

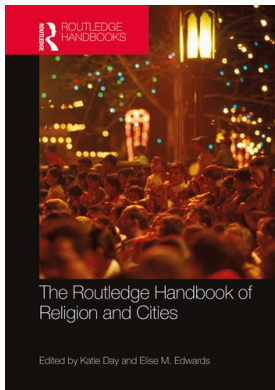
This article was downloaded by: 10.2.97.136

On: 22 Mar 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



## The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Cities

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### Discourse of faith and power

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429351181-25>

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**Published online on: 31 Dec 2020**

**How to cite :-** Isabella Cronin Favazza. 31 Dec 2020, *Discourse of faith and power from: The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Cities* Routledge

Accessed on: 22 Mar 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429351181-25>

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## 22

DISCOURSE OF FAITH  
AND POWER

## Turnaround Tuesday, a case study in Baltimore

*Isabella Cronin Favazza*

Turnaround Tuesday (TAT) utilizes spirituality as a cultural catalyst that enables the community to organize around the lack of employment opportunities within Baltimore City. Officially beginning in 2014 as a jobs movement with Baltimoreans Unite In Leadership Development (BUILD), TAT works “to prepare ‘returning’ citizens and unemployed citizens to reenter the workforce and to lead in creating job opportunities in Baltimore.”<sup>1</sup> Returning citizen is the term TAT uses to describe formerly incarcerated people. It distances the person from the mistake they made, unlike terms such as “ex-felon” or “ex-offender,” and instead focuses on the individual coming home and choosing to better their life and their community. From winter 2014 to spring 2020, TAT helped over 860 people find gainful employment where they would make at least \$15 an hour, and maintained an 83% retention rate.<sup>2</sup> TAT accomplishes its goal through community organizing and relationships with some of Baltimore’s prevailing institutions, such as Johns Hopkins Hospital. The program provides equal employment to areas of the city that have historically been blocked or deterred from job opportunities.

Taking place in two churches, TAT functions Monday through Friday, providing a variety of resources and training to help participants become employed. However, its Tuesday sessions are the backbone of the whole operation with a strong focus on spirituality. Before receiving any type of aid, a person must attend TAT’s Tuesday session a minimum of four times. At these sessions, TAT staff ground employment training around spiritual motivation. Opening in prayer, each session pinpoints a specific job-readiness skill and helps participants to understand it through different spiritual examples, skits, models from the real world, and practice, followed by announcements about upcoming events and a closing prayer. Even during the parts of the session that are solely focused on job readiness, religious rhetoric is used as a reason to keep fighting for a job, such as: “I know God has a plan for me,” or “If you put your faith in God, everything will turn out just fine.” During its Tuesday sessions participants receive an orientation, learning that TAT is a jobs *movement*, not a jobs *program*. TAT is a movement because its ultimate focus is changing lives by changing Baltimore City’s culture of economic disparity; it does not simply find jobs for people, but careers that will actually allow them to become upwardly mobile.

During years of *de jure* and *de facto* segregation that led to food deserts and few options for employment within city limits, Baltimore’s black community habitually found solace within the walls of the church. However, since 2016, more than 25% of US citizens have identified

themselves as unaffiliated with any religious institution, up from 14% at the end of the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> This paper explores the changing role of religion and faith within the black community of Baltimore City, asking how peoples' views of the church have changed and the ways in which community engagement, provided by TAT confronting Baltimore's unemployment rate, challenges new perspectives on religion and religious institutions. The purpose of this research is not to examine the validity of faith, but rather to examine its role within the community. Through analysis of TAT's history, practices, and documents, as well as interviews with its participants and staff, I address these questions: by their use of religious and spiritual language, does TAT replicate the historical pattern of Baltimore churches to provide social services as part of their mission of community engagement? And, how do participants of TAT perceive the role of faith within community organizing?

In total, 15 interviews were conducted for this project, including 10 participants, 4 TAT staff members, and 1 TAT alumnus. Each set of people was interviewed about different topics. For the TAT participants, the questions focused on their religious beliefs, as well as their feelings regarding the spiritual traits of TAT. When interviewing the staff, the questions focused on what each person brought into the movement, why they thought it was necessary, and how they perceived TAT participants' reactions to the spiritual components of TAT. The one alumnus interviewed was asked to describe his experience with TAT, both as someone who has utilized its services and contributed time to the movement as a volunteer. Half of the TAT participants interviewed were men, the other half were women, and in total their ages spanned from 29 to 69. Due to Baltimore City having a majority black population, it was also decided the case study would be more conclusive if all TAT participants interviewed came from this population. All interviewees were given explanations of the purpose of the study and the content of the consent form and all interviewees signed it prior to being interviewed. All names have been anonymized in references below, apart from the TAT leaders, as they are public representatives of TAT.

The following section provides an analysis of some of Baltimore City's current unemployment statistics, as well as religious beliefs within the United States, in order to understand the ways in which TAT is approaching its mission statement of helping returning citizens find gainful employment through a spiritually ambiguous identity. In the next section, "TAT's community organizing origins," the structure of TAT's parent organization BUILD will be addressed, along with the history of similar organizations, with the purpose of understanding the extent TAT mimics Baltimore's churches in attacking structural violence. The succeeding section, "Insights from interviews and participants' living environments," evaluates the interview responses and how TAT's participants have come to understand the use of faith within community organizing. And finally, in the conclusion, the shortcomings of the research, along with next steps, will be considered.

### **Employment and related challenges in Baltimore City**

TAT is essential to Baltimore because it is trying to improve the employment rate of the city, where 23% of the population is living in poverty.<sup>4</sup> This statistic is more than double the overall rate at which people in Maryland experience poverty and is higher than the percentage of the US general population living in poverty. Moreover, Baltimore City has consistently had higher rates of poverty than Maryland and the United States since 1988.<sup>5</sup> And, unless change is enacted quickly, Baltimore's children will face similar problems in the future. Using data provided by the United States Census Bureau, professors of Economics from Harvard and Brown University created a map of the US that measures the likelihood of social mobility. These predictions were created using data from 20,000,000 American citizens, accumulated from the time they were

children to adults in their mid-30s. Their research finds that, because of the current unemployment and poverty rates of Baltimore City, compared to children in nearby locations, children within the city limits are 6% more likely to be incarcerated as adults, to have an annual income of less than \$10,000, and face an employment rate of 64%.<sup>6</sup> By aiding Baltimore's adults to find jobs now, TAT's efforts could induce a ripple effect, potentially offering Baltimore City's youth a brighter future. Building upon previous community activism led by congregation-based community organizations, TAT employs spirituality as a method by which to support its participants and motivate them to keep looking for work.

Baltimore City's tradition of generational poverty within the black community is long-standing and directly connected to housing. In 1911, Baltimore's City Council passed the nation's first racially restrictive zoning law, which prohibited members of one racial group from buying a house in a city block already occupied by another race. But the city's housing segregation was exacerbated in 1917 when the Supreme Court struck down racial zoning.<sup>7</sup> Rather than being an occasion marked by a celebration of human rights, this moment signified a transition from *de facto* segregation to *de jure* segregation.<sup>8</sup> The Real Estate Board of Baltimore, the City Building Inspector, and the Health Department enforced racial separation by creating discriminatory guidelines surrounding the rental and sale of property to black people. These parameters fell into two categories: *clearance*, and *containment*. As Garrett Power, a professor emeritus of law at the University of Maryland asserts, "clearance was used to remove Negro slums from areas where they were not wanted; containment was used to prevent the spread of black residential districts."<sup>9</sup> These systems of segregation continued unofficially until 1922, when the National Housing Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB) published formal rules in the text entitled, *Principles of Real Estate Practice*. This textbook was used by all realtors, and it "emphasized that 'the purchase of property by certain racial types is very likely to diminish the value of other property.' It was deemed unethical to sell to blacks property that was located in white neighborhoods."<sup>10</sup> Simply put, redlining was used to boost the economy after the Great Depression; by decreasing certain neighborhoods' property values, property values located elsewhere would increase. Neighborhoods where value decreased were primarily populated by people of color. Additionally, the decrease in property value made it nearly impossible for residents of these regions to purchase property, as banks would refuse to invest in declining areas.<sup>11</sup>

Because Baltimore's black residents were forced to live in areas where the only housing available was rentable property in buildings of which value had been deducted exorbitantly, taxes typically brought in from mortgage payments were next to nothing in these residents' regions, which negatively impacted the infrastructure in these regions (i.e., provided little or no funds for public schools). Additionally, businesses wanting to open in areas with more minority residents could not acquire loans, limiting the options for business owners to purchase storefronts, and creating food deserts and narrow employment options in these regions.<sup>12</sup> Homer Hoyt from the Federal Housing Association justified the redlining system saying, "If the entrance of a colored family into a white neighborhood causes a general exodus of white people, such dislikes are reflected in property values."<sup>13</sup> Hoyt's explanation supplied a thin veil by which real estate brokers and health inspectors could conceal their racist practices, passing it off as the norm. By rationalizing racism through economic rhetoric, segregation kept black Baltimoreans living in disadvantaged areas of the city for decades.

Families who could afford to leave redlined areas did, which resulted in blockbusting. Blockbusting was a process that began by spreading mass hysteria. Realtors would talk about how dangerously close minority neighborhoods were to white neighborhoods to a point where the white residents would undersell their homes in order to move to allegedly safer environments—the suburbs—as quickly as possible. At this stage, realtors then scooped up the houses

being undersold at bargain prices and resold them to families of color at a ridiculously high mark-up rate.<sup>14</sup> After a certain percentage of the white residents left and people of color occupied most of the neighborhood, the block would then be busted. The final step of blockbusting is repeating redlining: the neighborhood's value would decrease to reflect the property hazards of the people living in it.<sup>15</sup> Through blockbusting, the message became clear: regardless of where people of color lived, they were neither welcome nor cared for by Baltimore City.

The number of white people trying to flee diversified living situations in the city, wherein they might encounter people of color, primarily black people, ultimately led to suburbanization and white flight. By 1950, though NAREB updated its textbook, it still maintained that "the realtor should not be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality or any individual whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in the neighborhood."<sup>16</sup> With the desegregation of schools due to *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), as well as the Federal Aid Highway Act, which allowed for the construction of 41,000 miles of interstate highway, it was only a matter of time until Baltimore City became known as a black city and Baltimore County as its white counterpart.<sup>17</sup> White flight was only made that much easier when the interstate was created because white people could now live outside of the city and commute to their jobs. Additionally, the idea of white children attending school with people of color encouraged white parents to find "safer" living arrangements than those in Baltimore City. Today, Baltimore County is predominantly white, and Baltimore is still known as a black city, wherein there are food deserts, underfunded schools, and a high crime rate.<sup>18</sup>

Historically Baltimore's churches have confronted structural inequities, yet from the start of the twenty-first century, the rate at which US citizens have ceased identifying with religious institutions has increased noticeably. Today, Americans who do not identify with a formal religion officially make up the largest "religious group" in the United States.<sup>19</sup> Race, income, age, and education level factor into the rate at which different communities are disaffiliating. For instance, areas with a high population of minorities and/or people of a lower socio-economic status are separating from religious institutions less often than white, affluent neighborhoods.<sup>20</sup> However, of the people who are religiously affiliated, one fourth do not belong to a religious institution; "these trends are not just numbers, but play in the reality that thousands of U.S. churches are closing every year."<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, two thirds of Americans, both religiously affiliated and not, believe that religion is losing its influence on society. And while some argue this is for the best and that religion is an outdated system, close to 50% of US citizens regret this trend.<sup>22</sup> Although religious institutions may not be as popular as they once were, people still value the role religion plays in teaching life lessons and building community; 58% of Americans say that religion is important to their lives and 76% pray daily.<sup>23</sup> Even among unaffiliated Americans, one-third thinks it is necessary to believe in God to develop morals and have good values.<sup>24</sup> TAT approaches its mission statement of helping returning citizens find gainful employment through a spiritually ambiguous identity. In the following section, theories about community organizing and social capital will be discussed in order to explain the organizing model of TAT and identify how it has separated itself from its congregation-based parent organization BUILD.

### **TAT's community organizing origins**

Community organizing can be defined as collaboration around investigating and addressing social issues of mutual concern by a collective.<sup>25</sup> BUILD is an associate of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) and has utilized its organizing model to address economic disparity within Baltimore's black community. TAT was initially founded through BUILD congregations dedi-

cated to nurturing social capital with the aim of liveability in Baltimore City. IAF's model of community organizing was founded on the principle of social capital, which is power created by social networks. Social capital is "developing networks of relationships that weave individuals into groups and communities."<sup>26</sup> Social capital has two types: binding and bridging. While all social capital can be understood as a local phenomenon based on connections among people, *binding* social capital is about forming individual relationships between people who share similar interests, whereas *bridging* social capital aims to unite groups of people from different areas of interest.<sup>27</sup> TAT garners interest in community organizing around improving Baltimore's employment rate by empowering people through spiritual motivation. TAT uses religious rhetoric, prayer, and "spiritual vitamins" to *bind* social capital within the black community and *bridge* social capital with other institutions (i.e., Johns Hopkins Hospital), in order to find employment opportunities for its participants. Spiritual vitamins are quotes that TAT staff take from religious texts to illustrate the job teaching of that day. While typically the spiritual vitamin comes from the Bible, occasionally they will pull from other sources as they are committed to TAT being a spiritually ambiguous movement.

BUILD began in 1977 with focused efforts to attack Baltimore City's racial and class disparities as "a broad-based, non-partisan, interfaith, multiracial community power organization rooted in Baltimore's neighborhoods and congregations." BUILD's mission is to make Baltimore a prosperous place to live with ample opportunity for all.<sup>28</sup> At its core, BUILD achieves its mission by following IAF's model of congregation-based relational organizing, which has four major steps: dues, fundraising, recruitment, and leadership development.<sup>29</sup> The congregations pay dues so that the organization has money for potential projects. BUILD also raises funds for specific issues, while recruiting people to carry out civic actions and training each of its members to be leaders to create a system of shared community power. Cheryl Finney, who has been involved with BUILD since 2012 and is the senior program manager of TAT, says, "the idea behind organizing congregations is that people are already driven to a place with a purpose and a structure."<sup>30</sup> When BUILD was first created, it was supported by ten churches and its focus was on issues such as the eradication of rats and better police protection. But as BUILD has grown its attention has been drawn to broader concerns such as gun violence, funding for school programs, and college tuition.<sup>31</sup> The organization "is now one of the three or four most effective power groups in the nation."<sup>32</sup> Today, members of BUILD include 23 congregations, 9 neighborhood and civic associations, and 12 schools and educational services.<sup>33</sup>

However, with more people becoming disaffiliated from religious institutions, some of BUILD's veterans worry about what this might mean for the organization's future. Vernon Dobson from Union Baptist Church, one of the first ten institutions to be included in BUILD, fears that "the clergy are mobilized to attack power inequities in society at large, but they're not prepared to give up any of the power that they wield inside their own churches."<sup>34</sup> Dobson argues that churches are willing to fight against structural violence but are uninclined to do so in a way that does not follow a top-down approach, and thus nurtures a culture wherein the clergy can disengage from the people it is claiming to help. Fellow BUILD organizer Dr. Douglas Miles recently echoed this concern at the 2019 Religion and Cities Conference, saying the black church has become an institution too interested in religious service as opposed to relationships. Miles believes relational organizing is the only way to bring the church back to what it used to be: a community. He says, "The black church cannot be changed from the inside; it must be changed from the outside ... That's why community organizing is important, it makes the church relational."<sup>35</sup> TAT is unique in that its spiritual identity was formed to accommodate people who were disengaged from religious institutions, while at the same time



connecting those institutions to a broader understanding of faith by focusing more attention on the community.

In fact, TAT started by bringing people from the street outside Zion Baptist, a BUILD church, inside to address unequal access to employment. In autumn 2014, one of BUILD's organizers, Terrell Williams, met with the church's pastor, Marshall Prentice, to discuss BUILD's project of constructing affordable houses in the neighborhood. Prentice was looking out the window at all the people standing on the street corners and did not understand why they were not at work. Williams, who is now one of TAT's co-directors, recounts:

He looked out the window and he said,

You know, it's so unfortunate that those young men out there will not get the benefit of these houses that we're building ... I just don't understand why they choose to sell drugs or do whatever it is that they're doing—putting their lives in jeopardy and everything that they worked for—it disappears ...

He was like, 'you really don't know, and I really don't know... why don't we go ask them?' And so we got a clipboard and we went out there and we just started talking to people, just started listening to people, and we just kept hearing these stories... [with a] central theme of people really trying to turn their life around, but employers just not giving them an opportunity.<sup>36</sup>

Williams and Prentice asked if people would be interested in meeting the following Tuesday morning to talk more. When the time came, they opened the church's doors and invited people into its basement; the purpose of the meeting was to understand why each of these people could not find a job. The same story kept emerging—a person had made a mistake earlier in their life, served time in jail, and then no one would hire them after they were released from incarceration. The group decided it would meet every Tuesday morning to try and figure out how to increase hiring in Baltimore, specifically hiring returning citizens. And while TAT struggled at first to gain institutional backing, both in forming partnerships and funding, TAT gradually found the support it needed to become the dynamic, faith-based jobs movement it is today.

### **Insights from interviews and participants' living environments**

While it is obvious that people come to TAT to find employment, what is not as apparent is just how inaccessible employment is in the neighborhoods from which the participants come. Located in a previously redlined area, TAT's neighborhood experiences poverty at the rate of 24.2%.<sup>37</sup> Although statistics from the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance of the Jacob France Institute specify that the unemployment rate in this region is only 23.1%, this information is misleading. Of the residents between the ages 16 and 64, 38.2% of people are not included in the labor force.<sup>38</sup> In economics, the term "discouraged worker" is used to describe people who are unemployed, but who have not actively looked for work in four weeks; people identified as discouraged workers are not included in the labor force or the rate of unemployment.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, within this same neighborhood, 42.4% of households do not have access to Wi-Fi, an increasing necessity in the digital world of online job applications, making it difficult to apply for jobs often. Especially in the wake of COVID-19, a global pandemic that has forced countless of people to work from home, having Wi-Fi at home has become a necessity to stay employed. Thus, the rate of unemployment is skewed because people who are not actively looking for work, whether by circumstance or choice, are classified as discouraged workers and therefore removed from the labor force and the unemployment rate.<sup>40</sup> Understanding these

living situations of TAT participants is necessary in order to interpret the spirituality of the participants and how they perceive TAT's use of faith.

Additionally, TAT staff primarily conduct outreach through word of mouth on the streets and in BUILD congregations, meaning that, although the movement aims to be spiritually ambiguous, it tends to attract people who already have faith or a connection to a religious institution. And while it is common for areas with high rates of poverty to be more religious, as religious institutions provide needed material goods and amenities to disenfranchised populations, it would be reckless to assume that every person from a low-income neighborhood in Baltimore is religious.<sup>41</sup> Although TAT does not exclude unemployed people who do not ascribe to a faith, as seen through its spiritually ambiguous identity, it could be doing more to advertise its services in locations that are not spiritually inclined, such as libraries. As disclosed by an Enoch Pratt library branch manager, many people who go to libraries during the weekday are unemployed and use the internet to search for jobs.

Due to TAT's outreach practices, the TAT participants interviewed for this project were more religious than what US trends would suggest.<sup>42</sup> However, as previously stated, although religious disaffiliation is occurring nationally, the rate at which certain areas and communities are disaffiliating is dependent on different demographics, race and socio-economic status included. Because the majority of the city's residents are minorities, and approximately one quarter of the population is living below the poverty line, these demographics reflect the possibility that Baltimore City is becoming religiously disaffiliated at a slower rate than the nation at large. Interviews revealed that most TAT participants preferred TAT to other job service organizations available because of the spiritual component, as shown by their comments:

A lot of programs aren't structured around religious or a spiritual movement ... [At TAT] it's like you're part of something versus someone just shoving a booklet of paperwork in front of you.

I don't think you can get a stronger guidance than drawing from religious focus to teach people.

It's a safe haven. I do hope that I get a job through this movement, but if I don't it wouldn't be time wasted because I look forward to every Tuesday.

In fact, the faith-based traits and the church location made people want to attend even more; participants said they loved the spiritual aspect because it made them feel like they were a part of something bigger than themselves. Three people said these characteristics had no impact, but not one of the ten participants said that they did not want to attend because of TAT's spiritual identity. These findings may have been amplified because the interviews took place on Resource Day. Resource Day takes place every Wednesday at both locations of TAT and it is during this time that TAT participants can receive aid on job applications, interview prep, and sometimes even job certification training. Because all of TAT's participants can only attend Resource Day after having attended TAT's Tuesday session a minimum of four times, if a person did become disinterested from the movement due to its spirituality they would not have been interviewed, as it is likely that they would have stopped attending TAT's Tuesday sessions.

After interviewing TAT participants about their own faith, it became clear that, while religious institutions can be used to foster a relationship with God, the participants primarily understand religious institutions to be a place for community and spirituality to be of personal concern. All interviewed participants identified themselves as religious, spiritual, or faithful, with four people saying they were all three. Rather than providing definitions, participants were asked what they did to express their faith. Of the eight participants who regularly attend a religious



institution, seven attending church and one attending a mosque, seven identified themselves as religious. The one person who attends church but did not say she was religious instead opted for the terms *spiritual* and *faithful*, she explained, “My spirituality is a personal thing for me, I go inward and look for God.” For the remaining two participants who do not attend a religious institution, one described himself as faithful and the other described herself as spiritual. Both also engage in prayer and said that their relationship with God was personal.

Additionally, though most people mentioned God in their interviews, the people who attended a religious institution were more likely to talk about the community, saying things like “I do want to make a difference in my community and my city,” or “I have become ... a very strong person in my religious community.” While it seems as though the people who defined themselves as religious are more community-oriented than those who described themselves as faithful, this pattern could also be attributed to TAT’s job training about personal and private relationships. In this training, TAT staff explain how certain relationships are more public than others, the idea being that there are certain people who one should always act professional around; in this training, relationships with people from church are viewed as public and faith is classified as private. Consistent with this, individual examples of what the terms religious, spiritual, and faithful mean to TAT participants suggest that religious beliefs are personal, having an independent relationship with God; and, on a different level, religious institutions are viewed more as a means by which to create community, with spirituality factoring in less.

When asked if there was a specific turning point in their lives that made TAT participants want to become more religious, three people said they experienced a religious encounter prior to coming to TAT. One woman explained how she was sitting alone and suddenly felt a presence, saying, “God was speaking to me ... I felt that spiritual divine moment.” Another woman talked about how her last job made her feel like she was dying and said she was saved on her job after seeing a manifestation and found comfort in how “there is no death in God.” The third person who experienced an encounter described how he heard God’s voice when he was sick as a child: “And since that day, [he has] never questioned if there was a God or not.” The remaining participants found faith after the death of a loved one, inspiration from a religious leader, or purely wanting a better life for themselves and their family. Religious institutions provided these people with a support system, as well as a space where they could reflect on their mistakes without judgment.

The alumnus interviewed, Benjamin,<sup>43</sup> who has been with TAT since its second week, believes that the feeling TAT participants have that they are a part of something greater is what drives them to want to be greater. He says TAT “makes you rediscover that there is a higher power, regardless of what you call a higher power. They might call the innate program a higher power. They might call their job a higher power.” Regardless of whether a TAT participant is religious, the spiritual identity of the movement has an innate way of cultivating trust and community; without this support system, Benjamin thinks more people might be susceptible to recidivism. Reflecting on his own experience, Benjamin believes “God helped me ... if I had to do it on my own, I wouldn’t have made it.” TAT is successful because it can simulate certain aspects of a religious institution, in that it provides a space that fosters community development. At the same time, because it is more spiritually ambiguous than a religious institution, it requires that people look inward to their own beliefs about what a higher power is and, in so doing, the participants become empowered by themselves.

TAT’s staff understand that people want to have a spiritual space where community building is the focus, as opposed to scripture and religious practice. TAT has created this type of environment by holding weekly job-readiness trainings inside a church, mimicking the routine gathering of religious institutions, and using religious rhetoric while also challenging the traditional

roles and discussions people have in this space. TAT opens in prayer, but as Co-Director Melvin Wilson explains, “Our prayers are generic. They are not meant to force religion on anybody, but we are in a church and we are going to pray. We are a spiritual movement and we are not ashamed of that.”<sup>44</sup>

Even though the movement’s mission is to prepare returning citizens to re-enter the workforce, the spirituality of the space, as well as the spiritual vitamins, prayer, and presence of a pastor impact how people approach this mission. Finney says that this influence is necessary in order to open participants up to learning new skills; saying, “I think spiritual centering gives a person a chance to develop trust and feel safe and feel worthy, and that’s sort of the prerequisite for learning some new behavior and being ready for work.”<sup>45</sup> From Finney’s perspective, TAT needs to have spirituality involved to address the emotional needs of its participants, many of whom need a safe space wherein they can confront their trauma, heal, and work toward a brighter future.

Williams affirms Finney’s thoughts, understanding that the community needs a space for growth but that traditional religious institutions can no longer provide this:

While the people around the church are not connected to it now, and we’re seeing that across the city, we’re hoping that [TAT] can feel something like church, but not church because not everybody is religious. It has to be a place where everybody, every religious perspective feels comfortable.<sup>46</sup>

Keeping the structure of church intact, TAT replaces conventional religious ideologies with job-readiness skills, thus allowing for the development of a more inclusive community. Religious institutions are not losing their value; rather, the focus is being drawn toward the community built around them and adapting these institutions to become more inviting to outside perspectives. Because TAT utilizes a spiritually ambiguous identity, its participants strive to understand their own higher purpose outside of what some might call God’s plan, thus allowing them to focus more on what they can do to improve their lives and how they can become community leaders.

## **Conclusion**

TAT adapted models of social capital created in congregations to draw in more participants to be trained as employees and leaders, effectively bettering the lives of the individuals and the community. The movement is distinct because it is a fusion of the secular and the sacred, resting on the middle ground that many disaffiliated Americans are looking for. While TAT is able to garner interest in the community it is currently located in, it is probable that its hybridity will be of interest in other areas, especially given that half of the US population regrets how religious institutions are losing their influence. This pattern of religious recession, followed by nostalgia of what religious institutions used to represent, would suggest that religious institutions either need to change to better meet the needs of the people, or the people need to find new institutions altogether.<sup>47</sup> Because TAT can address secular issues using a spiritually ambiguous lens, its job-training skills are both useful and transformative to the individual and the city. TAT replicates the people-focused religious institutions of the past by introducing individuals to leadership development and the ways in which they can rise above oppression, while modifying the parts of religious institutions that no longer serve the best interests of the public.

TAT is productive in working toward its mission for two reasons. TAT has the ability to make a person feel respected on the individual level and on a community level. Interviewed TAT participants felt that spirituality was personal and religious institutions were public, and they were drawn to TAT because it reflects both. In addition, TAT’s participants are encouraged to

believe in a higher power, and in this they learn the value of their presence in the community, a necessary reminder for returning citizens who have been removed from their community for a long time. Looking inward to define what this higher power is, TAT's participants discover how to trust themselves again, becoming confident and thus engaging as community members more. In essence, TAT demonstrates the importance of understanding an individual's needs within the context of their community.

A more intentional recruitment process might be one avenue for TAT to expand its accommodating perimeter. This could allow TAT to become even more spiritually ambiguous and thus even more adaptable to its participants. Currently, TAT attracts people who are affiliated with religious institutions, typically churches, or already believe in God as a higher power. If TAT wants to appeal to a broader audience, it might need to disengage from religious institutions further, specifically the church. While the movement claims a spiritually ambiguous identity, it could do more to include non-Christian faiths in its Tuesday sessions. Taking place in two churches with pastors present and primarily drawing on the Bible for the spiritual vitamins, TAT could easily be mistaken for a Christian movement, possibly even congregation-based. If TAT can become more spiritually ambiguous, as well as do outreach in non-religious spaces, it might increase its participants and perhaps effect change in Baltimore City's economy faster. The ability to connect with more diverse religious institutions is established through creating social capital, as TAT will be unable to encourage other types of religious institutions to be involved with the movement without first beginning relationships with these institutions. TAT's work is fundamentally grounded in social capital, so it has the skills to form these relationships and become a more inviting faith-based organization.

Future research that builds on this project might focus on the relationship between unemployment and spirituality, specifically documenting the ways in which religious institutions are changing. TAT and similar movements could utilize this research to attract more social capital and contest structural inequities. Unless TAT begins recruiting participants in public spaces, it will not be possible to study whether unemployment rates influence individuals toward wanting a more spiritual or religious lifestyle. Studies following up on the impact of TAT over a longer time period would provide data about TAT alumni's employment rates, their appeal to non-religious participants, and the impact of faith-based employment programs.

Moreover, although religious disaffiliation has been well documented, more research on religious disaffiliation and its impact on faith-based community organizing is desirable. In a world where the religious landscape is changing, there is potential for more secular-sacred hybrid movements to be created. While religious institutions have been around for a long time, the movement away from them is occurring rapidly. TAT provides a blueprint for how to adapt religious traditions in a way that still honors them. Amending religious practices that create social capital to fit the spiritual needs of the people and community today, TAT provides a possible solution for how religious institutions and congregation-based organizations can acclimate and continue to exist in the future as religious disaffiliation continues.

## Notes

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