

## **Prayers and Protest: How Religion Shaped the Black Power Movement**

In this dissertation, Venus Bender examines the relationship between the Black Power movement and Christianity in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It argues that Black Power was not a purely secular movement but was significantly shaped by Black church members who used religious rhetoric and biblical interpretations to justify the fight for Black self-determination. Addressing a historiographical gap, this research project challenges the prevailing view that Black Power marked a break from the spiritual roots of the civil rights movement. Case studies such as Albert Cleage's Shrine of the Black Madonna and the National Black Sisters' Conference demonstrate how religious leaders redefined Christology by portraying Jesus as a Black messiah and integrating Christian principles into the fight for social justice, but also by using Black Power to encourage other church members to fight for their liberation. By illuminating the religious dimensions of Black Power, this dissertation contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the movement's ideological diversity and its continuity with earlier Black liberation efforts.

**Venus Bender** is a doctoral candidate at Goethe University Frankfurt, where she earned her B.A. and M.A. in Educational Science and American Studies. She is a member of the research group "The Black Power Movement and the Contested Nature of American Democracy" within the Gerda Henkel Foundation initiative and of the DFG-funded network "Bridging Black Freedom Struggles." Supported by a scholarship from the German Business Foundation (sdw), her research examines the intersection of religious activism and Black intellectual thought during the Black Power movement, with a particular focus on Black Christian Nationalism and Black Liberation Theology. Her broader research interests include modern U.S. history, histories of race, cultural and intellectual history, and Black theology.