The Theoretical Dynamics of the Blues Epistemology

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> "Many of the valiant efforts of African Americans for an alternative path of development before, during, and after the civil rights movement of the 1960s were defeated in a consciously organized manner. Yet, the meaning of this experience to future reform efforts is critical…working class African Americans in the Delta and in the Black Belt South have constructed a system of explanation that informs their daily life, organizational activity, culture, religion, and social movements. They have created their own ethno-regional epistemology. Like other traditions of interpretation, it is not a monolith; there are branches, roots, a trunk. This central tradition is referred to in this work as the blues epistemology." (Woods 2017, 16)

This paper aims to map out the elements of the central concept from Clyde Woods' *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*: the blues epistemology. I define the blues epistemology and related concepts such as the blues bloc and planter bloc with reference to Antonio Gramsci's regional bloc. I attempt to clarify the blues epistemology by analogy to other important epistemological interventions in works on race. I quickly survey some other writings on the blues as a resource for Black American survival and then as a mode of social consciousness-raising. The paper demonstrates how Woods' blues epistemology adds on to this literature on the blues. The paper concludes with a discussion of how regional blocs in Woodsian-Gramscian terms may enhance the racial orders concept in American political development.

Clyde Woods posits the blues epistemology as the tradition of development theory and practice that resists the dominant plantation relations structuring political economic development in the South. Woods introduced the blues epistemology after surveying literature on plantation economy vis-a-vis its suitability for capitalism. The plantation economy of the South is not destroyed or overthrown by the "industry-minded" New South merchant. Instead, the New South capitalist is allied with the holdovers of the planter class. Woods attends to understandings of South slavery not as feudal or too little capitalist but aligned with capitalistic drives. This

alternative tradition is the blues epistemology of the Black working class. Clyde Woods draws attention to the blues as an alternative tradition of political and economic development to learn from the many defeated pushes from working-class Americans as a resource for future reform efforts. The purpose of the blues was an affirmation of life and humanity for working class Black Americans in a repressive environment that deemed them subhuman and did not present an alternative for seeing themselves otherwise. The blues epistemology is a way to describe a mode of thinking, basic ethic of survival and subsistence, and a set of behaviors within a culture which support Black working-class visions for social democracy.

The blues epistemology is "a self-referential explanatory tradition among working-class African Americans in which development debates occur" (Ibid., 25). It is a longstanding tradition of explanation of reality that emerged in the realm of culture and posed itself as a direct resistance to the antebellum plantation regime (Ibid.). The practices of censorship and paternalistic misrepresentations of Black cultural formations gave the blues the discursive space to emerge and become a durable tradition of explanation for working class Black people. Censorship produced conditions for creating communication that could only be understood by the initiated and benefited from misinterpretation and stigmatization of white people and the upper-middle class moralists. The blues formed to critique the planter regime whilst escaping decipherability by dominant society as it organized against it. The blues were not just the psalms of sufferers singing to salve against their oppression in the Mississippi Delta and broader Black Belt South. It sought to “instill pride in a people facing daily migration, as well as challenging folk wisdom, descriptions of life and labor, travelogues, hoodoo, and critiques of individuals and institutions” (Ibid., 17). The blues carried and disseminated wisdom about landlords, Parchman State Prison, levee breaks, the poorhouse, domestic violence, and more. Its purpose was to affirm

the lives and humanity of Black Americans through a set of cultural institutions and practices that reflect them and their ways of understanding the world.

The blues tradition informed the lives, thoughts and actions, critique, and celebration where the social sciences were long blind to its influence as an ethno-regional epistemology. "The blues and its extensions offer an unapologetic celebration of life, resistance, spiritual affirmation, community, social and humanity, and the highest levels, the "upper rooms," of African American culture and philosophy" (Ibid., 20). It ought not be understated how the blues acts as a source of sustenance for the quotidian needs of Black Americans and is a source for writers, philosophers, and musicians alike to cultivate Black American toward revolutionary democratic ends. The blues epistemology offers us a frame for interpreting a multifaceted Black politics deeply informed by the blues tradition. In his "Blueprint for Negro Writing," Richard Wright made similar arguments critiquing African American literature for turning away finding inspiration in Black folk tradition such as the blues, Black spirituals, etc. In this 1937 call for artist to be a revolutionary vanguard, he urged writers to draw on the blues for social commentary and explanation because the masses of Black people understood their world through cultural productions like the blues. Writers could have created a more sophisticated social nature of artistic communication between the masses and themselves.

Similarly, Albert Murray also describes the blues or blues idiom lyric specifically in terms more considered with the subsistence of the Black American. He refers to blues idiom lyric to refer to the lyrics or song opposed to blues dance with which he is also very concerned. he blues speaks to some fundamental understand of having experienced injustice and it offer an interpretive mode for making it through unjust conditions. In *The Hero and the Blues* (1973), Murray connects the blues idiom to the disillusionment or detachment within writers, most of

whom he claims experience injustice and are writers in part due to that. Murray describes the blues as having a sort of realism in that "the whole point of the blues idiom lyrics is to state the facts of life…" yet it is a device representative of a continuous resistance to oppressive conditions. The blues idiom lyric is a "device for making the best out of a bad situation…in its orientation to continuity in the face of adversity and absurdity--the blues idiom lyric is entirely consistent with folklore and wisdom underlying the endurance of the black American" (Murray 1973, 36-7). If the blues idiom resonates with writers in general who experience some injustice in life, it would have been a special disservice for Black writers who may have had cultural connection to the blues to lose sight of it as Richard Wright was describing.

Clyde Woods provides new terms for discussing Black social development and the blues as a critical geographer. Woods has a discussion of “relational regions and regional blocs” that he claims provides a theory of social change that can be incorporated in the blues epistemology (Ibid., 27). The blues bloc and planter bloc are derived from his application of these concepts. The bloc is a Marxist—particularly Gramscian—term for describing an alliance of social groups which contest for hegemony (“control over resource and over the ideological and distributive institutions governing their allocation”) within a region (Woods 2017, 26). A bloc is a term to describe an alliance of social groups in an antagonistic relationship between a dominant bloc and its resistant alternative. In Antonio Gramsci’s “Notes on Italian History” from his *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, a bloc in the political and historic field is not stagnant but subject to change and replacement for the aligned groups within a bloc. Gramsci uses this term to characterize the complex city-countryside relationship and the political program Northern “urban bloc” in Italy which gained the North hegemony over the South (94-95). He considers other

surrounding social forces in this dynamic like the demobilization of peasant masses by landowner action parties in Sicily and Sardinia in Southern Italy (97-98).

In "The Study of Philosophy" from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, he describes the more ideological or practical-philosophical elements of a bloc. In this writing overall, Gramsci develops ideas about a "philosophy of praxis" which is a theoretical consciousness informs his political or 'practical' activity and unites one "with his fellow-worker in the practical transformation of the real world" (333). When it is successful a philosophy or conception of the world is seamless between intellectual and 'simple' classes. Gramsci describes a fundamental problem facing any philosophy or conception of the world that produces practical activity like a cultural movement, faith, or religion that is resonant with Richard Wright's critique of Black writers and their neglect of the blues. Gramsci emphasize that "[t]his problem is preserving the ideological unity of the entire *social bloc* which that ideology serves to cement and to unify" (328). By which he means, the strength of a philosophy, religion, etc. is related to their institution's ability to ensure there are not two separate religions for the "intellectuals" and the "simple souls" (328). In the case of the blues for Wright, the blues is a philosophy of the 'simple' mass which the intellectual need not forget to rely upon.

The blues epistemology operates as an ideological unity or in Woods terms "a sense of collective self and a tectonic footing from which to oppose and dismantle" Americans traditions constructed from Black exploitation and denigration (Woods 2017, 29). It aims to dismantle the expropriative American traditions and institutions and "create a new regional reality based on cultural freedom and economic social justice" (25). It is awfully clear how much Clyde Woods wrote with Gramsci here the practical transformation of the real world and new regional reality are similar goals. The blues bloc and planter bloc are in competition for distributive and

ideological resources within the region. The blues is a primary instrument for resisting the planter ideological hegemony.

The plantation bloc in *Development Arrested* had a particularly strong hold on ideological and distributive resources in the South. As Wood notes, the plantation bloc "can generally be viewed as the Southern ethno-class engaged in a monopolization of resources, power, historical explanation and social action" (Woods 2017, 29) The planter class was intent especially on constructing Black American as lesser to reflect their place in ethno-class hierarchy therefore easier to exploit while the planter was the heroic master atop the hierarchy or what Woods calls a "plantation classificatory grid". The blues epistemology proposes its own "self-referential classification grid" rearranging values and modes of social explanation to counter and disrupt the planter ideology with democratic visions dismantle exploitative institutions as well (Ibid.).

There is an exemplary episode of the ideological contest between the Delta planter epistemology and the blues epistemology in a few developments in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. The planter epistemology transitions from existing in fiction and history into the social sciences. Early sociologists such as Alfred Holt Stone and Howard Odum both respectively spread myths of racial war as a matter of racial physics and misrepresentations of the blues and Black Americans. Stone was the son of a classics professor who later became a Confederate captain and Delta politician (Woods 2017, 97). Stone himself owned a large plantation, attended the Mississippi constitution convention in 1890 and voted against Black enfranchisement. Later in life, Stone served as vice president of the Delta Council, the dominant planter organization (Ibid). In Stone's essay "Is Race Friction Between Blacks and Whites in the United States Growing and Inevitable?" he argues that the proximity of raced populations one another will inevitably lead to competition, racial conflict and race war. Howard Odum's

scholarship started an entire school of blues criticism intent on rendering the blues as primitive and studying the music form as an anthropological artifact of early human society. Odum was influential in suggesting that blues only dealt with loneliness and melancholy, romantic relationships and self-pity, attempting to narrow the broader more political range of topics in the blues (Ibid, 101). The blues epistemology ideologically resisted through its popularity and cultural hegemony being established over American airwaves. Recorded blues and jazz was a significant and enduring mobilization for Black American consciousness and was "permanently linked" to new communication technology such as the phonograph. Radio and recording technologies opened access to making popular music. The recording companies developed after the 1909 Copyright Act, changing how music is sold (Green 2007, 54-5). Recording companies such as Okeh, Paramount, and Brunswick/Vocalion were successful at selling blues and jazz (Woods 2017, 115). The recording success of early Delta blues musicians in Chicago like Big Bill Broonzy, Charley Patton and Son House revealed a market for their rural blues in the North and South, rural and urban.

In the South just prior to the first wave of Great Migration, the blues bloc mobilized against white supremacist violence and planter associations' multipronged programs to control means of agricultural production and produce ideologies conducive for keeping Black laborers in the Delta, namely "the myth of Black progress and a companion myth of Black degeneracy" (Woods 2017, 80). To prevent emigration to Kansas, these myths picture the Mississippi Delta as a utopia and claim that the desire to emigrate was caused by Black Americans' "religious mania" believing they were the people of Canaan not from "the elimination of a whole generation of leaders, from massacres, rape, forced family separation, disenfranchisement and debt peonage"

(Ibid., 81). Planter hegemony was achieved through economic and ideological moves as such. In the North, the blues bloc faced the regional allies of the planter bloc.

It is important to note here that the blues bloc does not collapse Black politics into one unitary body under the blues. It ought to be assumed that the blues bloc can contain disparate interests across gender, and class, and other political commitments or identities. One can assume the blues bloc consists of Black working-class southerners or those with Southern roots and their coalitional allies. Within this, there is a lot of space for contestation and need to craft alliances for shared goals reaching toward a more democratic society. The blues bloc is juxtaposed against the planter bloc whose ideologies and policies attempt to classify, define, and institutionalize the marginalization of the Black working-class members of the blues bloc.

Epistemology in Blues Epistemology

It is noteworthy that the blues epistemology as a concept begins as an ontology. At the behest of his colleague Edward Soja, Woods opted for a 'Blues epistemology' for fears that seeing the blues ontologically "would be too abstract and too easily divorced from concrete empirical interpretations" (Soja 2012, 3). Soja notes that later in his career Clyde would turn back to a notion of a blues ontology (Ibid.). Woods' readers might note some conceptual slippage and some holdover with the blues ontology when he defines the blues epistemology: "The ontology or worldview, embedded in" Black American communities in the rural South and their diaspora which comprise the blues bloc (Woods 2017, 29). Worldview might be closer conceptually to an epistemology as Woods see it, a theory of knowledge, social explanation, and social change. An ontology would shape Black American identity, a collective self, and go even further to condition one's sense of being and how one experiences the world phenomenologically. Woods is right to favor a blues ontology because the blues is tied to being, apprehension of sense data, and how reality is experienced itself.

I, however, will not subject a blues ontology to further scrutiny in this paper for reasons of focusing on the concrete empirical features of the blues *epistemology*. In doing so, I refer to other political scientists and one political theorist's uses of epistemology in more practical, empirical valences. First, I will describe Charles Mills' inverted epistemology or epistemology of ignorance as it relates the planter bloc's misapprehension and misrepresentations of the blues and the blues bloc. Secondly, I look to the interventions of Vesla Weaver and her collaborators into political science research on citizens' general lack of political knowledge with their observations of the political knowledge of race-class subjugated people in overpoliced communities.

Charles Mills' epistemology of ignorance is another relevant use of an epistemology that may be helpful for framing the willful misinterpretation of the blues and the production of myths to control Black populations. Mills writes of "…white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion and self-deception on matters related to race" are required cognitive and psychological functions of the Racial Contract which "requires a certain schedule of structured blindness and opacities in order to establish and maintain the white polity" (Mills 1997, 19). White misunderstanding and misrepresentation are not just an epistemological prescription but it is also an outcome of later phases of this Racial Contract. The "agreement to misinterpret the world" is agreed and later tacitly accepted to think, but the inverted epistemology requires antagonistic campaigns of racial myth and repression of countermobilizations (Ibid., 18). How is it the structured blindness and white misrepresentation reproduced and relitigated to maintain the white polity over time? What does it look like? It may look like planter epistemology in early sociology and the Mississippi Delta planter campaigns to deny mass racial violence and terror and to prevent emigration out of the Delta. The attempt to dismiss the fever to emigration as some religious mania is another episode of the Racial Contract's prescription to evade and deny

historical white atrocities against nonwhites from the slow genocide of African slavery to random killings of Native Americans and Bushmen in South Africa to high death tolls from forced labor in Belgian Congo (Ibid., 99).

The Racial Contract is useful for demonstrating the long production of racist society and dominant political/moral ideas about race created a present where racial realities were made invisible and acceptable to whites (Mills 1997, 92). Mills ascribes the epistemology of ignorance as a cognitive and psychological thoughtlessness that one accepts as part of 'becoming White,' but he shows that this cognitive given is (Ibid., 18-19, 93). It is "prescribed by the terms of Racial Contract" and not "accidental" (Ibid., 19). In the arguments for the historical nature of the Racial Contract, we observe a two-tier moral code and two-tiered political convent for sets of laws/rights per the contract for whites and nonwhite respectively. The Racial Contract takes the limit of an ideal 'social contract' to white subjects or persons for granted while nonwhites are objects or subpersons to be manipulated and exploited. It is within this struggle to resist ontological inferiority and denial of personhood that the blues' affirmation of Black humanity and personhood is so powerful (Ibid., 118). The blues allows for a challenge against the designation of subperson.

Where the Racial Contract is primarily a historical investigation into how the inverted epistemology and Racial Contract become invisible for white people, the methodological intervention of the following political scientist looks to the knowledges of racialized people as the blues epistemology sets out to do. Vesla Weaver, Gwen Prowse and others have made epistemological interventions in their scholarship on highly policed communities derived political knowledges and a particular relationship to state institutions via their experience with police encounters (Weaver, et al. 2019; Prowse, et al. 2020; Chaudhary et al. 2020). These

scholars propose a different approach to researching political knowledges in general by relying on unmediated dialogues between everyday citizens who experience concentrated police encounters. They collected firsthand conversations from participants in their Portals allows for conversations about policing and incarceration in highly police communities. People use their knowledge of policing to inform others and help them "avoid, manage and withdraw police encounters" much like how Clyde Woods' blues bloc trade folk wisdom verbally and lyrically to survive and avoid racial violence (Weaver et al. 2019, 1163). One participant from Baltimore noted that the police have official policies but really operate as a legal gang (Weaver et al. 2019). Another participant, a 69-year-old Black man from LA remarked "it's not a justice system. It's a justice system to the point, it's just for us—to go through. *It's nothing for us to get anything out of, but for us to go through*" (authors' emphasis added) (Ibid., 1164). Another version of this statement is used by Mills to summarize the Racial Contract "when white people say "Justice, they mean "Just us" (Mills 1997, xiv, 110).

Some of the intricacies of this "Just Us" statement are confirmed by how race class subjugated people experience the state and policing. Soss and Weaver (2017) argue for an understanding of the state as two faces; the first face of the state is a liberal democratic one providing social provision while the second is one of repression, surveillance, and discipline. They make this claim while noting that the welfare state and punitive state have long been collaboratory. Prowse et al. (2020) reveal through participant conversations that police exhibit a "distorted responsiveness" where they are at times hypervigilant to police community members and other times negligent to community needs. The police would be extremely "attentive to minor infractions, but this energy and attentive would not translate when people were at risk of violence or had already endured violence" (Prowse et al. 2020, 1435-36). People learn to protect

one another from this uneven relation with police and the state in this tradition of survival and subsistence that characterize habits learned from a blues epistemology. The conversational and communal maintenance of habits for communal strength is a similar knowledge system that the blues disseminated in music and the cultural hubs for the blues.

Blues as Social Consciousness-Raising and Protest

Richard Wright (1937) and Angela Y. Davis (1998) both write about the blues in terms of how integral it was for social consciousness of working-class Black Americans. Wright describes the 'petty bourgeois of oppressed class pining after the virtues and sociopolitical habits of the (white) bourgeoisie as handicapped by their "false ambition and property" (Wright 1937, 404). Whereas the Black workers lacking said handicaps, "they have access to a wide social vision and deep social consciousness" (Ibid.). The source of this wide social vision and deep social consciousness was this expansive tradition of Black American folklore "moulded out of rigorous and inhuman conditions of life that the Negro achieve his most indigenous and complete expression. Blues, spirituals, and folk tales recounted from mouth to mouth" were tried and true channels of "racial wisdom" that Wright could not allow Black writers to go on ignoring.

For Angela Davis, the recorded performances of Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday revealed a rich terrain for examining a historical feminist consciousness that reflected the lives of working-class black communities (Davis 1998, xv). She argues strongly for women's blues as a working-class form that anticipates the common Black feminist parlance of "the politicization of the 'personal' through dynamics of 'consciousness raising'" (Ibid., 42). Namely, there was consciousness raising in women's blues through public sharing the collective experience of having disloyal partners and domestic violence. The collective experience of disloyal partners is express in Bessie Smith's "I Used to Be Your Sweet Mama:" "All you

women understand / What it is to be in love with a two-time man" (Ibid., 64). One instance regarding domestic violence is Ma Rainey's "Black Eye Blues." Rainey's song named the problem of male violence where society had kept it hidden and beyond public or political scrutiny (Ibid., 29-30).

Davis's *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* is not only about the songs in relation to social consciousness. She also speaks to songs themselves being social protest of the individual artist and collective sentiments among Black Americans. Among the examples, Bessie Smith's Poor Man's Blues criticizes the poor man has his tough times and fights in wars for U.S.A while the rich man lives in his mansion; and Ma Rainey's Chain Gang Blues highlight forced labor as punishment for incarcerated people. Most notably Davis cites Bessie Smith's "Backwater Blues," a song about the Mississippi River Flood of 1927, as a social protest government neglect, relief effort soldiers killing Black men and "outraging" women and girls (Davis 1998, 110-11). Clyde Woods also cites the Mississippi River flood of 1927 as one of the two events (alongside the Elaine Massacre of 1919) "that drastically deepened the conflict between the plantation bloc and the blues bloc" (Woods 2017, 117-18).

Woods reads a cultural phenomenon in the blues through a sort of Marxist critical geography. Previous writings on blues by Richard Wright and Angela Davis talk about the blues in Marxist terms of social consciousness for Black Americans. Blues epistemology is a more comprehensive and organizing concept for Black Americans in the MS Delta and beyond. The blues is more than an invaluable vector of social consciousness raising. Wright and Davis help us understand better how the blues is fundamental in shaping social consciousness as precursor to social protest and political action. Davis demonstrates how recorded blues performances were social protest for artist and the Black mass alike, but she does not go as far as to formulate the

blues as endemic to Black political formations within a region or a more systematic epistemological frame for how to do politics.

I want to be clear that I am not suggesting that consciousness is not enough nor is consciousness raising some flawed political end. Consciousness is necessary, and the blues epistemology reveals another dimension of analysis after consciousness raising. Woods' blues epistemology helps us see how these ways of thinking about politics move to prescribing solutions for political problems and organized action. It goes a step further as the mode through which the Black socius comes to its consciousness and frame how Black political development can be understood over time (Woods does geography great but not so much how this is an organizing and durable concept over time.) The blues is a bulwark against any false consciousness. To the question of how Black resistance is sustained across time, different geography (rural and urban) and regions (North, South) from the Mississippi Delta to Chicago, I propose the blues epistemology as one answer. Black resistance ought not be taken as a given reality or inevitable eventuality of oppressed people responding to repression. Black resistance is sustained in the face of immense and violent oppression through the revitalizing and contingent political mobilization of the blues bloc.

The Blues Epistemology and Racial Orders

Karren Orren and Stephen Skowronek (2004) refer to the layering of "new governing instruments" atop old institutional arrangements. Robert Lieberman (2002), drawing on Orren and Skowronek and institutionalist scholarship following, offers a 'multiple orders' approach where understanding frictions and incomplete reforms is important to tracing change in ideological and institutional patterns over time. Rogers Smith and Desmond King's (2005) contribution of racial institutionalist orders was significant as a framework for understanding the

"racial concepts, commitments, and aims in order to help bind together their coalitions and structure governing institutions that express and serve the interests of their architects" (75). Through King and Smith, we can more systematically discuss racial politics within reference to racial coalitions and state action. They provide a white supremacist or anti-transformative racial order against an egalitarian one. Even in moments where the white supremacist order is dominant like much of the period in question for my dissertation, there is still resistance however weak or discordant. Also, the actors in either order have varying interests for supporting white supremacy versus transformation. Black racial institutionalist orders are often understood as a subcategory in the egalitarian order as figured by Smith And King. Black political orders, however, are unique in how they operate. This becomes particularly clear when we attend to class and cultural differences within Black American communities. The blues is one politico-cultural basis for the constancy of Black working-class resistance in an egalitarian political order. The blues is a Black cultural production that is an ideological resource for Black Americans even beyond the music form known as blues The blues racial order and the habits, places of gathering, and epistemologies of the blues bloc are distinct from those of the Black elite classes.

Smith and King offered racial orders to fill a gap in the "institutional orders" already operative in their contemporary American political development literature. They note that little of that existing work addressed race because "the impetus to grasp the roles of 'states' and 'institutions' came from dissatisfaction with analyzing politics in Marxist 'class' or liberal 'group' terms" (Smith and King 2005, 79) So, why bring a Marxian term of a bloc for a specific cultural regional raced group back to it? How does the planter-blues bloc enhance Rogers and Smith's racial orders, specifically egalitarian (Black) racial order therein?

Smith and King are incredibly careful in their description of internal contradictions and conflicts within racial orders. It is not a simple as unity within a hegemonic white supremacist order nor for the resistant egalitarian order. Smith and King do not extensively write in their piece about the antagonistic conflict between the orders as much as their rise and fall across time. The Gramscian bloc does not only avail itself to racial group terms or class conflict but coalition arrangements and strategy necessary to win the tools of the state. Indeed, this nexus of race and class subjugation for Black American populations calls for some conversation between institutionalism and the likes of Gramsci and Woods. Race and class interact in unique ways in the United States from the emergence of early industrial centers in the beginning of the twentieth century to present in ways that the national level analysis of Smith and King do not full include in their foundational paper.

Onboarding Clyde Woods' blues epistemology into our analysis of political regimes, completing political orders, and the political contestation for control our layered governing institutions, we can better understand conflict between blocs. The planter bloc and blues bloc relation might be like how we understand institutional orders in American political development. The political conflict and long durée of white supremacist and egalitarian political orders building policy programs and institutional arrangements to support their ends. It may be that the bloc and conflicts between "hegemonic forces" or differing political consciousnesses could enhance how Smith and King conceptualize the American state as comprised of competing racial orders with conflicting ideology. In term of level of analysis, the racial orders concept addresses the national level of racial ordering while the blues epistemology is a regional and emerges in the South. Rogers and Smith's concept combined with Woods may allow for a more flexibility to

theorize about each concept apply to a new context as the blues expands across the nation and into different geographies like urban centers.

The blues epistemology is multifarious in its theoretical dimensions and imports into the discipline of political science. It builds on the foundations of blues schools of literature and blues criticism from theorists like Richard Wright, Angela Davis and Albert Murray. This paper provides an intellectual topography for the blues epistemology. Its discordant multi-section organization attempts to attend to the multiple schools of thought that Woods draws on. The various sections are also emblematic of the various inroads the blues epistemology has for political theory and political science. The blues epistemology is an overlooked tradition for democratic habits and modes of actions in response to white supremacy and political repression. By drawing out its connections to various literatures in anticipation of future work, I have hopefully clarified the features of the concept for my purposes and revealed some of the impetus behind a research agenda on the blues epistemology.

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