

AMERICAN PROPHETS BY JACK JENKINS
SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 4: REVOLUTIONARY LOVE

The Reverend Dr. William J. Barber II

1993: Barber pastors the small congregation, Greenleaf Disciples of Christ, a community founded by formerly enslaved people in 1886. Barber tells church leaders that he believes the congregation was called to help revitalize neighborhoods within 3 miles of the church. Barber and the congregation went on to build homes for low-income families and converted an abandoned supermarket into a thriving daycare center.

1993: Barber receives diagnosis, **Ankylosing Spondylitis**, a form of arthritis for which there is no cure; it fuses bones together including his spine; this forces him to walk stiffly, hunched over, using a cane or walker. His daughter was born with a brain disorder; so, health care is an important issue for him.

2005: Barber is elected **head of the North Carolina NAACP** on a platform of social justice

2007: Barber assembles the **"Historic Thousands on Jones Street" coalition**, outside the NC State Legislative Building calling for action on issues ranging from affordable housing to environmental concerns to ending the Bush administration's War on Terror. This was **"his first major experiment at 'moral fusion,"** a reference to the fusion of Black Republicans and Populist Party members in 19th century NC to enhance voting rights and increase taxes for education, envisioning his project as a modern expression of this legacy, theorizing that **while not everyone was passionate about the same issues, they did recognize the same system of power holding them back. They shared a common cause.**"

During the Obamacare Debate: Barber stood alongside the Religious Left (Jennifer Butler, Sister Simone Campbell, Tracy Blackmon).

2012: A slate of **hard-right conservative Republicans** takes over NC governorship and legislature, "giving the state its most conservative government in a century, tied to the increasingly influential Tea Party movement. It passed legislation cutting unemployment benefits, instituting restrictive voter ID laws, blocked Medicaid coverage to as many as 5,000 people."

2013: Barber and a radically diverse group of **16 other activists** (in their first Moral Monday protest) **"prayed sang, and chanted** as they were approached by police (in front of the NC Legislative Building) and escorted out, with their **hands tied...chanting Revolutionary Love.**" Next week Barber returned with **80 demonstrators; 30** of them were led away in **handcuffs**. The **3rd protest saw 57 arrests**, the number of arrest increased every week. (The **arrest tally** for the **2013 Moral Monday demonstrations hit 800-900.**) **Crowds then swelled into the thousands** each week. **Moral Monday** spoke to a number of progressive causes: women's health, abortion rights, police brutality, voting rights, and Medicaid expansion. Secular protestors stood alongside clergy who supported the same ideals, some with their own signs such as, 'Now this is what we call a church.' **Barber's form of public religious expression not only accepts secular partners but actively seeks them out as moral exemplars.** His followers found a way to exist in a public space with other people who represented their values. **Barber's theology is rooted in a belief that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed. The NC legislature ignored the pleas of Moral Monday.**

August 2013: The **Asheville, NC Mountain Moral Monday** had an estimated **10,000 people** hear Barber speak - the biggest liberal protest of 2013. Several journalists noted how Moral Monday effortlessly reimagined older forms of religious progressivism in a modern liberal context. Barber set his cause in the tradition of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement.

2014: **Moral Monday Georgia** (responding to the disappearance of 40,000 voter registrations from the state data base); **South Carolina - Truthful Tuesdays** (responding to frustration over public education issues, voting rights and Medicaid expansion). Barber kicks off a new wave of protests with a Moral March on Raleigh (80,000-100,000 protestors).and leads "a massive progressive protest movement in North Carolina, credited with unseating a Republican governor."

August 2014: Barber announces a **Moral Week of Action**, which would launch solidarity movements in **Alabama, Florida, Indiana, Mississippi, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Wisconsin**

Late 2014 and 2015: Barber "was suddenly struck by a desire to **step back and assess** where it was all going...to evaluate and retool."

2016: Barber joins with Re. Dr. Liz Theoharris, a Presbyterian Minister for a **Moral Revival Tour of 20 states to:**

- **"Promote a 'revolution of moral values,' to reframe political debates about morality ahead of the 2016 election to offer day-long 'seminary without walls' trainings for local faith leaders addressing these groups**

through the vehicle of Repairers of the Breach to 'move minds not just mobilize bodies.' The result was the reawakening-spiritual and otherwise of a long dormant national progressive faith-based infrastructure, which found renewed purpose and energy in the cause they championed."

- **Plan a 2018 revival of the Poor People's Campaign**, the last and unfinished project of MLK. This would require long-term planning with a focus on developing a network of like-minded spiritual leaders across the country.

2016: Moral Monday and Repairers of the Breach representatives try to present a list of moral demands to representatives of the DNC and The RNC. The Democrats invite Barber to the convention; the Republicans send a security group to say that the group would be arrested if they didn't leave. Barber delivers "an electric, sermon-like prime-time address at the Democratic National Convention" and emerges as a dynamic critic of the president, his policies, and the evangelical leaders who supported him." Vox: "The Democratic convention most surprising argument-Christianity is a liberal religion."

August 2016: Moral Monday was instrumental in the Supreme Court ruling that North Carolina's voting law was "deemed to be unconstitutional targeting African Americans with almost surgical precision."

November 2016: Due to Moral Monday's voter mobilization efforts, the Democratic gubernatorial candidate eked out a win over the Republican Pat McCrory. (However Donald Trump was elected president and the Congress became Republican.) Barber's response to the 2016 national election was, "America is now North Carolina."

02/17: Just 3 weeks after Trump's election, Barber stood before a crowd in Raleigh, NC and said, 'the racist and greedy extremism that came to power in North Carolina four years ago now controls the White House and the Congress in DC.' The Moral Monday movement had already provided a framework for what would become the nationwide Resistance movement in opposition to Trump, his administration, and its policies.

2017: Barber lays out the power of his fusionist approach: "This movement exists so preachers can 'fight for fifteen, and workers can say 'black lives matter,' and a white woman can stand with her black sister for voting rights, and a black man can stand for a woman's access to health care, and LGBTQ fold can stand for religious liberty, and straight people can stand up for gay people, bisexual people, and transgender people, and a Muslim imam can stand with an undocumented worker, that's why we march...Fusion politics is about helping those who have suffered injustice and have been divided by extremism to see what we have common."

Summer 2017: The GOP-led Congress threatens to repeal and replace the ACA, Barber spearheads rallies, pray-ins, and protests on Capitol Hill with religious and secular groups alike to help defeat the repeal effort.

December 2017: Barber's fame and fiery rhetoric eventually makes him the de facto head of America's new Religious Left (although he rejects the term). Barber: "This is moral fusion. We're not left. We're not right. We're not conservative or liberal. We're standing in the moral center."

2018: Barber's status allowed him to speak to several issues, constituencies, and systems of power at once, which benefitted his relaunch of the Poor Peoples Campaign. California congressman Eric Swalwell directly credited Barber's activism with helping the Democrats take back the House in 2018.

10/04/2018 Barber wins a "Mac Arthur "genius grant," one of the nation's most prestigious awards, including a \$625,000 check as he is "arrested outside a McDonald's headquarters in Chicago, protesting the company's refusal to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour."

Cornell West describes Barber as "the closest person we have to Martin Luther King in our midst."

"Barber catapulted the Religious Left into relevance; his knack for pairing dramatic civil disobedience with what he calls morel fusion organizing disparate religious and secular advocacy groups into massive political coalitions, usually with faith leaders at the helm – a recipe for social change that evades simplistic categorization and looks very different from the right-wing Christian political machines. The vast and complex faith-rooted organizing apparatus Barber helped create often functions as a particularly vocal element within broader progressive campaigns-a coalition among coalitions...laying the foundation for a new political structure that could alter the future of liberal activism and the Democratic Party."