became more involved in revolutionary movements.

Protestants saw what was occurring within the Latin American world with Catholicism and eventually mirrored the Liberation Theologies in their own contexts. This mirroring of Liberation theologies seems rooted in parallel experiences within the Protestant world creating a convergent evolution of theologies as religious communities in the Protestant world responded to similar forces that Latin American Catholicism endured and diverse communities arose that were divergent yet similar to one another. Blum and Harvey note that some scholars within Black culture were seeking to develop ways of showing how Christianity required others to identify with the Black struggle. Scholars such as James Cone developed their own theologies of liberation that were both “profoundly different and remarkably similar.” Other theologians and activists did the same thing within the Protestant world. For example, César E. Chávez, a prominent labor leader in the 1960s and 1970s concerned for Mexican farmers, constantly invoked the Beatitudes of Christ in challenging oppressive governments. His work led to several Latino American priests coming together to address how the Church should relate to impoverished groups, forming the Padres Asociados para Derechos Religiosos, Educativos y Sociales.

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72 Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 146.
74 Harvey and Blum, *The Color of Christ*, 239.
75 Ibid, 239.
James Cone took the concept of Liberation and reshaped it by noting that the patriotism of American white theology was a key factor in its being “a servant of the racist state” and could “only mean death to black people”, as Cone noted in his 1969 work *Black Theology and Black Power* which also believed that affirming Christ was Black was the best way to represent Christ’s contemporary presence in Black people’s lives. Additionally, Cone was very adamant that whites not ignore the need for portrayals of Christ’s blackness since the very history of the U.S was one where black people were “oppressed because of their blackness” and “emancipation could only be realized by Christ and his Church becoming black.” Cone’s development of Liberation theology was very opportune for Christians since many were tired of seeing representations of Christianity that seemed to pervert the teachings of Jesus in order to allow for racism to flourish. The portrayals of Christ loving all and yet not celebrating blacks was significant enough to cause many to consider leaving Christianity altogether and venturing into other religious camps offering strong identification with Black nationalism. Some of the religious organizations that Christians fled to were groups such as the Ahmadis – a sect within the Muslim world which suffered persecution since it was seen as an illegitimate expression of Islam. The Ahmadis in the 1940s gained a lot of ground with blacks by publically denouncing Jim Crow policies and any Christian denominations accepting it. They also surveyed 13,600 Presbyterian, Lutheran, Unitarian and Congregational churches and showed that only 1,331 of the groups promoted nonwhite members. By the early 1950s, a heightened awareness of

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77 Ibid.
diverse groups within the Islamic world had developed and blacks were choosing to leave Christianity in massive numbers.\textsuperscript{80}

The rise of the number of Christians turning to a marginalized form of Islam is significant not only for Blacks but for Hispanics as well, as the 1950s saw a mass immigration movement from Puerto Rico into Harlem (where the Ahmadis and other Islamic groups were present, including Malcolm X).\textsuperscript{81} Although there were other Muslim groups who were actively involved in the political processes of their day, there were also many African American Muslim communities in the 1950s and 1960s that kept to themselves since they did not want to deal with the risks of challenging racial discrimination as a minority group.\textsuperscript{82} Nor did they want to become politically involved with Afro-Latinos, who were coming from either a Protestant or Catholic background. These Afro-Latinos still had to wrestle with why there seemed to be many things done in the name of Christianity by oppressive governments that did not truly honor their heritage as Hispanics. Moreover, Afro-Latinos had to wrestle with addressing Hispanics of dark complexion who did not seem fully accepted in Puerto Rico. The influx of migrants into Harlem transformed the vicinity into Spanish Harlem and created multiple spaces for its inhabitants to wrestle over their ethnic and religious identity.\textsuperscript{83}

Although they may not have seen representation of their issues within the Christian cultures they hailed from, other religious groups were more than ready to accept them if they could appeal to them adequately. As González indicates, Islam has developed a substantial

\textsuperscript{80} Marble, Malcolm, 110.
\textsuperscript{81} Zain Abdullah, Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem (Oxford University Press, Sep 1, 2010), 168.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, 168.
presence in the Latino community in urban centers like New York and Chicago and Los Angelas. This is has largely been attributed to “finding religious grounding in the family structure, in disciplined spirituality and in their own ancestry – both from Spain and Africa.”\textsuperscript{84} The ways that Hispanic Americans value having disciplined lives is a part of Islam’s appeal to Latinos. Puerto Rico itself had five Sunni mosques, although religious practices can cross theological camps and are a part of why there was no problem with Latinos being Muslim while still finding value for reverence for Christ or other iconic figures in Christianity (i.e. Mary the Mother of God, Abraham, etc.).\textsuperscript{85}

The competition between Christianity and non-Christian marginalized groups spurred on Christian liberation theologians in creating a religious system/theological framework that both identified the needs of Blacks and Hispanics. Justo González’s later works helped in providing an outlet that Hispanics could use to have a strong identification with Hispanic culture while also seeing a Christ who was consistent with addressing injustice wherever it was present. González noted in his book \textit{Faith and Wealth: A History of Early Christian Ideas on the Origin, Significance, and Use of Money} (made in 2002) that he did not seriously consider the impact of reading scripture through a lens of sociology and economics and seeing the text of scripture addressing social hierarchies until 1987 after the liberation theologies began to take more shape and he decided to give his own perspective with liberation theologies from a Hispanic perspective.\textsuperscript{86} As González explained, it was liberation theology that deeply shaped his own views for the books he wrote on Hispanic theology.\textsuperscript{87} González’s stance was that all Hispanic

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid, 100.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, 100.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid,
theologians should adhere to the responsibility of ensuring scriptural interpretation “throw light on our current situation, help us to understand it, and support us in our struggle for justice and liberation.”

**Political Spirituality**

In light of reviewing the existing literature on liberation theology, this section will survey the connections between liberation theology, American Studies and the field González specializes in with regards to Political Spirituality. Catherine E. Wilson highlighted the importance of Latino faith-based leadership in community building when she quoted Father Sánchez stating “We need a Martin Luther King…King used religious imagery to identify with the people.” This is of significance when considering that there are currently discussions occurring in the Latino community on seeing the connections between developing strong leadership, faith-based activism and imitating Martin Luther King in using religious ideology to give a voice to one’s political conflicts.

González’s work is deeply interwoven with the realm of Religious Identity Politics that flourished in the 1970s, an era in which a number of prominent Latino theologians were able to develop their ideologies (i.e. Caesar Chavez, Virgilio Elizond, Justo González, etc.). The work that these individuals did was crucial since it allowed for Hispanics to have scholarship expressing political realities in in the U.S and applying them to the religious experience of

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Latinos. Their work also served as a means of ensuring that the needs of Hispanics and Latinos were acknowledged. Moreover, their work illustrated how the Church could be used as an instrument of social networking and social activism and how it could be brought into political movements that helped alleviate Hispanics from oppressive experiences.

Felipe Hinojosa shared how the civil rights struggle helped to provide a framework for Latino Evangelical churches to develop a means by which they could create leadership opportunities and educational benefits for Latino theologians so that they could freely create resources that would be relevant to the Latino struggle.\(^91\) Latinos were not seeking to assimilate theologically and they wanted to be distinct from their white counterparts. Additionally, the black freedom struggle that was being observed had far-reaching impact within the other grassroots movements of the Latino civil rights battles.\(^92\) Hinojosa notes repeatedly that there would not be civil rights expression without first having Latino religious activism in the 1960s and 1970s that coincided with the religious activism of the black freedom struggle.\(^93\) Latino evangelicals were deeply inspired by the liberation theologies and resistance movements that sprouted up in Latin America, but they could more easily identify with the black freedom movements under the leadership of Martin Luther King and other preachers.\(^94\)

Latinos chose to emulate the black freedom struggle by organizing groups such as the National Farm Worker Ministry Board and by protesting via picket lines while developing grassroots support from other farmers. Still, there were other initiatives that brought together

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\(^{92}\) Hinojosa, *Latino Mennonites*, 78.
\(^{93}\) Ibid, 78.
\(^{94}\) Ibid, 78.
both blacks and whites in even more unique ways. One example is the URC, which pressed whites to give better care to the needs of Spanish-speaking groups and helped to give Chicanos a strong religious perspective that shifted much of their activism in a more vibrant manner. Additionally, the URC (based out of Mennonite culture) was able to develop a Black and Brown coalition that promoted the needs of African Americans, Latinos and Native Americans. Traditional Mennonite theology emphasized peacemaking as well as quietness. Hispanic and Blacks Mennonites wanted a more robust militancy that went beyond focusing on spiritual matters, whereas the white Mennonites missionaries training them were less prone to want engagement with political issues. There were significant factions within the Mennonite world who interpreted their insular tendencies as a reflection of “non-conformity to the world” and they believed that not disagreeing with civil rights leaders did not mean there was a need to join street protests or legislative battles.

Consequently, Black and Latino Mennonites had to wrestle frequently with understanding how to be committed to peace theology while also demonstrating that they were distinct from the rest of Evangelical culture. The creation of the URC (Urban Racial Council) in 1968 allowed for several Black and Brown Mennonite groups to engage political issues without feeling constrained to a quiet approach and the URC. Additionally, the URC allowed for communication to occur between “militant groups and the church” and the organization allowed for a greater examination of how Black Mennonites could combine black nationalism with their

95 Ibid, 78.
96 Ibid, 78.
97 Ibid, 33.
98 Ibid, 53.
100 Ibid, 70.
Anabaptist worldview while also allowing for Hispanic Mennonites to discuss a greater role that blacks could help them achieve. Historian David G. Gutiérrez noted how Puerto Ricans had a very complex racial status and bicultural identification since they could be identified as “white” in Puerto Rico and yet still be deemed minorities in the U.S because of the towns that they lived in. This intersection of racial identities was further magnified by the fact that Puerto Ricans in Diaspora could identify with others on the basis of having a common experience and being treated as subordinate to the Anglo-Saxon dominant culture of the U.S. Historian Clara Rodriguez indicated that shared experiences occur in a myriad of ways because language barriers and complexion would lead to an association with the lowest racial identification in the U.S.

Proposal

While the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s was an overtly political movement, it was also highly religious and the religious is an essential part that birthed many of the very expressions Latinos wanted to emulate. Most scholarship overlooks the religious dimensions that were often subtle and deeply rooted in a long historical tradition since the civil rights movement is intimately tied to a long tradition of religious revivals, going back to the First and Second Great Awakenings, “a tradition that incidentally transcends the cultural boundaries of the black church.” However, there does appear to be scholarship that focuses on the ways in

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101 Curtis Burrell, “The Church and Black Militancy,” URC meeting, Chicago, October 4-5, 196, Race Meetings file, I-3-7, MCA.
103 David Gutierrez, The Columbia history of Latinos, 100.
which ideas are translated from one ethnic group to another. Are religious ideas and their resultant political expression transferred through observance of another ethnic group from a distance? Or is it through the ways that parties personally interact that mutual shaping of ideas occurs?

My proposal addresses three crucial questions that are virtually absent from the aforementioned literature. The first question is “Why were King and Justo so likely to connect?”. David L. Lewis wrote the most prominent biography about King yet he nor other scholars have gone into any detail about the overlap of the theological or social worlds of Latinos and Blacks.\textsuperscript{106} Moreover, Lewis and other scholars have no mention of the experiences of Justo and King. New works by Sonia Song-Ha Lee explain fresh connections on building Latino coalitions with Blacks in the Puerto Rican community during the 1950s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{107} Nonetheless, she did not discuss the unique connections between Justo and MLK during that era. Additionally, the anti-war protests during the Vietnam War saw coalitions occur between many varied groups. Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam (CALCAV) and several other movements developed to create networks of resistance toward the war effort and this era saw great strides toward unity and ecumenical work despite the many differences between dominant religions (i.e. Protestant, Catholic, Jews, etc.).\textsuperscript{108} King was a leading figure among clergy in organizing protests against the Vietnam war, yet his coalitions with González in opposing Vietnam in Puerto Rico.

have not been sufficiently covered. Others such as Echols seem to be the only scholar mentioning King’s interaction with González as González shared an essay describing his thankfulness for King contributing to a multiracial America. Echol’s work involved showing where several “leading religious and theological thinkers from the African American and Hispanic communities assess the past impact and present import of Dr. King's bold, yet in many respects unfulfilled, vision.” However, the biographical background of Justo and his intimate experiences with King have not been covered.

The second question addressed in this proposal is “What were the parallels in their religious thoughts and personal experiences?” Both King and González were theologians and both of them were pacifists. Additionally, both King and González were shaped by their fathers as well as the sharing of church and ministry pursuits. The third question addressed in this proposal is “How did King and González mutually impact each other?”. The scholarship existing tends to emphasize the impact of civil rights as being one way on global movements. The Black Freedom Struggle in the 20th Century is largely depicted as the dominant source of influence for many global movements. However, there does not seem to be any addressment given to how Latinos impacted Black Civil Rights leaders and Black Freedom movements. My work will explore the significance of “grounding” social activism in religious and cross cultural dialogue using the understudied relationship between Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Latino theologian Justo González. I will explore this process through the use of oral interviews with Dr. González. The development of theologies and praxis of alienated Christian groups and cross fermentation between them (where the alienated assumes an in-power group dissimilar from the alienated

group/s) can be seen in the person of King and González. Influences are often not straight shots.

By delineating the history of particular groups, we can see how alienated groups are not monolithic but distinct microcosms that experience similar challenges within a macrocosm (dominant culture). We can see that this shared experience can result in both shared and dissimilar strategies that have particular value in terms of identity and particular experience. As a representative of a Latino community and a bridge between King and the Hispanic world, the proposal of this paper is to show how Dr. Justo González’s and Dr. Martin Luther King’s mutual interactions led to a mutual shaping of thought and I hope that this paper will aid in showing how bridges between Latino and African American culture can be seen in the ways Justo and King interacted.

**Question 1: Likely Reasons Behind King and Justo Connecting**

One factor connecting King and González is the fact that both individuals had a passion for non-violence and the Vietnam War. The following interview transcript deals specifically with the experiences that King and González had going into conversations with one another. González noted that he and King both found themselves in very difficult times when they met. What follows is the conversation where González shared the context King had coming to Puerto Rico:

González: And I lived upstairs in a house – in sort-of a back apartment – and he stayed in the same upstairs, in the front apartment. So you know, we spent plenty of time together and then we’d go out – there were different places I showed him. Well, I don’t know where you want to go –

Interviewer: You’re sharing your thoughts about – I guess – I never really knew about that background. It’s called F.O.R.?

González: F.O.R., yes.

González: The Mennonites, you see, ended up in Puerto Rico; the
Puerto Rican Mennonites happened because – during the war – they had to do some kind of a volunteer service in order not to go to war. And so many of them went to Puerto Rico to work there – I mean, American Mennonites. And then they started churches there; and they stayed there. And that’s the original Mennonite church in Puerto Rico. And there were some Mennonites in the F.O.R. – they were not all Mennonites – there were no Puerto Ricans, either. Many of them were American expatriates who were in Puerto Rico. And so they invited Martin Luther King. And I was assigned to be his translator.\(^{110}\)

It is imperative to understand that King’s relationship with the Mennonite Church was not automatically a comfortable one. Many Mennonite leaders were uneasy with the politics and theological framework of King as well as his work with the black freedom movement.\(^ {111}\) They were grateful for King’s stance on nonviolence, but his ideology with “coercive” nonviolence alongside his liberal theology bothered certain Mennonites and caused them to be disengaged with the black freedom movement.\(^ {112}\) Colaiaco noted that King was ridiculed repeatedly in his career due to the fact that his nonviolent protests often generated violence.\(^ {113}\) In example, the 1963 edition of *Time* magazine chose King as ‘Man of the Year’ but noted that ‘King preaches endlessly about nonviolence, but his protest movements often lead to violence.’\(^ {114}\) Moreover, King acknowledged at multiple points that SCLC purposely incited violence in racist communities by choosing to be non-violent in protest and planning on racist communities responding with violence in order to expose the bigotry of those communities. King shared this in one article for the *Saturday Review* (developed in the midst of the Selma protest in 1965) where he laid out the strategies for successful

\(^{110}\) Justo González interview by Gabriel Greaves, Decatur, November 2015.
\(^{112}\) Ibid, 124.
\(^{114}\) Colaiaco, *Apostle of Militant Nonviolence*, 137.
nonviolent direct-action campaign and indicated one of the desired results of inciting violence would be that “Americans of conscience in the name of decency demand federal intervention and legislation.” The paradoxical nature of nonviolence, according to King, was to force violence out of an enemy and choosing to restrain oneself so as to make oneself be seen as morally superior. King also noted this when saying that the nonviolent protestor was one wielding “the sword that heals.” Even Ghandi’s disciple Krishnalal Shridharani noted that nonviolence is far more similar to war than pacifism. It was significant for King to expose the covert violence (i.e. fair housing, equal access to education, human rights, etc.) done by White America to generations of Blacks and he believed that coercive nonviolence via nonviolent protests. King’s goal was to ensure that Black Americans could force their “oppressor to commit his brutality openly – in the light of day – with the rest of the world looking on.” This is something that González noted to have a significant impact on the thinking of many within Latin America because they could see the practical benefits of nonviolence:

González: And you see, that’s what’s powerful about nonviolence. As you know, Gandhi was one of his models. And what made the movement powerful was that they kept on pushing in a peaceful way, and beat them. They kept on pushing. And after a while, it became clear that they were morally superior to their oppressors. And I think that’s what’s happening in the U.S., too. I mean, when we looked at it from our side – I was growing up in Cuba; we looked at what was going on in the U.S. – and what seemed, to me, very clear, was that African-Americans who joined the movement were morally superior to the people who considered them inferior – and that the movement itself proved that. And that broke the back of ideological superiority – because “I am superior, but I

115 King, Behind the Selma March’, Saturday Review, (3 April 1965), 16.
116 Martin Luther King, Why We Can’t Wait (Beacon Press, Jan 11, 2011), Chapter 2.
118 King, Why We Can’t Wait, 27.
can’t behave the way these people do.”

Interviewer: So it’s almost like you’ve lost clout with people around the world, where your image can no longer help you.

González: … I mean, if you think that you’re superior because you just happen to be superior, and somebody whom you consider inferior puts you to shame by your actions, then your superiority begins to be threatened and questioned. And I think that’s that part that we saw from our side – in many ways, the movement was not only showing the injustice of the system, but also the ideological misrepresentation of the system – where you thought, “After all, yeah, we can be nice. But after all, we are white. Yeah, we can be nice with you –” and so on – but that doesn’t work anymore.119

In contrast to King, Mennonite leader and peace activist Guy F. Hershberger took a stance against coercive nonviolence when stating, “There is no difference in principle between so-called non-violent coercion and actual violence.”120 Hershberger’s stances were central to Mennonite views against coercive nonviolence and this position was central to the desire for Mennonites to have a peace identity.121 King was still invited in 1960 to come speak to two Mennonite colleges in spite of the tensions that his views engendered and the concerns that Mennonites had with King did not keep them from being engaged overall with his work in the black freedom movement since they saw the need for his involvement with the work they were doing.122

During the interview, González noted the places that King came to speak at and some of the things that King was made aware of when coming to Puerto Rico:

Interviewer: King went to the seminary?

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119 Justo González interview by Gabriel Greaves, Decatur, November 2015.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
González: Yes. It was our seminary, where I was teaching – he came there and spoke there. And then he went across the street to the university, which obviously was a very open place like universities usually are. People were really eager to hear him. Obviously he was not preaching. He was lecturing. He preached at the seminary but at most places he was lecturing. He was giving a lecture about justice and civil rights and so on in his very unique style, which was very difficult to translate.

Interviewer: And what year was that again that he spoke?

González: I’m trying to remember. I think it was about 1965 or so – maybe 1964 or 1965 – I went to Puerto Rico in 1961 and I left in 1969. 123

González later clarified the atmosphere that King came into when he was in Puerto Rico in order to give context on why he and King were able to relate further. Specifically, he noted the ways King was able to connect with him, particularly as he saw the direction of King’s thoughts shift toward issues outside of class in search of new ways for social responsibility to be seen. Additionally, González pointed out that their backgrounds as Evangelicals of a specific persuasion made them likely to connect before meeting since they could understand each other:

Interviewer: Wow. Those were really controversial times and these were risky things to be talking about.

González: Yes. Actually, we talked more about Vietnam and about poverty than we talked about racial civil rights in the states.

Interviewer: And that’s funny because –

González: He was moving in that direction and he saw a connection there which he was seeing in Puerto Rico and so on. So we talked a whole lot more about that –

123 Justo González interview by Gabriel Greaves, Decatur, November 2015.
Interviewer: The common bridge, like this connects both of our actions.

González: Yes. Also, his positions on civil rights and African-American rights were quite clear. There was no way to try to convince him or discuss anything else with him, but he was still working on the whole issue of Vietnam and the situation there and especially how the question of the poor and the connection between race and poverty were not always one-to-one. There are a lot of poor people who are not African-American and then there are rich people who are African-American. There weren’t that many then, but there were a few.

Interviewer: Yeah – the bourgeoisie.

González: Yes, but we were talking much more about poverty and the causes of poverty and that kind of thing then as opposed to racial issues although obviously his lectures were about what was happening in the states and so on.

Interviewer: And you did talk about your theological stance –

González: Oh yes.

Interviewer: And that was really enjoyable.

González: Well, we were very much I think in agreement there because both he and I were of a sort of evangelical persuasion that was not for today’s version of evangelism which very often has to do with right wing inclinations and so on. But basically people that out of the gospel there was some social responsibility and some things that you have to think about is what we tried to do.\textsuperscript{124}

González indicates that both King and himself were able to engage in a dialogue because they believed that the Gospel of Jesus Christ required them to understand there was some level of

\textsuperscript{124} Justo González interview by Gabriel Greaves, Decatur, November 2015.
social responsibility – with deep conversation required in order to understand in practical terms what that looked like. The mutual desire to process on how to be socially responsible is a key factor in seeing why González and King were so likely to connect when considering that people can find it difficult to connect if there is no common ground or mutual pressure forcing them to work together. Had King and González come from differing versions of Evangelism that did not value social responsibility, they would have possibly been at odds from the beginning and therefore missing the opportunity to connect with one another.

González later shared on other ways he tried to help King have awareness of the social and religious environment in Puerto Rico. These conversations revealed more reasons behind why they could easily establish a connection. King understood the need to understand the dynamics of how churches (both Catholic and Protestant) operated in Puerto Rico and González was able to be a bridge for him as a translator. According to González, after I asked him if he was ever able to discuss his own experiences growing up in Cuba:

González: Yes. My family was Methodist before I was born, but not a whole lot – I remember talking with him and trying to explain to him some of the issues of the church in Puerto Rico, which I could understand partially because I had lived there, but also because they were very similar to the ones in Cuba. It was mostly issues about how to communicate with people, especially when he was preaching at the seminary – how to communicate with people here about their own religious experience and so on – that was interesting, but I don’t remember any of the content, just the subject.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{125} Justo González interview by Gabriel Greaves, Decatur, November 2015.
González elaborated further on the social and political atmosphere that King was choosing to come into. Specifically, González explained some of the difficult elements he had to contend with in engaging the Mennonites:

González: In Puerto Rico they have a whole thing …. a strong sense of nationality. I think I’ve always said that no matter how close to states (i.e. statehood) that Puerto Rico has, if you scratch the surface, you’re going to find an independence movement. But obviously for all kinds of reasons - economic and other - independence is not a real, viable option. Plus, we’re living in a time when independence is becoming less important. People are joining. But in the ’60s in Puerto Rico at the time when the independence movement was very radicalized partially because of Cuba, it connected the past with all that, and therefore in response to that the pro state movement became very extreme right, and the church was caught in the middle of that.

Interviewer: How was the church caught in the middle of it?

González: Well, the older generation.

Interviewer: Protestants or Catholics?

González: Protestants. The older generation of Protestants tended to be pro state because they were afraid of what the younger generation was proposing, which was basically a Castro-style revolution. And so it was very, very polarized, and people stereotyped on another. You are either Communist or you’re patriot. There was nothing in between and that kind of thing. And then FBI was coming to find out who was firing and all that, and they found out that some of these leaders in the church were collaborating with the FBI giving them information about younger organizers. And he came and made a message. I don’t know how much of that he actually saw when that was going on. In that situation, the FOR was calling for peace and reconciliation, but it was mostly about Vietnam and all that because mostly people who were for it for the US.
Interviewer: Oh, wow. So it wasn’t really an ethnic movement?

González: No, no, no. It was a Puerto Rican movement. Actually, all the people I knew with the FOR were invited in and they were all Americans, not anybody else.

Interviewer: Wow, so it’s almost like you’re coming into a party with people saying, “This is how it is for our groups here.” Then you realize you don’t represent the people here.

González: We, he actually motivated the people, but these people who were organizers were very nice. They’re very nice, this idea of white Americans where everything’s okay and who are very, very liberal about stuff over there.

Interviewer: Right, that’s true. It’s not the same. You’re in the homeland.

González: They were nice people……

Interviewer: Right.

González: Mostly people were protecting companies and so who lived there who were ready to serve the war in Vietnam The FOR was not - certainly not - a Puerto Rican group.

Interviewer: And that kind of shifts a lot of things because I remember I was researching on the issue and the book I’ve been reading here. They talked about the Fellowship of Latino Mennonites. They talked about the Fellowship of Reconciliation, but they also mention how there were very distinct parties because Mennonites had a lot of division. They wanted to be not involved in the world, but they still wanted to have a voice against things like a war. And yet you have many people saying you want to be a voice against the war but not having the people here to be our own voices, not having at that time in all the Mexican areas - southern United States that have a Mexican population. They have people saying,
“You’re not really representing us, but you’re speaking on behalf of us.”

González: Well, the Mennonites in Puerto Rico began when people were given options……. At some point passengers were given an option not to be drafted but to do for the church, and so many North American Mennonites were then sent to Puerto Rico to work in coffee and stuff like that. And so they lived in Puerto Rico, and that was the beginning of the Mennonites in Puerto Rico. But there’s apparently some …in Puerto Rico Mennonite church, but the FOR was not that. There was and I supposed there still is in Puerto Rico the Union church, and that’s an English speaking, multidenominational church, in general a Protestant church in English. And that’s obviously where the attending companies go. People are visiting there for a few years, that’s their church. That’s where most of the FOR was.

Interviewer: Okay, wow, that makes more sense.

González: Some of the people were professors at the universities …others weren’t a part of any conversation. I’ve heard no emphasis from others to have the FOR in Spanish.

Interviewer: So that makes a statement in and of itself that they really weren’t as connected strongly.

González: FOR…. They did work, but their connection was basically having to go to war. And they were concerned that too many Puerto Ricans were being sent to Vietnam. That’s clear. Don’t forget about that. But they were not a grass movement in Puerto Rico.

Interviewer: Right, because they couldn’t really grasp the culture dynamics.

González: Now when King came because who King was, then obviously you had mobs and you had the independentistas and all that and the press and all that. And all of that was obviously published in Spanish. It was in all the papers and all that, but the
FOR itself was not that connected to the fiber of the Island.\textsuperscript{126}

González made a very strong point that the FOR was disconnected in many ways from the people of Puerto Rico. This is intriguing in light of the fact that Mennonites working with the FOR invited King down to Puerto Rico in order to connect with the people. Moreover, there were internal conflicts present among the very people the Mennonites wanted to reach.

Nonviolent movements in the U.S developed in the U.S. in many ways, as seen with James Farmer in his development of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) as “an outgrowth of the Fellowship of Reconciliation.”\textsuperscript{127} James Farmer was the director of CORE from 1961 to 1966 but the rise of King helped the movement bring nonviolent resistance into awareness.\textsuperscript{128} Farmer promoted King’s centrality to the movement when he shared the following: “If we had plowed the ground for a decade and a half, the Montgomery movement had fertilized it and put the seed in, …No longer did we have to explain nonviolence to people. Thanks to Martin Luther King, it was a household word. CORE was a beneficiary of the emergence of King.”\textsuperscript{129}

King had a stance on nonviolence that was seen as very militant within the U.S. and the FOR’s decision to have him present seemed to indicate a level of disconnection with the revolutionary spirit that Puerto Ricans were already having. It was already the case that by 1963 King and SCLC were skilled at “fomenting political crises in Southern cities” and King knew that “in any confrontation, public sympathy usually gravitates to the victims...each campaign city became the stage for a morality play in which the nation could easily separate the heroes from

\textsuperscript{126} Justo González interview by Gabriel Greaves, Decatur, November 2015.
\textsuperscript{127} Colaiaco, \textit{Apostle of Militant Nonviolence}, 23.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid, 24.
\textsuperscript{129} James Farmer, \textit{Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement}, (New York, 1977), 18/.
the villains…The Children’s Crusade in Birmingham, the brutal beatings at the Slave Market in
St. Augustine and the violence on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma.”

The strategy for creating dramatic crisis in provoking bigots to react to peaceful
demonstration with violence was successful in getting the media to become aware of what Black
Americans went through and generating support from multiple parties by showing oneself to be
victims worthy of support. It was a very clever tactic that helped compel local and federal
authorities to intervene before things became even more destructive. However, the culture of
Puerto Rico was one where the strategy may have created the opposite effect since many of the
protestors had a national focus on violent revolution as a means of establishing independence.
González’s father experienced what it was like to advocate for violence and raised González
knowing what can happen when violence was incited within their culture. Thus, his background
seemed crucial in establishing a likelihood of connection with King since González could be a
bridge to King in knowing what things to be aware of.

González noted this further, showing some of the ways in which King’s militant
nonviolence was a very difficult concept to work out in light of what was occurring within
Puerto Rico’s independence movement – with the students leaning toward acts of terrorism being
a factor that González needed King to be aware of before speaking to them:

Interviewer: So, with Dr. Martin Luther King I know one question
I had was with the discussions you had going into it; actually let me rephrase my question. What were
some of the discussions that were happening at that time when Dr. King came to the island besides the
conversations you had with him one-on-one?

González: Well the first one on the island, the main discussion
had to do with the political status of the island. They
always do, but that time it was particularly virulent

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in that discussion. We wanted to be independent. We wanted to become a state. We wanted to remain as we were, and that issue has long dominated Puerto Rican politics, but in the 60s it was very much an issue. What Puerto Ricans were looking at was which of these options was just or better or whatever. There was a great deal of division in the church, where people were using one another: communists and reactionaries and this and that.

There was a great deal of misgiving, with U.S. government officials trying to make sure that people in Puerto Rico were not avoiding the draft. Sometimes it was in nasty ways: one day I was in the seminary – I was the dean of the seminary – and this guy came into my office and asked me for the records of one of my students. I said; I can’t do that. He said; no, you have to. No – I can’t do that. You have to. I said; well go get a court order and then we’ll talk about it. As he was leaving my office there were about 10 or 12 students there, and he looked back at me and laughed. He had a big smile and just as he got into the car he said; thank you for being so helpful and giving me all those records and he left. Those students had entrusted me and –

Interviewer: You wouldn’t have respect, like; wow – they set me up. They’re really trying to do some things.

González: Yes – and it was that kind of atmosphere, and then at the same time some of the more radical students were nearly at the border of promoting terrorism. The university was right across the street from the seminary and there were riots that went on. Mostly the concentration of people for independence was at the university, and so the university was always a center of comings and goings and all kinds of stuff like that.

Into the middle of that King comes and he didn’t deal with all of those issues. I think if he had, he would have been considered an intruder because you don’t come in from somebody else’s country and tell them what they are to do. All of what he was saying, though, had to do with that in many ways with his emphasis on non-violence at a place where both sides were trying to be more and more violet against the other. He mentioned that he didn’t talk about how this was in Puerto Rico; that was there. And there was
obviously injustice because part of the whole issue of the statehood has to do with questions of justice.\textsuperscript{131}

González noted that the atmosphere King entered into during his visit to Puerto was one of political unrest. He was asked to speak on issues of nonviolence in order to engage with people who had begun to lose hope in nonviolence leading to impactful decisions. González already had a commitment to a similar stance growing up with his father and this laid the groundwork for King and González to interact with one another as their conversations continued during their time together. Both King and González worked at seminaries when speaking on their mutual passions.

\begin{quote}
González: So we traveled everywhere, and spent hours talking about all kinds of stuff.

Interviewer: Wow. What things did you and MLK talk about – Dr. King?

González: See, there was a time when he was moving towards being concerned with other issues beyond the American issue. He was concerned about the poor – that was what killed him, he was in fights for the poor.

Interviewer: Wow – of all things.

González: But also with the war in Vietnam.

Interviewer: Right.

González: And we had quite a bit of conversation about the war in Vietnam. And partially, the experience that – a disproportionate number of the troops that were in Vietnam were racial minorities. There were entire regiments of Puerto Ricans. And also, there were a few African-Americans there, too.

Interviewer: I remember hearing something, also, about Puerto Rican. If I’m not mistaken, they still can’t vote; but they can be drafted.

González: Well, they can vote in Puerto Rico. But they cannot vote for the president.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{131} Justo González interview by Gabriel Greaves, Decatur, May 2016.
Interviewer: Yeah, okay. Wow.

González: And the reason for that is that the votes for the president are done by states. In theory, the only people who vote for the president are the electors. So when you vote, you’re not really voting for the president. You’re voting for somebody who’s going to represent you in the election. And each state has so many representatives. And Puerto Rico’s not a state, so they have no representatives. But they can be drafted – definitely, they can be drafted. Well, not now because there is no draft. But when there was a draft, they could be.

Interviewer: I know King talked about that, about how that was not something that was proper, with the draft in general.

González: Well, he was against the draft, period.

Interviewer: Right.

González: But you see, part of the problem is that when you eliminate the draft, then the military becomes a refuge for the poor.

Interviewer: Wow.

González: In other words, you see, there are more poor people volunteering for the army than middle class and rich people. If you know what to do, and you don’t need to worry about – “Where am I going to eat, or where am I going to live,” or something – you’ve got a job – why join the army unless it’s for very patriotic – but if you are jobless, you can’t go to school; one way you’re trying to hope to get some kind of a career is to join the military. And so once you go from the draft army – which was not quite fair because, as you know, people who could had the means to get out of it. But still, the draft army did not lead to the [inaudible] of the professional army that you get if it’s all-volunteer.

And I think he was, obviously, very much upset because of the way that the draft was being conducted. But I’m not too sure the volunteer army has really solved the issue because still, you have a disproportionate number of poor people. It’s a difficult career with an easy entrance. And if you are in a position where most of your doors are closed, then –

González: You’re surprised.
Interviewer: Then that’s the way to do it. So we talked a whole lot about that. And we talked about the Vietnam War and about the false assumptions behind it. And we talked about the relationship between poverty and race. The Puerto Rico situation is a bit different because in Puerto Rico, obviously, everybody’s Puerto Rican – they are not discriminated against as individuals, but the problem itself is poor. So you have a degree of poverty. And at that time, it wasn’t as bad because – at that time – you know, Puerto Rico goes up and down. Puerto Rico reflects the American economy, exaggerated.\(^{132}\) So if you come here and the U.S. is good, then Puerto Rico goes up. If you come here, and the U.S. is bad, then Puerto Rico really. So it wasn’t bad at that time, but there was still the sense that, somehow, Puerto Ricans have been drafted in disproportionate numbers – the same thing that was happening to us – African-Americans, blacks – back in the States. And so those were the subjects of discussion. And there were also, obviously, other reaches of discussion – of the relationship between the message of scripture, the Gospel, and civil rights and nonviolence. And is nonviolence just a strategy, or is it a principle? It was an interesting discussion.

Interviewer: What was interesting about that? What was the dynamic?

González: Well, in conversations, he would say that – for him – nonviolence is a principle. It is not something you do because that’s the way that you can get results. But you can decide to remain nonviolent because somehow that works.

Interviewer: Okay. It’s not just about being pragmatic, with, “Just help us out,” it’s about, “Because I believe this logically, that Jesus wants us to be nonviolent.”

González: That’s right.\(^{133}\)

González noted that King came to Puerto Rico having a very significant heart for racial minorities who were impoverished by the Vietnam War and disproportionately impacted by the

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\(^{132}\) Justo means mean “in an exaggerated way” when he said “exaggerated.”

\(^{133}\) Justo González interview by Gabriel Greaves, Decatur, November 2015.
war itself. King described it as “a white man's war, a black man's fight.” He was extremely angry at the ways that African American youth were disproportionately drafted into the war and placed on the front line.\textsuperscript{134} Since the majority of draftees were poor, undereducated, and blue-collar workers from urban centers, African Americans were deeply impacted by the Vietnam war.\textsuperscript{135} Moreover, the Vietnam War took place against the backdrop of the Civil Rights movement. Calico noted that King “was among the first national leaders to perceive that the Vietnam War would sabotage the Johnson Administration’s much heralded anti-poverty program” and he felt that the war “depleted economic resources that should be used to rebuild the ghettos and eradicate poverty in America.”\textsuperscript{136}

The Vietnam War also presented a challenge to King and caused him to take a more radical political stance. The war itself “diverted hundreds of young activists from the black freedom struggle to protests against the war.”\textsuperscript{137} Consequently, King began to focus on American foreign policy as a means of ‘supporting a new form of colonialism’ and claimed in a conference on Vietnam in February 1967 that “We must combine the fervor of the civil rights movement with the peace movement.”\textsuperscript{138} King continued to do rallies protesting the Vietnam War and connecting peace movements with the civil rights movement. However, the seeds of his anti-Vietnam stances were already present years before and it is not surprising to see that Justo and King would come together having common ground in activism for the poor during the war.

\textsuperscript{135} Bielakowski, \textit{Ethnic and Racial Minorities}
\textsuperscript{137} Colaico, \textit{Apostle of Militant Nonviolence}, 178.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid, 179.
Puerto Rico’s treatment of the poor was a great concern to González since the impoverished were seeking a means of economic mobility and the military offered it to them through war.

Students had been protesting mandatory service in the Vietnam War in Puerto Rico. Specifically, protesting against the draft and the war was connected to supporters of independence. Moreover, other Latinos had noted that the Vietnam War was taking away funds that were greatly needed within the community. One individual impacted by the war shared the following on the subject: “Every time we blow up a village in Vietnam we are spending enough money to build a new hospital or library here. While our bombers tear apart Vietnam, this war also tears apart our own nation - because there is not enough money to wage war and also deal with drugs, slums, medical care, and housing. The poor and unemployed, the Chicanos, Blacks and Puerto Ricans - these have paid the price of this war.” Ybarra notes that Chicanos opposing the war did so for a myriad of reasons while still being "united in the belief that the Vietnam War was being fought disproportionately by ethnic minorities and the poor." Both González and King were drawn together in mutual discussion because the war was impacting both of their ethnic groups. González noted this further in conversation when they talked on the Vietnam War’s impact on Puerto Ricans:

Interviewer: …. even when he came to Puerto Rico, I was curious, did you have any parallels in experiences that you guys had when you were talking?

González: I think one of the other things that was very obvious was the draft in the Vietnam War.

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Interviewer: Yeah, that was a really big issue. Because in Puerto Rico that really was a justice issue. It’s a very, very strong justice issue. The number of Puerto Ricans who were killed in the war in Vietnam were just astronomical when you compare it with the number of whites. It was not racism, it’s just the poor people.

Interviewer: Right. It was beyond the race.

González: They had not declined for the school. If you had money to go to school and get hired, well, if you don’t have money you can’t go to school. You have to be working. You’re working, you go to the draft. And then there’s the draft where they’re typically recruiting all people because that was the only way to live.

Interviewer: They’re survivalists, the economics.

González: Yeah, you had to go in the army because you need the talent. You need the money for your family. And that was there, and that was all happening also with America. So I think we talked a whole lot about the war, partially in the sense of it being unjust and being justified but also basically of the draft and the injustice in the US works way over there. I think that was the one I most remember.¹⁴²

Dr. González noted that Puerto Ricans went to the army for financial reasons, even though they were not taken care of overall. The way that Latinos were being exploited by the U.S. army is a mirror image of the ways that African Americans were being exploited in the U.S. This point of shared pain that González and King had is another way that strong connections occurred.

Dr. González and Dr. King also came together because of their focus on the Gospel of Jesus Christ since they were both devout Christians. They also connected in regards to their shared passion for discussing the relationship between the message of scripture, the Gospel, civil rights and nonviolence. Both King and González were involved with non-violent movements such as the FOR and the Mennonites who supported the FOR. Their focus on non-violence as a

¹⁴² Justo González interview by Gabriel Greaves, Decatur, November 2015.
principle binding Christians together to address the plight of the poor and the wars that served to impoverish them created common ground for them to mutually connect. Class was also another significant factor making King and González likely to connect, according to Dr. González when he noted their discussions on the issue of family:

Interviewer: One of my questions, like back in the day when you were talking with MLK, was family a big topic of conversation when it came to the work you guys were doing when it came to Puerto Rico?

González: Not really, no. I think he was talking more about justice and the social problem of the era. And when I think what’s happening was that he was beginning to see that without blaming the race, seeing the effect on the younger age, and that it’s a question of poverty and class. And I think in that sense he was ahead of the time because at his time there were very few black, rich republicans. Now they’re all over the place.

Interviewer: Right, they’re all over the place - pushing for Trump too.

González: So there is something that I think we have to be careful, but if you reduce everything to class. Then the rich, black or Latino farmer will slowly become someone that cannot be touched…. they are now like the Black Republicans that are above being addressed even when doing the same things as rich Whites…

Interviewer: Right. You can’t touch them because it’s about --

González: So I think a part of what was happening when he was there, you see in Puerto Rico the issue of class…There’s racism in Puerto Rico, but it’s not the kind of stuff I watch in the states. We didn’t have signs that said black and white. We didn’t have you can’t stay at this motel because you’re black. There never was that. There’s a social stratification and all that but much less. But the question of poverty in terms is very flagrant there. So I think what was going on when he was there - and that’s what we talked most about - was the relationship between class and race. And that it’s not one or the other nor is it the one trumps the other. The two are there and it’s just as much an issue. I didn’t know anything about
all the stories of murder and all that. Nobody knows that who killed him fully…it’s very obscure.

Interviewer: Right, about who actually did it.

González: Yeah, or why. But it seemed to me that he was very sharp when he was claiming justice on the basis of race. When he began talking race with the horror and with all the blacks who had been killed in Vietnam and that’s because they’re poor and they have to go there. That’s all they can get, and he began correcting. The things that he was preparing in Memphis was not a civil rights march in the sense of the others one before. It was a poor people march.

Interviewer: Right. Disturbing the class battles how you just turn them into class.

González: That’s right. And that, you see, should have brought the kind of people who are now supporting Trump and the white --

Interviewer: Who are under class.

González: The poor class who are now supporting Trump. And if those people ever joined the ethnic minorities, then you’re in trouble.\textsuperscript{143}

Martin and González both had a significant understanding on the ways that class and race were interconnected. They both chose to not view race and class as separate topics that never converged. This mutual understanding helped to cement their interactions and desire for mutual understanding.

**Question 2: The Parallels in their Religious Thoughts and Experiences**

One of the immediate parallels between González and King was their mutual status as political outsiders within Puerto Rico when they were together. González shared on how it was difficult for him during his time on the island and that he had to be very cautious on how he

\textsuperscript{143} Justo González interview by Gabriel Greaves, Decatur, November 2015.
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proceeded with conversations when he was translating for King. Likewise, King was also very cautious as to the topics he chose to engage in when it came to conversations. This can be seen in the following discussion from González:

Interviewer: So I’m curious, if I can ask this question. When you were translating for King and hearing him present at universities, did you feel you were impacted by the strategies that he was sharing, that you learned something personally? Or were you already living this out?

González: No, I wasn’t living this out. I was a very young guy with a recent PhD trying to figure out what I was going to teach. That’s basically what I was.

Interviewer: Wow, so this is all new also.

González: Yeah, I mean, I knew about him. I followed him. I admired him. I supported him, but I wasn’t engaged in the way that later happened. …. I’m originally from Cuba, and in the early years in Puerto Rico, I was expected to go back to Cuba.

Interviewer: There was a lot of issues with nationals from Cuba in Puerto Rico.

González: Yeah. There are several things there. One is I did not get involved with the Cuba issue because I could not agree with all the reactionary policies of those who were trying to work that, but I couldn’t agree with Castro either. In Puerto Rico being a Cuban, you had to be careful. You had to be quiet because if you (especially at that time) began making too much noise it’s like the reaction would be the same thing as an American in England telling Britain what to do. And they might not like it.

Interviewer: You start stirring the nest too much. It’s almost like, if I were to articulate it, saying, “You’re invited here as a guest, and we’re thankful for you being here. But make no mistake, you’re meant to be here quietly.”

González indicated that his status as a Cuban national was a very difficult position to maintain when he was on the island because anything said the wrong way could illicit the wrong reaction from other Puerto Rican nationals. Historically, the early 1960s saw a consistent

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144 Justo González interview by Gabriel Greaves, Decatur, May 2016.
tendency for nationalist intellectuals to reject Cuban immigrants or at least be ambivalent toward them since many considered Cubans “fierce enemies of Puerto Rico’s national sovereignty and dignity.”\footnote{Jorge Duany., \textit{The Puerto Rican nation on the move: identities on the island & in the United States} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 26.} Moreover, One Puerto Rican writer described Cuban exiles as "opportunistic and ungrateful parasites" and another indicated that they were "aggressive and without scruples in the struggle for their own survival."\footnote{José A. Cobas and Jorge Duany, “Cubans in Puerto Rico: Ethnic Economy and Cultural Identity” (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 41.} This dynamic with being an outsider is similar to King’s own experience as being caught in-between worlds as well. Sales noted that King’s work in Northern communities (where Malcolm X had influence) involved a distrust of “the violent impulses of the \textbf{Black} masses not only because of his Christian pacifist orientation but also because he feared they had violent predispositions.”\footnote{William W Sales, Jr. \textit{From Civil Rights to Black Liberation: Malcolm X and the Organization of Afro-American Unity} (Boston: South End Press, 1994), 46.} Sales also noted that the Black church and its ideals were much less central to black communities in the North than they were in the South – with Northern blacks exposed to a myriad of ideas that legitimatized rebellion for the oppressed and armed revolution.\footnote{Sales, \textit{From Civil Rights to Black Liberation}, 47.} Many Black separatists groups distrusted King’s ideas with nonviolence since they felt it legitimized subjection to hostile communities from the local and federal level and did not appreciate his close ties with others in the White community (i.e. Jews, Europeans of various expressions, etc.).\footnote{Friedman Murray, \textit{What went wrong?: the creation and collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance} (New York: Free Press, 1995), 241.} King came into Puerto Rico in a mindset of preparation for the things he chose to speak about. He wanted to be wise concerning how to speak on issues of nationalism that were going on, as indicated in the earlier part of the interview.
González: …. some of the more radical students were nearly at the border of promoting terrorism. The university was right across the street from the seminary and there were riots that went on. Mostly the concentration of people for independence was at the university, and so the university was always a center of comings and goings and all kinds of stuff like that. Into the middle of that King comes and he didn’t deal with all of those issues. I think if he had, he would have been considered an intruder because you don’t come in from somebody else’s country and tell them what they are to do. All of what he was saying, though, had to do with that in many ways with his emphasis on non-violence at a place where both sides were trying to be more and more violet against the other. He mentioned that he didn’t talk about how this was in Puerto Rico; that was there. And there was obviously injustice because part of the whole issue of the statehood has to do with questions of justice.¹⁵⁰

Both González and King had to contend with issues of distrust within the communities they were seeking to serve because of nationalistic and social issues and both of them had to learn how to navigate the situations that they found themselves in. Another parallel in their personal experiences was that they both had mentors who were devoted to Gandhi in his ideals for nonviolence. Additionally, both men grew up with childhood experiences that deeply impacted their views on racism:

González: And you see, that’s what’s powerful about nonviolence. As you know, Gandhi was one of his models. And what made the movement powerful was that they kept on pushing in a peaceful way, and beat them. They kept on pushing. And after a while, it became clear that they were morally superior to their oppressors. …

Interviewer: Wow. That’s pretty fascinating. And was that also your stance before you talked to Dr. King?

González: I think, generally – my father was a devotee of Gandhi.

¹⁵⁰ Justo González interview by Gabriel Greaves, Decatur, November 2015.
Interviewer: Oh, wow.

González: And for a while, in the suppression of a dictatorship – before the one that Castro had, back in the ‘30s – he got very involved in the revolution against that dictatorship, and gave up all his nonviolent principles. And then, when he saw what happened after the revolution, he decided he made a mistake.

Interviewer: So he saw the fruit of what happened with not choosing nonviolence.

González: In other words, when he chose violence, when they had to get rid of the government, they simply unleashed more violence when they wanted. And so then the other people had a reason to go back against him. And so the violence becomes a circle. And so he said, “I want to stay out of that.” And so, yes, we had that very, very fear with us. The other thing is, my folks, they were fairly middle-class. They were both teachers – but I mean, teachers were not paid a whole lot – my father was also a novelist, but it was sort of a sideline. And one of the ways that they got us to come to the States so we could see the rest of the world, was that my mother was teaching in a school of very well-to-do kids. And I got to go there. My mother and my brother got to go there, simply because of that. We couldn’t have afforded it. But anyhow, every summer they brought a bunch of kids from Cuba to camp in North Carolina. Several things happened. One thing, to me – it must have been the second trip or so – one of the kids who came was a bit more African-looking than the rest. And when we were getting onto the Greyhound bus, the driven told him he had to go to the back. And my father really said, “No. That can’t happen. If he goes to the back, then all of us are going.” And so – you know, 30 kids, the bus is going to be empty. So finally, you know – but it was making sense to me. And I remember when they were picking on him, I was like, “Well, what did he do?”

González: I had no sense that they were doing that to him because he was black. It was just, “What did he do?”

Interviewer: “Is he Hispanic?”

González: No, but I mean – “Did he kick the driver? Did he cuss him
out? Did he do something disrespectful?” I mean, why is the driver insisting that he’s got to go someplace else? And it was then, I think, that it began to dawn on me what was really going on here. And that was many years before I ever met King. I was only about 8 or 9. And then we came to summer camp. And there we saw blacks there, in North Carolina – only the cooks. And for some reason, I became friendly with the cooks. And one day, one of the counselors came and gave me a speech about why I shouldn’t do that.

Interviewer: Wow; about why you shouldn’t be friends with black kids –

González: With cooks, they were cooks – you know. When all the kids were all at their stations, I’d go in the kitchen and start with the cooks, and talk with them, and practice my English with them, and talk to them – kids, you know – talking with some grown-ups that were nice. And this guy came and talked to me about why I shouldn’t be doing that. So, you know, my experience was strange in that it was not what I lived with all the time – although you could say that there was also racism in Cuba, but it was much more hidden.

Interviewer: Wow. Would you mind explaining a little bit more about that – how was it hidden in Cuba? I know about Afro-Cubans. One of my good friends, he’s actually from Cuba. And he’s had that same experience, where he knows that, “I can talk about my background, I can talk about my parents and what their experiences were as Cubans. But people will automatically stereotype me as just being African-American because of how I look.”

González: Yeah. Well, I think several things: I think – when the slaves were emancipated in Cuba – and it was happening everywhere else – they were just let go; nothing else. So you have all the slaves who were working on farms and things like that, with other things that left in the air. And so they told them to move to the cities, and become the underclass. So there was, obviously, much less education, and much less resources and all of that, under the severance of slaves. Now, people who were of mixed blood, and somehow, their father
it usually was the father who was white – the father took care of them was not part of that ….

And then you had – after you begin to look at it, you begin to realize – you begin seeing that there are places where there are very few blacks – at grocery stores, very few salespeople were black. So there was a little bit of that – not as blatant as it was here (in the U.S).

Interviewer: But subtler, would you say?

González: More subtle, more hush-hush, more – you know...

Interviewer: I see what you’re saying.

González: And one thing that I remember, I remember – again, after all this experience in North Carolina, being back home – and somebody knocking at the door, and a cousin who lived with us came and said to my mother, “There’s a man at the door.” My mother went out. And after a while, somebody else knocked. And she came and said, “There’s a black man at the door.”

González noted that his father chose to become a disciple of Gandhi when he realized the fruits of nonviolence in revolutionary Cuba and the ways that violence consistently led to more violence. This is parallel to what King experienced since his mentor and spiritual father was Howard Thurman. Thurman was associates with King’s father Martin Luther King Sr. since he was a Morehouse graduate alongside King’s father. Thurman was a missionary to India and visited there in 1935. His work was very influential in aiding many of the leaders within the Civil Rights movement. King was attending Crozer Theological Seminary when he came across the writings of Thurman such as *Jesus and the Disinherited* – a book that King would later carry with him wherever he went and cite extensively in his views on radical Christian nonviolence.\footnote{Quinton Hosford Dixie and Peter R. Eisenstadt, *Visions of a better world: Howard Thurman’s pilgrimage to India and the origins of African American nonviolence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 190-194} 

\footnote{Justo González interview by Gabriel Greaves, Decatur, November 2015.}
was greatly admired by King and he was also the first African-American to meet Mahatma Gandhi in India when Thurman led an African-American delegation to South Asia in order to meet Gandhi with his wife at the Negro Delegation.\footnote{Dixie, \textit{Visions of a Better World}, 96.} There was an immense need for Gandhiansm to be translated into something Black Americans could use to their advantage. Gandhi’s other admirers included pivotal figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey.\footnote{Ibid.} Gandhi’s meeting with Thurman was very successful and Thurman was able to have extensive meetings with Gandhi on nonviolence and understanding what it was, consequently leading to his developing a form of it within African American culture that would later be adopted by Martin Luther King Jr.\footnote{Ibid, 104-105.}

King’s similarities of experiences with González are also evidenced in the fact that both men grew up middle class. King noted how he did not recall growing up in "crime-ridden slum district nor a refuge of the upper class."\footnote{Thomas F. Jackson, \textit{From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Struggle for Economic Justice} (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 28.} King was born in Atlanta into a middle-class family within Atlanta and his father was a Baptist pastor who fought for equality and equity in his community. Moreover, his father was a prominent businessman who worked with the NAACP and fought for teacher salaries to be equal between blacks and whites in Atlanta’s public schools.\footnote{James H. Cone, \textit{Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare} (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 20.} While 65 percent of African-Americans were on public relief in the neighborhood King grew up in, his family always had food and were well-dressed.\footnote{Cone, \textit{Martin & Malcolm}, 22-23.} King Sr. was very focused on things such as saving and self-help principles because of his own experiences as the son of a sharecropper.\footnote{Ibid.}
strong work ethic was present for King Sr. just as it was for González’s father as an educational specialist and teacher. Also, similarities between King and González can be seen in the fact that both men had significant childhood experiences that shaped their minds. González noted that he was eight or nine years old witnessing a young black male being asked to be removed from the bus he was on in North Carolina. González witnessed his own father stand up on behalf of the black male, although González was not fully aware of what was going on as a kid. Similar to King, Sr., who was very militant in his fight or equality of blacks in his community, González’s father was very adamant in his defense of the disenfranchised. Martin Luther King had a similar experience with his own father he experienced the “color bar” for the first time. One of King’s white friends was told he could no longer play with Martin (who was six years old at the time) because he was “colored” and it shocked King because he was not aware of the racial differences – of the race problem.” One distinct difference between González’s father and King’s is the fact that González’s father seemed less inclined toward violent actions after he adopted nonviolence as a lifestyle. King observed that his father “did not turn the other cheek” to aggressions of whites in the South and that he often struck back verbally when there were insults. Nonetheless, both men were deeply impacted by the examples that their fathers left for them to follow.

Another parallel between King and González is the fact that both men found themselves in situations where their views were not truly validated by the seminaries they attended. González shared this in the following statements on King after sharing on his experience with teaching:

160 Ibid.
161 Ibid.
162 Ibid.
González: I see what was happening was I was deciding that my future was not in Cuba, and I could not just keep on biding my time until I got back to Cuba. I had to begin doing something, working where I was, and that changes things quite a bit because then you have to begin saying, “How do I move in that direction?”

Interviewer: The thought process is “Now I need to be more vocal……I need to say something.” That’s fascinating. So what was the most enjoyable experience translating through all of that? What was the most enjoyable memories? You’re in the car. You’re driving down the road, talking. What was your most enjoyable conversations because you had shared experiences?

Both your fathers were preachers, and you both had a commitment, even though you were younger. How old were you at the time?

González: Well, let’s see. I would have been about 26 or so.

Interviewer: Twenty-six. So you were in your younger years. Like, you were like in the prime of your life. So that’s pretty epic too to realize, “Wow, he brought this shift.” The era itself, I would be curious, what was it that you were thinking in hindsight, “This is my most enjoyable moment?”

González: I can’t think of what the content was. I remember him sitting in the living room and trying to get him to drink Cuban coffee.

Interviewer: He was reluctant to that?

González: Yeah, he struggled. It was too strong for him, ha.

Interviewer: Oh, wow. That’s hilarious.

González: I’m trying to think what the conversation was about. I think one of the things that I remember was a conversation - a very brief conversation with him - about his experience of being a black man at BU and my experience of being a Latino man at Yale and that you were engaged and yet at the same time thinking “This is not my world.” In other words, that
somehow he felt supported by the faculty at BU but at the same time he saw all kinds of things happening that he chose not to fight it because it was not one he was going to fight there.

Interviewer: Because he was thinking it wasn’t my battle.

González: Yeah.

Interviewer: That’s kind of funny.

González: I was just remembering…. I was just at New York. I was doing a lecture there about a month ago, and I was remembering someone…. When I went to Yale, for instance, they said, “Well, you have to know two modern languages if you are English. You cannot be Spanish because the Spanish is not a valid language.” They say that to me now, I will kick them. At that point, I said, “That’s not right. I’ll do something else and take some more languages.” And I have the impression that that was something of what I heard because he was the one person who made me - I remember there beginning to reflect, and what I remember is a chat about being upset and beginning to reflect on the experience of being at a school where sometimes I thought (and I don’t want to put it too strongly) that the professors weren’t all that bright because they had no understanding of some of the things that I was talking about. And none of them said it straight.

Interviewer: Right. It’s almost like you seem to be educated beyond your level of intelligence.

González: Yeah, yeah, I mean, with things like that, that doesn’t work. I just said, “Well, that’s life.....” Now the feelings are different because the feelings now have roots here. And they are not going to stand for that. But in my time I was the only one there, and I think that he (King) had more people around because he knew about taking an effort to bring black people to a movement. But, still, it was a problem.\footnote{Justo González interview by Gabriel Greaves, Decatur, May 2016.}
González noted that he could identify with King in the ways that both of them had to be very strategic in the battles they chose to engage in when they were pursuing their PhDs. The covert forms of racism that González experienced at places such as Yale are reflected in the ways he noted that his very native tongue was not considered a valid language to express theology in. He chose to accept what the academic staff noted to him and continue to learn other languages in order to be acceptable. This is a mirror image of what King had to face as a Black male at Boston University. Both men had to choose to restrain themselves in order to advance in the academic environments that they were a part of. This was done in spite of the fact that both men felt they had ideas that the seminaries would never accept. Moreover, their restraint in expressing their ideas was based in feeling very strongly that they were far more advanced than the academic institutions they were a part of at the time. King’s time at Boston University was something he initially looked forward to because Boston never had Jim Crow laws and was a leading center for the abolition of slavery. King still experienced racism in the form of landlords denying him apartments because he was a black man and he avoided things (during the first year) such a racial politics during his time at BU. Others described Boston University's white academic staff as "benignly racist." Martin Luther King experienced many instances of racism at Boston University, similar to what he experienced at Crozer Seminary.

Additionally, King’s silence on the issue of racism involved being influenced by academic pressures to avoid the topic. Cone noted, “In six years of graduate study at Crozer and Boston, King never identified racism as a theological or philosophical problem or mentioned

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165 Ibid.
166 Peter J. Ling, *Martin Luther King, Jr.* (London: Routledge, 2002),
whether he recognized it in the student body and faculty…his academic success and popularity as a student seemed to blind him to the manifestations of sophisticated racism among liberal whites.”

Additionally, Major Jones (one of King’s Boston peers/friends in graduate school) noted that they mutually decided to not write dissertations on anything pertaining to racism since they felt it was wise to discuss topics within the field of philosophy and theology/ethics that had intellectual substance. Others have pointed out that King was not allowed to truly acknowledge that the black experience needed to be understood in White America since his focus was to fit in as much as possible and prove that a Black man could make it on the terms of White people. Both González and King had to contend with finding ways that they could assimilate while not being able to express their full thoughts until after they had more freedom to share on them.

**Question 3: Examining how did King and González mutually impact each other**

There are many ways in which King and González have had parallel backgrounds. However, King and González also had moments where they were deeply impacted by one another due to their experiences together. In example, González noted that one of the greatest things he was able to experience with King occurred in the midst of King listening. According to González:

González: …we talked a whole lot about the war, partially in the sense of it being unjust and being justified but also basically of the draft and the injustice in the US works way over there. I think that was the one I most remember.

Interviewer: Was he kind of surprised of some of the things you shared with him about how stuff was in Puerto Rico?

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González: I don’t know. Because he in many ways, although he was very outgoing when he was in front of the public, he was very quiet. At least if I had to guess, he was very quiet in the sense that he was listening all the time. He was listening. He wasn’t coming to give prescriptions. He was brought there by the associations – that also brought the question of the war. But his basic agenda was peace….

Interviewer: Right. That was the agenda.

González: Because we were going through the issue but it was against racism. His basic agenda was peace, and so that not really breaking his listening. So I don’t know if he felt that he was learning stuff he didn’t know. …now what interests me that when he came there he was very much involved with hope - with that part the mission.

Interviewer: So the Poor Man’s march started after coming down to Puerto Rico.

González: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Not certain if One thing affected the other…. but in other words – if I say I try to guess and I’m guessing…. but coming from Puerto Rico may have well meant for him that it was even clearer clear that race is not the real issue. Here you have a society (Puerto Rico) where racism is said to not exist – but you see the same things happening and it was not that way in the U.S.

Interviewer: That’s wild.

González: And still the see the injustice that was taking place after …especially the question of the war and all that, I think that real clicked as a part of a process that was going on in him…. but I am not certain fully.  

González noted that the timing of the events when King came down to Puerto Rico in February 17, 1962, is highly significant since the Poor Man’s campaign began afterward. Of course, the Poor Man’s Campaign was officially announced on December 4, 1967. The campaign itself demanded a broad coalition of “3000 poor blacks, whites, Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans and Indians – trained in nonviolence – to march on Washington from ten

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170 Justo González interview by Gabriel Greaves, Decatur, May 2016.
cities and five rural communities throughout the nation."\textsuperscript{172} The campaign was massive since it went from mobilizing one city at a time to mobilizing the nation for radical change – with race and class being crossed over on all levels.\textsuperscript{173} Colaico points out that the purpose of the campaign was to push forward education, healthcare, and federally funded job training programs alongside restructuring of ghettos and centering on encouraging Congress to give $12 billion for addressing the end of housing discrimination and income for the disabled.\textsuperscript{174} King’s focus had shifted solely from civil rights to issues of human rights and King noted directly that “we are engaged in the class struggle” since the entire movement called for a massive redistribution of wealth.\textsuperscript{175}

King noted “We intend to channelize the smoldering rage and frustration of Negro people into an effective militant and nonviolent movement of massive proportions. We will also look for the participation of the millions of non-Negro poor—Indians, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Appalachians, and others. And we shall welcome assistance from all Americans of good will.”\textsuperscript{176} Whereas he used to focus on addressing Jim Crow systems, King switched to focusing on the systems of class and inequality. It seems logical that the exposure to the economic realities within Puerto Rico played a significant role in influencing King to shift his focus to being aware of how class impacted what was present with race when it came to seeing what had occurred in Puerto Rico with the poor being hit the hardest with the Vietnam war and often recruited by the military to fight.

Another way that King was influenced by Gonzáles can be seen in what occurred in the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{175} José Yglesias, \textit{Dr King’s March on Washington}, 270. \\
\end{flushright}
midst of translating for him. Having the experience of translating for someone opened the door of understanding how communication in a specific oratory style does not always have the same level of ease as you would expect in another setting. According to González:

González: Yeah, …But the way King spoke, it was like a waterfall, and I literally had to pull his jacket. I pulled his jacket, “Will you shut up? I need to translate.”

Interviewer: Right, it’s like it’s too much, man, too much. Wow and that story’s real.

González: In some ways he was …. That’s what I remember most more than anything else. I remember he was to go consciously. He wasn’t used to being translated. He had that rhythm, that cadence.

Interviewer: Very epic.

González: Just imagine if when he was talking about “I Have a Dream,” he would have to stop every time I said, “I Have a Dream.” And then he had to stop again.

Interviewer: Right, and he couldn’t complete it.

González: It sort of broke his cadence.

Interviewer: That’s a pretty unique experience to have just connecting on that level just practically. It’s like Senator John Lewis said. He actually had it where he talked to MLK one time. He told MLK, “Here’s the speech that we’re going to have. Don’t talk about this ‘I Have a Dream,’ stuff. Don’t go preaching like you do in the Baptist church. We have to present ourselves professionally.” And so he said the story that when King came up to the podium in the Washington and said what he did, he thought, “This is going good. It’s going according to plan,” and then King came out saying, “I have a dream.” He was like, “Oh, no,” because he didn’t want to have a church feel to it. He was like we’re trying to present our agenda, but that had much more of an impact.

González: That’s right.

Interviewer: It’s just crazy thinking like from you translating is a whole different dynamic. There was this communication there too.
González: It’s a whole different experience. If somebody says the same thing, they can translate even if it went very, very quickly, but he had his own rhythm. And it was difficult to try to get him into a rhythm to translate because you’ve heard his speeches, haven’t you?177

González pointed out the ways that King had to learn how to be translated when it came to his speaking style being difficult to keep up with. It was a learning experience for King in having to understand how to ensure that his cadence shifted in such a way as to allow for others to understand the full impact of his words. González noted this when pointing out King’s gratitude for the experience:

González: He was giving a lecture about justice and civil rights and so on in his very unique style, which was very difficult to translate. I remember standing next to him and pulling his coat because he would start these cascading sentences.

I would have to say “hey, a minute – where are you?” It was difficult not to forget what he had said at the beginning by the time he got to the end of the sentence, so I had to stop him. It was a good experience though; it was a very, very good experience.

Interviewer: Wow – and what did he say about his conversations with you at the end of it all, because that must have been an experience?

González: I don’t know. I don’t remember. I think basically he said that it was a good experience and thank you, but I don’t think that we talked a whole lot about what it meant to him.178

King noted that it was a good experience and expressed appreciation for working with González since González was crucial in ensuring that others could understand where King was
coming from in his lectures. Something as simple as learning how to slow down in communication or speak cross-culturally is highly significant because it shapes a person in being able to communicate across cultures in ways that will help people embrace the full impact of what they are centered on.

Fig. 3 – Photo of Dr. Martin Luther King and Dr. Justo L. González – from email dialogue between González and Gabriel A. Greaves on May 13, 2016.

González pointed out that King influenced him because his coming to Puerto Rico was at a crucial point in his life when he was considering whether or not to advocate for liberation theology. King’s presence helped to encourage González into developing more of his own stances and understanding who he was. González noted this in the following exchange:
Interviewer: Here’s my other question, I guess, with that. In that experience you said, if I remember you correctly, he reflected before how he impacted even you before you started getting focused on liberation theology.

González: Yeah, yeah. In that way, yes.

Interviewer: That was like a couple years afterwards, right?

González: Yeah…. But you see what was happening was I was deciding that my future was not in Cuba, and I could not just keep on biding my time until I got back to Cuba. I had to begin doing something/working where I was, and that changes things quite a bit because then you have to begin saying, “How do I move in that direction?”

González understood that the development of his thought was hindered by uncertainty surrounding his status in Puerto Rico and his uncertainty concerning what he wanted to do in life. Without King being present to dialogue with, González would have possibly remained undecided in how he wanted to approach his future. The presence of King and what he signified as a fellow theologian and scholar was helpful to González and illustrates what can happen when ideas are generated from exposure to others in different spheres of influence.

**Conclusion and Future considerations**

I hope that this study has helped to show a mutual shaping of thought occurred between González and King at multiple points. The research done here is by no means conclusive, as there are many other factors to consider. González noted that King was not present by himself when he came to Puerto Rico. He had other individuals there who were his close friends, such as C.T. Vivian. Interviewing Vivian may help to illustrate further ideas that have not been considered. One concern to review for the future would be asking Vivian what his thoughts were

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179 Justo González interview by Gabriel Greaves, Decatur, May 2016.
concerning the Poor Man’s campaign and if anything was discussed during his time with González and King in Puerto Rico. Another concern that may need to be considered is examining other friends of MLK in order to see if González was ever referenced by King. This would help to further solidify the impact that González had on King when it came to his work with Latino communities beyond that. Regardless of what may be discovered in the future, what is certain within this paper is that González and King had a mutually enjoyable experience of learning together and crossing bridges that many Black and Brown people have never been able to cross.
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