

**THE CHICAGO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

**SAY IT LOUD:  
PREACHING BLACK PRESENCE IN THE BIBLE FOR SELF-ESTEEM**

**A PROJECT IN MINISTRY THESIS  
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## ABSTRACT

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Since the beginning of Christian missions to Africans and African Americans, Christianity has been a religion traditionally accepted as Eurocentric. Significant people in the Bible, including Jesus, were described as white by missionaries and early users of the Bible. Thus, it is vital to recognize and expose Black heritage in the Bible and Christianity through preaching to expand self-esteem and win religious favor among members of the African American community.

Knowledge and understanding of the purpose and the presence of Black people in the Bible will build a sense of belonging, while allowing infinite religious expression. Analysis of preaching Black presence in the Bible to build up self-esteem of African American congregations is the intent of this thesis. Methods will be embraced to cultivate the African American population in the church, coupled with self-awareness for edification of African American people.

## **Acknowledgments**

I dedicate this work to the two matriarchs who modeled Christianity before me: my mother, Ora Lee Landers, who stood on her godly convictions without ceasing; and my grandmother, Ophelia Scales, whose commitment to the Eternal Thou showed her family how to overcome every obstacle known with demonstrations of love.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

How do you study something that enraptures your whole being? You wake up thinking about it and constantly analyze ways to be effective and creative while doing it. You toil with the thought of doing it and being accomplished in it along the way. You try to rest at night, but your mind has deliberations concerning it and the delivery thereof with the intent of making a difference in someone's life by having the courage to do it in the first place. That is how preaching holds me captive daily. This yearning and never-ending attraction to preaching led me to the Doctor of Ministry in Preaching Program at the Chicago Theological Seminary, as part of the Association of Chicago Theological Schools (ACTS).

My homiletical examples in the local churches throughout my life made me admire the call to ministry and the crafting of well-thought-out sermons. I never wanted to garner the reputation of being a pulpit slouch (usually called a "jackleg preacher") because too much was at stake in those precious moments of communicating a message that could alter the present existence and well-being downtrodden individuals. Therefore, I have always approached preaching with the mindset of that occasion being akin to a dire emergency with the possible loss of life in my hands. In other words, what can I say and render in a moment's notice to entice a person to want to know about the enigmatic grandeur of the Eternal Thou. Unfortunately, I felt I was amid preachers who didn't care about the careful crafting of sermons. I did not want that lackadaisical approach to preaching to befall me. With that infinite preaching quest incessantly

on my mind, I knew that what I needed required proficient empirical and arduous homiletical study to bring the best preacher out of me.

In Texas, undergraduate study at Dallas Baptist University gave me solid roots in Baptist biblical thought and fundamental systematic theology. Graduate study at the Samuel Dewitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University granted me access to a social conscience for urban ministry while providing numerous preaching methodologies. Nevertheless, I had been away from formal theological study for ten years and felt that a tune-up would necessitate and strengthen the competency of my preaching.

I was aware of a few exclusive doctoral preaching programs around the country that could help me to accomplish this task, ranging from studying with Dr. Robert Smith, Jr., at the Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama, to studying with Rev. Dr. Marvin A. McMickle at the Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School in Rochester, New York. However, those programs were not ideal for my professional itinerary as a middle school teacher because they met at crucial times during the school year. Since public school education awards teachers paid time-off during the summer, the ACTS Doctor of Ministry program was well suited to my yearly schedule.

I came across the program while searching the internet before knowing it had produced great Black preachers like Rev. Dr. Marcus Cosby of the Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, and Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley of the Alfred Street Baptist Church Alexandria, Virginia. Moreover, one of my homiletics professors at Virginia Union, Dr. James Henry Harris, was an instructor in the ACTS Doctor of Ministry program, so I felt I could not go wrong by applying to be a part of this venture. Although I was hesitant to apply since my days of

formal study had waned over the years. I was also denied opportunities to study for a Master of Sacred Theology degree at Dallas Theological Seminary and Duke Divinity School. I felt I had nothing to lose if I received another rejection letter from a formal theological learning institution. What spurred me to apply was one Sunday after I finished preaching at the Damascus Missionary Baptist Church, where I was serving as the Executive Pastor; a dear member told me that I already preached as if I were a doctor of the scriptures. That boosted my confidence and made me think I had something to offer in preaching beyond the local congregation.

In February 2015, I received the great news that I had been accepted into the program's summer session. As I read that acceptance letter in my right hand, my left arm was in a medical shoulder brace because I had dislocated it while playing kickball with the Damascus youth group. My physician advised me that it would be in my best interest to have surgery that summer to restore full function to the shoulder, so I put my doctoral pursuit on hold until the 2016 summer. That turned out to be one of the best decisions for my preaching endeavors because it afforded me the incredible opportunity to meet a diverse company of preachers that had left an ineradicable imprint on my personal life and preaching ministry. Being among that gifted and talented band of prognosticators confirmed that I was in the right place at the right time and part of the right program. My thought process concerning preaching and ministry has been stretched from day one to the present, and I do not regret the personal and ministerial growth that has taken place during this excursion.

Nearly two and a half months after leaving Chicago that summer of 2016 to begin the process of the first preaching ministry project, the congregation of Damascus Missionary Baptist Church was on the threshold of doing something that hadn't happened in over 53 years: the



election of a Senior Pastor. I was a finalist and thought for sure the vote would swing my way. However, I lost by three votes. That put me in a mental whirlwind of discouragement and disappointment, for I had served at Damascus as the Youth Pastor, Pastoral Assistant, and Executive Pastor for more than eight years. Rev. Donald Burgs of the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Houston, a pastor in the city, invited me to join his ministerial staff. I didn't feel overly comfortable with making such a sudden move at the time, but it was an open door to trudge ahead with completing my doctoral assignments. Rev. Burgs was overly kind and generous in sharing the laity and pulpit with me to continue my doctoral excursion.

During my second year in the D.Min. program at ACTS, a few brethren of the Christian Methodist Episcopal denomination approached me. They encouraged me to look at their denomination, for it was always in search of exceptional preachers. When I decided to begin a search, I landed at the Phillips Temple Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Houston, Texas, led by Rev. Robert Bean. In that quaint church setting, I discovered what I believe to be the impetus for this thesis of preaching about Black presence in the Bible. Although my work had taken me to other settings, I felt that Phillips Temple would be an ideal place to explore my hypothesis about the preachment of Black biblical characters. I was under the impression that the congregants of Phillips Temple, like me, were proud of their Christian heritage but lacked specific knowledge to empower the community based on cultural legacy.

I would like this extended study to explore preaching intently about Black people in the Bible. I want to convey a sense of overwhelming respect and admiration for Black biblical ancestry and make a bold and courageous stance in being a Black Christian because it's imperative for Black people to understand the pivotal role we have in the biblical saga.

I am searching for a reason to believe in people of Black Church again and believe in myself by examining Black biblical personalities. This thesis originated while reading a local newspaper that focuses on the Black community in Houston. There was a headline in large bold print, which stated that there should be *more* Black Houstonians who are deserving of a commemorative statue. I had similar sentiments, especially concerning church settings. I hope that this study will provide an incentive for more preaching about Black biblical characters. Once preachers identify race with the people in the pews, that will make sermon content more relatable. Black people are denigrated daily for any offense, while other ethnicities are celebrated for doing the same things. Therefore, preaching about Black biblical characters will build the self-esteem of Black people and be a driving force in elevating Black Christian pride.

## CHAPTER 2

### MINISTRY IN CONTEXT

Rev. Harold Sims began a new work for the Christian Methodist Episcopal denomination. Divinely inspired by and named after endeared CME Bishop Charles Henry Phillips, Phillips Temple Christian Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in a small house in 1946 in Houston, Texas. In the 1950s, a larger structure was built to accommodate the congregation's needs as Houston's Black population increased by 7 percent over the previous decade. As time went on, Rev. E. N. Green had a vision to build a brand-new edifice for Phillips Temple. Enthusiastically on board, the church members wholeheartedly contributed to the purchase of bricks, lights, and concrete. Various unique offerings were made to the cause of erecting the building, which culminated in the structure that still stands there today. According to the church's historian, the shining hallmark of the church is the choir. Within its seventy-six years of existence and its affiliation with the Christian Methodist Episcopal denomination, twenty-one ministers have served the church, eight of whom began their ministry there.

I decided to preach in Phillips Temple about Black Bible characters during my second year of doctoral study. As the youngest member of the congregation then, I believed that a seminal approach to the subject matter would benefit the writer and the laypeople. In my year as a preacher at the church, I observed attendance—that is, six people are related by blood or marriage to the current Pastor, and four are faithful members of the church who can be categorized as spry Baby Boomers. The Pastor, Rev. Robert Bean, was in his seventh round of ministerial duty at the church in Harris County, Texas, within the booming metropolis of Houston. Nestled in the African American community known as Acres Homes, Phillips Temple

is situated along a route where churches offer a variety of religious persuasions. Every eighth of a mile on the West Montgomery Road has a church in its vicinity, but none of the churches are megachurches. This is significant, I believe, because it speaks volumes about the idea that Black people who once would make it mandatory to participate in Sunday morning worship services now have options. Could this be due to superfluous preaching coupled with a lack of belief in a tangible place to come together for community and camaraderie? Does this reflect the conundrum of self-esteem that permeates my senses when I'm in this neighborhood?

After my experience at Phillips Temple, another church contributed to this study—an appointment to pastor the Bethel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Tadmor, Texas, in August 2020. Although there is not a recorded date of inauguration for Bethel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Tadmor, it was organized by a White teacher named Rev. Metar from the Northern parts of America. The building made of logs with a nestling fireplace within it was along Hickory Creek on the property of Brother Ned Franklin. As the small community grew larger, church services transitioned to a school located on what was known as the Ike Washington property.

Church history records in 1894 the parishioners of Bethel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church decided to erect a building and dedicated it in 1900 under the pastorate of Rev. R.W. Henderson and committee members Ben Ross, H. Love, N. Moore, J. Moore, and R. Moore.

Brother Tim Harris donated two acres of land for the present site of Bethel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, and a building was constructed and completed on December 4, 1962. The laity marched into the new edifice on the fifth Sunday in March 1963 under the pastorate of Rev. T. J. Pleasant and the Steward Board comprising Andy Johnson,

R.B. Washington, L.K. Patton, Lipscomb Shephard, Carl Franklin, Plancy Scott, and Ike Washington. A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held where the oldest member of Bethel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Sister Martha Sheffield, was given the honor to cut the ribbon. Presiding Elder E.O. Collins rendered the dedicatory sermon.

Throughout the history of Bethel, she has staked her claim in the Davy Crockett Forest in Houston County in East Texas as the church that has stood as the sentinel in the community, pointing men, women, boys, and girls to the heavenly way. Amid any world turmoil and war, she has looked strife in the face and held the banner of Jesus Christ high with his words as their calling card of upon this rock I will build my church.

Through the litany of appointed pastors by the Colored Methodist Episcopal and now Christian Methodist Episcopal denomination, these individuals have been portrayed as God-like and devout preachers who have come to let the people know of the goodness of God and see his works in the lives of people. Persecution has not crushed Bethel. Power has not beaten back the zeal of Bethel. The times have not abated Bethel as a force for Christ. Treason and abuse have not stopped Bethel from going forward in gaining stability for the church to continue her mission. The current membership has the mindset for Bethel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church to stand for years to be a living monument that can never fail to exist.

The great tradition of Bethel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church is worthy of honor; however, in 1962, wallpaper with a picture of a White Jesus was installed in the choir loft and became a point of contention that I want to examine in correlation to preaching Black characters for self-esteem. In 1962, the superintendent of Sunday School at Bethel was coordinating the Easter program for the children of the church. Rather than just having the children stand before

the audience bellowing their speeches, the superintendent desired a background that depicted the Easter story. The product was discovered, and the larger-than-life poster depicted the cross on Calvary on the left side, the open tomb on the right side, and Mary Magdalene bowing at the feet of a gargantuan White Jesus who is lifted about a foot above her in the middle. The congregants eventually decided to add some type of picture to the sanctuary. They agreed upon posting the larger-than-life poster on the wall in the choir loft with the gargantuan White Jesus as the focal point (see Figure 1). When I saw the poster on the wall, I found it disturbing my psyche, especially as it was a new millennium. It reminded me of the carpet rug rendition of White Jesus that was posted in the church of my religious heritage, Mount Calvary Baptist Church in El Dorado, Arkansas. In addition, that rendition in El Dorado came from my brother who sent it from Germany while on duty in the military in 1978, and my mother strongly insisted the rugs of White Jesus and the Lord's Supper with White Jesus and his White disciples be posted in the choir loft of the church. With these narratives in mind, let me explore the issue of these ruminations.

### **The Issue**

Since its beginnings, Christianity has been considered as a White European religion. In the view of many African Americans, Christianity was forced on their ancestors by White slave-owners as another tool used to control them, with many African American slaves converting to Christianity to avoid more egregious ill-treatment by their White owners. As a result, many African Americans today do not relate to the Bible and its stories. They feel excluded from the gospel due to Europeans' "whitening" of the Bible.

The Christian missionaries who traveled the world preaching the gospel had good intentions. However, in many cases, their approach was less than optimal, and the steps they took to promote Christianity were sometimes extreme. For example, in some parts of the Congo, missionaries used colonial administrative powers to force the natives to convert, and those who refused were often executed. Children were even taken from their parents so that they could be converted forcibly to Christianity. All of these interventions were based on the belief that the religion of white Christians was superior to the spiritual beliefs of those they sought to convert. White Europeans told Africans that their traditional beliefs were barbaric and “devilish,” and gave them little choice but to convert. The impacts of these practices can be seen and felt today in African Americans’ relationship to Christianity.

Many African Americans feel disenfranchised, and need for salvation is not a choice they would make. The “whitening” of Christianity left no room for Blacks in the movement. White people redefined Christianity as a religion characterized by whiteness, placing the onus on Black people to attain the implied superior holiness of whiteness. Whites also ensured that Black people in the Bible were made irrelevant and mentioned only superficially. Whence has led many Blacks to abandon Christianity.

Lack of self-esteem and self-worth has been central to the Black Christian story. For centuries on end, Blacks have been forced to view themselves as inferior to whites since many are not aware of their role in the salvation story. People are shying away from the gospel since it has been conflated with whiteness, and many Black people want no part of it. The problem is deeply rooted in human history, and it is essential to proclaim the narrative that allows Black people to become aware of the tasks of their ancestors in the Bible and their outstanding

contributions to the salvific story. Indeed, Black people will come to church to hear preaching about Black characters in the Bible as a tool to increase self-esteem.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

This study examines the historical, social, economic, cultural, and geographical factors that have led to low self-esteem among Black Christians. Many Black Christians do not feel that the Christian faith provides a secure refuge from the daily ostracization that comes with the disrepute of being Black in America; therefore, they perceive Christianity as a white religion. The purpose of this paper is to show textual and other evidence that Christianity is not just a white religion. It unveils information that will bring to light that there are Black characters in the Bible who accomplished stupendous feats as well as delineating how Christianity did not originate in Europe. This paper will reveal liturgical and homiletical content to show that Black people are in fact part of the Bible.

The paper seeks to promulgate the existence of Black people in the Bible and lift the self-esteem of Black Christians in African American ancestry while providing a guide for homiletical instruction based on Bible teachings. It is pertinent that Blacks understand that they are not inferior to whites, and that they are a vital part of the biblical tapestry. Many Black people have left the church with feelings of woeful desperation and disenfranchisement. With the number of Black people being active in church life dwindling, this study will put the subject of self-esteem under a homiletical microscope. Nonetheless, the writer believes that if he preaches to disclose the naked truth about Black personalities in scripture and how they have commonalities with modern day Black Christians, the self-esteem of the hearer will be elevated.



### **Research Questions**

This paper is structured around three central questions:

1. Why do many Black Christians feel that Christianity is predominantly white?
2. What are the reasons Black people have low self-esteem?
3. What can be done to help Blacks understand that they are part of the biblical narrative and that there are many Black characters in the Bible?

### **Thesis**

It is possible and desirable to inform the Black community of its historic role in the Bible, regain its self-esteem, and embrace Christianity.

### **Hypothesis**

1. It is possible to enlighten Black congregants of their history and purpose in the world.
2. Black people are integral part of Bible stories.
3. It is possible to bring faith and confidence to the Black Christian community.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE HOMILETICAL ISSUE

For congregants of African American churches, there isn't a prominent Black person in the Bible that is commonly relatable. American Black churches refer to successful and inspirational Black people such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. or President Barack Obama, but there is no revered individual in the Bible for them to relate to.<sup>1</sup> The deeds noted in scripture in reference to Africans need to be taught and included in sermons in churches everywhere. This knowledge should not be exclusive to just North America. Several extraordinary biblical characters of African descent made significant contributions, and it is time for the narratives of these personalities to be included in sermons, thereby ensuring that Black people do not view Christianity as an exclusively White religion<sup>2</sup>.

Nevertheless, the more things change, the more they stay the same. Since the inception of the original publication of *Preaching for Black Self-Esteem*, the plight of African Americans has travailed through some highs and lows.

Moving from weapons of mass destruction at the turn of a new century to making strides of just not being in the room but being the head of state. Historically, an African American, Barack Obama, was elected to the highest governmental position in the United States in 2007. On the other end of the spectrum, an African American young man, Trayvon Martin, was

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<sup>1</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie: The Book That Brought the Shock of Self-Revelation to Middle-Class Blacks in America*, 1st ed. (New York: Free Press, 1997), 57.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Dianne Savage, *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2012), 5.

murdered while walking home with a hoodie on his head in 2012. Another young Black man named Michael Brown was left to rot on a local street along the outskirts of Saint Louis, Missouri in 2014. George Floyd was sacrificed on a public street behind counterfeit money in 2020. Ahmaud Arbery met fatality while jogging through a neighborhood that same year. An African American woman, Kamala Harris, became the first female Vice President of the United States in 2021. However, Breonna Taylor and Atatiana Jefferson were assailed to death by law enforcement. The pendulum for self-esteem perpetually continues to swing back and forth as a new generation of Blacks who seemingly have no true connection to the Civil Rights Movement, no fidelity to the modern model of African American Christendom and consider the troubles of this country to be otherworldly find themselves at best unbothered. There's no loyalty to the struggle nor a leader whose character that hasn't been called into question concerning one issue or another. Yet, Henry Mitchell and Emil Thomas wanted to start a spark on a dusky street and wrote with the hope that their insight would help Black Christians near and far conclude that Black identity in its highest form is worth the fight. This is what I observed at the ministry sites where this project has developed. The congregations seem weak and bland on the outside. Their faith tradition wasn't boisterous nor flamboyant, so I wanted to discover if they had a self-esteem issue due to lack of facts about their own culture in the Bible and if that knowledge was gained through preachment, then their identity would rise to even higher heights.

Given the numerous obstacles that Black people in today's metropolitan environments confront, it is crucial and pertinent to preach about Black self-esteem. To assist Black people in overcoming negative stereotypes, reclaiming their ancestry, and celebrating their abilities and achievements, preaching that validates and strengthens Black self-esteem is crucial. Using three

publications that take various tasks toward the subject from an array of perspectives, this section will examine how preaching about Black self-esteem might be better informed and improved. How might the lessons and discoveries from these three works enhance the practice of preaching for Black self-esteem? That is the central research question. The first part delves into the work of Emil M. Thomas and Henry H. Mitchell's *Preaching for Black Self-Esteem*. The second part examines Jeremiah Wright's *What Makes You So Strong?* The third part analyzes Frederick Haynes' *Rockin' the World with Your Words: An Essential Guide to Developing and Delivering a Life Changing Message*. The conclusion assesses the relevance of these published works on how to approach preaching Black biblical characters for Black self-esteem.

### **Preaching for Black Self-Esteem**

This book offers a practical and theoretical framework for preaching that considers Black people's spiritual and psychological needs. The book contends that preaching to Black people's self-esteem isn't about encouraging narcissism or inflated senses of self-importance but rather about confirming the inherent worth and potential of Black people as individuals and within the Christian community. The book covers a wide range of disciplines, including sociology, history, psychology, and theology. It seeks to understand why Black people have low self-esteem and how to preach to raise it. Additionally, the book provides several sermon samples that showcase the ideas and methods of Black self-esteem preaching. If the research issue is to be answered using the book's thoughts and results in preaching about Black self-esteem, then the book has accomplished its goal as a conversation partner to this project. As the experiences and struggles of African Americans in an urban setting via the lens of self-esteem are presented, a thorough and organized analysis of the concept is vividly seen.

Some essential and pertinent issues are encompassed in the book pertaining to self-esteem for Black people. These include the factors that wither the self-esteem of Black people, its dimensions, and the social and historical environment in which Black people live. The book delves into the various aspects of self-esteem, encompassing one's self-concept, self-image, self-worth, self-respect, and self-confidence. Preaching can help people develop healthy self-esteem and reap the spiritual and psychological benefits of doing so. Based on its effects on Black people's psychological, emotional, physiological, and spiritual health, the book contends that self-esteem is crucial to their happiness and success. Additionally, the book contends that self-esteem is both a blessing bestowed by God and a dutiful burden owned by Blacks as witnessed through the history of the race<sup>3</sup>. It offers guidelines and methods for Black self-esteem sermons, with examples and study questions to demonstrate their application. There are four stages to the book's model of preaching that promotes Black self-esteem: 1) presenting a precis, or a synopsis, of self-esteem symptoms;<sup>4</sup> 2) choosing and analyzing biblical texts and themes that relate to those symptoms; 3) crafting and delivering a sermon that promotes and encourages self-esteem; and 4) reflecting on the sermon and its effect with an add-on of study questions. This model is effective because the majority of Christian clergy and educators simply don't study or evaluate the relevance of these scriptures to the Black community.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas, Emil, and Henry H. Mitchell., *Preaching for Black Self Esteem* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 30-33.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas and Mitchell., *Preaching for Black Self Esteem*, 22-26.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas and Mitchell., *Preaching for Black Self Esteem*, 24.

Let's examine the variety of self-esteem topics and sermons Thomas and Mitchell visited in the book-Black Caste, Black Characteristics, Black Continent, Black Capacity, Black Culture, and Oppressed Existence.

### ***Black Caste***

The content in this chapter illustrates how the caste system, an implementation of a social and psychological paradigm of distinguishing people on the background of their race, class, or gender, in America automatically treats Blacks as second-class citizens. In addition, it shows how the caste system brings out adverse reactions to its repugnance. The sermon from Matthew 15:38<sup>6</sup> entitled "Don't Count Me Out" exhibits how Jesus challenged the caste system and affirmed the value of those considered less than in ancient times of a patriarchal society.<sup>7</sup> Not only did Jesus show the worth of the excluded, but the preacher speaks of a future rally for the counted out as seen in the book of Revelation.

### ***Black Characteristics***

The characteristics in this chapter refer to the lively physical features unique to Black people such as creativity and the like. The personality of Black people mirrors their history and culture, as well as their spirituality. Furthermore, the text illustrates that preaching about these traits and sharing them as peculiar attributes of Black people can boost self-esteem. The sermon from Jeremiah 13:23 entitled "The Skin I'm In" notes that in antiquity the entire continent of Africa was once known as Ethiopia.<sup>8</sup> This preachment accentuates the power Blacks have when

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<sup>6</sup> Holy Bible, KJV. 2014. Thomas Nelson Pub.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas and Mitchell., *Preaching for Black Self Esteem*, 43-50.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas and Mitchell., *Preaching for Black Self Esteem*, 61.

they are not ashamed of the way God has created them. The second sermon in this chapter illuminates Psalm 139:14 where the powerful and compelling words I am wonderfully and fearfully is utilized to express that Black people were created with a distinctive purpose in the mind of God.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Black Continent***

How can we take pride in that which we do not know?<sup>10</sup> The authors trace the solid and deep link African Americans should aspire to have with Mother Africa, the continent of their ancestors. They contend that the Bible is stuffed with African credentials. The chapter states The Bible is full of positive references to Africa, the land of Moses' birth, Israel's infancy, and Jesus' early childhood. Any Bible concordance reveals the names of great Africans like Hagar, Abraham's wife; Ebed-melech, Jeremiah's Ethiopian deliverer; Simon, Jesus' cross bearer; and Queen Candace's Nubian treasurer.<sup>11</sup> This section brought out how the continent of Africa was a source and resource for self-esteem for black people in that it accorded them a sense of belonging and identity, a source of pride. At the same time, this section shows how preaching can assure and affirm the continent of Africa through its references and examples from its culture, history, and spirituality - looking once again at its past and how Africa has affected the entire world. The sermon drawn from 1 Peter 3:15 called "The Roots of the Spirit" to reflect how the African roots influence the belief system of African Americans.

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas and Mitchell., *Preaching for Black Self Esteem*, 67-75.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas and Mitchell., *Preaching for Black Self Esteem*, 77.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas and Mitchell., *Preaching for Black Self Esteem*, 77.

The African Traditional Religion (ATR) is affirmed and fulfilled in Christianity.<sup>12</sup> This kind of inspiring information built a fortitude within the writer to share this knowledge unashamedly with the congregations for this ministry project. Not only should Blacks be proud of their African heritage; they should correctly frame it as part of honoring the ancestors.

### ***Black Capacity***

This chapter focuses on the ability and potential of Africans to be achievers and contributors to industrious fields such as school, science, art, politics, and religion. It reveals how preaching can acknowledge and enhance the capacity, or wherewithal, of Black people and be used for God's glory to thrust humanity forward. The capacity of Black people has been a resource of self-esteem as it has enabled a race to overcome and transcend the barriers and obstacles that established limits and hinderances. The sermon from Matthew 21:42-44 entitled “The Cornerstone Conspiracy” affirms and celebrates the capacity of African Americans by using their achievement to conquer hurt and disappointment. It urges the idea of fulfilling the capacity with the help of inspiration from the Holy One. The sermon states, No one but God is the final arbiter of our destiny!<sup>13</sup> Not only is the self-esteem of the hearer reinforced, but the hearer is encouraged to know the one who conquered the conspiracy, the Chief Cornerstone, Jesus.

### ***Black Culture***

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas and Mitchell., *Preaching for Black Self Esteem*, 89.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas and Mitchell., *Preaching for Black Self Esteem*, 101.



The authors expound on how African American culture is looked down upon with inferiority. However, Blacks have always excelled by maintaining their cultural identity while acclimating to standard and inherited practices of a dominant culture. Just as Black clothing, food, dance, social conventions, music, literature, art, and worship symbolize customs and values, preaching can, in like fashion, be a defender and a promoter of Black culture, and serve as an entryway into conversation with other cultures. The culture of black people is shown to be a grandstand of self-esteem. In the past and currently, as usage of reflection and visualization, the soul and spirit of the Black preacher is shaped and expressed by using communication and interpretation as a means to correspond identity and ancestry.<sup>14</sup> The chapter also indicated that preaching supports Black culture, using its elements and traditions as illustrations of Black thoughts and behaviors treating and preserving them as a unique, colorful, and diversified treasure. The sermon from 2 Timothy 1:6 entitled "Epistle to the Young, Gifted, and Black" acclaims the intelligence and intellectual gifts Black people possess and put on display in private spheres and public places.<sup>15</sup> This is the very reason this Black preacher as writer and herald must SAY IT LOUD!

### ***Oppressed Existence***

The authors analyze the alienated, neglected, and abused position of the massive groups and society members by the superior, mighty, and robust classes and systems, such as slavery, discrimination, racism, and poverty. Preaching this topic as the means of squaring up and

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas and Mitchell., *Preaching for Black Self Esteem*, 113.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas and Mitchell., *Preaching for Black Self Esteem*, 122-130.

questioning anything that contributes to, and proceeds oppression leads to perpetual presence of adverse conditions for Blacks can lead to low self-esteem. Nevertheless, the African American experience inspires and mobilizes those in the race to resist and demand change. The chapter also explains how one can preach in a way that asserts and glorifies the lives of an oppressed people by drawing from their stories and experiences as a reference and presenting God's notion of justice and mercy. The sermon from Luke 18:2-8 entitled “The Cry for Justice”<sup>16</sup> as preached after the 1992 Los Angeles riots indicates how persistence to demand what’s right will avail itself in due time.

The writer would celebrate this future breakthrough with the lyrics from the song Hold On Just a Little While Longer<sup>17</sup>:

Hold on just a little while longer  
Hold on just a little while longer  
Hold on just a little while longer  
Everything will be alright  
Everything will be alright

Thomas and Mitchell gave the writer the reason why to preach Black biblical characters to boost Black self-esteem; now let’s analyze what to say when preaching sermons about Black self-esteem.

### **What Makes You So Strong?**

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas and Mitchell., *Preaching for Black Self Esteem*, 133-141.

<sup>17</sup> Cleophus Robinson, Jr. Consolation, Savoy Records, 1980, YouTube.com, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_Hbl1f1PMww](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Hbl1f1PMww) Accessed 2 Feb. 2024.

In the book, *What Makes You So Strong*, by Jeremiah Wright, biblical characters and situations are incorporated into the narratives, and these are used as powerful tools to enlighten the heroic characters and the challenges they faced. Wright applies his spiritual lens to present a theological construct for understanding the plights of Black folks, and he also underscores the contemporary validity of scripture as the source of guidance and strength.

A prominent example of Wright's mastery of biblical imagery to boost self-esteem is his move beyond individual struggles to address broader historical and the experiences of Black people, in the hallmark sermon "What Makes You So Strong" of this book from Judges 16:4-31 to underscore the vital status of African Americans by stating, " You see, God has a work that he wants to do through African Americans - a people who have known hatred, yet who still have the strength to love; a people who have known degradation, yet who still have the strength to stand tall and produce giant after giant in field after field; a people who have known belittlement and humiliation, yet who have maintained their integrity and kept their souls intact; a people who have been lied to, lied on, and lied about, yet who still have the strength to forgive and to build strong families, regardless of those families' configuration."<sup>18</sup> Wright emphasizes the power of black people as instruments of God's will. Through this narrative, Wright enables Black people to recognize themselves as agents of revolution and transformation, capable of overcoming oppression and finding triumphant liberation.

Moreover in the same sermon, Wright uses the case of Queen Esther, who is a strong person willing to sacrifice her life for her community, as an illustration of the resistance and

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<sup>18</sup> Jeremiah A. Wright Jr. *What Makes You So Strong? Sermons of Joy and Strength from Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr.* (Kindle Locations 1875-1878). Kindle Edition.

defiance of Black women when staring in the face of perilous challenges through the appearance of Esther's declaration as found in Esther 4:16, "If I perish, I perish."<sup>19</sup> Wright honors the indomitable spirit of Black women who have shown when opposed by oppressive methods, they are willing to fight for justice and equality for themselves and all the more for those they dearly love. By equating African Americans with Esther's bravery and resilience, Wright gives them a sense of dignity and dominion to act by presenting them as courageous and determined radical revolutionaries.

Likewise in the same preachment, Wright points to the historical legacies of slavery and contemporary forms of oppression by explicating the enduring plight of Black people. Wright highlights the tenacity and strength of Black people by asking, "How were you able to survive the horrors of slavery, to survive the loss of two hundred million in the Atlantic Ocean, to survive the hatred of Europeans, to survive a holocaust five times worse than Hitler's holocaust, and to then take a Jesse Owens over on Hitler's turf and stick it in Hitler's ear?" How were you able to do that? What makes you so strong, black people? Is it something in your African blood? Is it something in your African psyche? Is it something thing in your African soul? Is it something in your African spirit?"<sup>20</sup> Using a biblical context to frame the struggles of black individuals, Wright infuses their experiences with a meaning and a purpose, raising their self-esteem and validating them as worthy human beings.

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<sup>19</sup> Wright Jr., *What Makes You So Strong? Sermons of Joy and Strength from Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr.* Location 1804.

<sup>20</sup> Wright Jr., *What Makes You So Strong? Sermons of Joy and Strength from Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr.* Locations 1827-1830.

Notably, Wright's mastery of biblical imagery to boost self-esteem is seen in his account of the story of Samson, an individual whose physical strength is revered and who ultimately fell due to his vulnerability to temptation. By linking Samson's weakness for Delilah to the lack of resistance of black people to external interference that causes their self-destruction, this portrait of Samson becomes a convincing parallel. Wright puts the subtitle "Samson's Weakness"<sup>21</sup> over a section that underlines the fact that this biblical narrative has an everlasting relevance, this being the conflict between love and lust, strength and weakness is an issue which impacted as much the present as the past. This breach of solitude not only deprives the reader of the opportunity to know Samson as an absorbed biblical hero but also turns him into a mirror reflecting the inner struggles and moral dilemmas of the modern man, especially the Black man.

"What makes you so strong, black man?",<sup>22</sup> "What makes you so strong, black woman?",<sup>23</sup> and "What makes you so strong, black people"<sup>24</sup> are recurring catchphrases throughout Jeremiah Wright's seminal sermon, spotlighting the resilience embedded in the African American experience. With these questions, Wright underscores that African Americans have shown remarkable pliability, which can aptly be related to the oppression and marginalization they have been subjected to for centuries. This recurrence of these mantras

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<sup>21</sup> Wright Jr., *What Makes You So Strong? Sermons of Joy and Strength from Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr.* Location 1816.

<sup>22</sup> Wright Jr., *What Makes You So Strong? Sermons of Joy and Strength from Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr.* Locations 1775, 1776, 1778, 1781, 1785, 1797.

<sup>23</sup> Wright Jr., *What Makes You So Strong? Sermons of Joy and Strength from Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr.* Locations 1798, 1801, 1804, 1806, 1811, 1813, 1814, 1819.

<sup>24</sup> Wright Jr., *What Makes You So Strong? Sermons of Joy and Strength from Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr.* Locations 1819, 1824, 1826, 1829, 1830.

reveal how resolute and spiritually sustaining the African American community is, fostering self-esteem with pride and power against adversity.

Additionally, Wright employs expressions like "They tried the poisons of self-hatred"<sup>25</sup> to reflect the systematic oppression and racism that African Americans have experienced through many generations. Wright draws attention to the subtle means of how white supremacy has tried to diminish the self-worth and self-esteem of Blacks through the distortion of Black history being severely tarnished, and by promoting harmful stereotypes based on appearance, intelligence, and character. Still, Wright postulates that Black people in society have proved to be very robust, have defied different expectations, and have continued to excel in various fields of their choice, thus showing their gallantry amid racial insensitivity.

Wright effectively utilizes biblical imagery to cast light on the valor of Black people and the obstacles they have surmounted. Using ancient narratives as the mirror to real-life struggles features the lasting essence of biblical scripture in providing comfort, inspiration, and guidance to those facing adversity. In the delivery of the sermons presented in *What Makes You Strong*, Wright honors the strength and the victory of Black individuals who, apart from that, prove the powerful influence of faith, courage, and determination of self-esteem while attaining justice, freedom, and liberation.

Wright provided the writer with what to say via words and catchphrases when preaching Black biblical characters to boost Black self-esteem; now let's examine how to say it when preaching sermons about Black self-esteem.

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<sup>25</sup> Wright Jr., *What Makes You So Strong? Sermons of Joy and Strength from Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr.* Location 1782.

### **Rockin' the World with Your Words**

Among the voices that echo as globally influential among African American pulpитеers is Dr. Frederick Douglass Haynes, III. Haynes has demonstrated his religious, spiritual, and social service towards uplifting the oppressed members of society, particularly Black people. His book *Rockin' the World with Your Words* shows that he is not only an evangelist but a symbol of hope and empowerment, as much in his words as they serve as catalysts in changing the way African Americans perceive themselves. Transformational messages and speeches by important Black figures throughout history and sacred rhetoric spoken by proclaimers in hallowed places have always been significant and powerful. It shows that speeches and words of hope have helped the Black community believe toward a positive metanoia of self-esteem.

Within the framework of his sermons, Haynes carefully brings out biblical truths underlying his accounts and making the whole narrative both spiritually fulfilling and emotionally chastening. Haynes portrays his life problems and successes in his sermons, therefore manifesting how faith plays a significant role and demonstrates the importance of perseverance which builds up confidence to have optimistic self-esteem. He encourages and motivates his listeners through storytelling that uplifts hope in Jesus. Haynes makes mention of interactions with his grandfather bringing out the punch line of self-determination and the concern to define himself, the central idea that runs through all his preaching.<sup>26</sup> Through his

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<sup>26</sup> Dr Haynes, Frederick D. *Rockin' the World with Your Words: An Essential Guide to Developing and Delivering a Life Changing Message*. 8-9. N/A. Kindle Edition.

sermons, Haynes functions both as an informer and inspirer, a dissolver of constituents' doubts, asking them the penetrating question: "Who am I?" pondering the personal politics of self-definition.<sup>27</sup>

Dr. Haynes' sermons utilize his authenticity and relatability as connectors to the head and heart strings of the listeners. In this way, he creates a blockbuster masterpiece with the Black community by intertwining his story of struggle, success, and redemption into a message. As a result, it remains unforgettable in the minds of his audience. He deepens that connection with the listeners by using his own experience and vulnerability in the process. His portrait of genuineness is refreshingly sterling and calls forth powerful emotions among listeners. He underlines as one of his pieces of advice that "Instead of seeking to discover who you are, decide who you are. Evaluate your experiences and lessons learned from the story of your life."<sup>28</sup> This quote harbors the motive to define self on one's terms, boosting blacks' self-worth and empowerment.

Issues of self-esteem and empowerment as crucial aspects of Haynes' preaching can also be observed in how he mobilizes the oppressed and frail. Indeed, throughout his preaching, he never ceases to advocate for those with no power and voice. He realizes that through self-esteem, individuals can transform their lives; he models it aptly, saying, "The power of your voice comes

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<sup>27</sup> Dr Haynes, *Rockin' the World with Your Words: An Essential Guide to Developing and Delivering a Life Changing Message*. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Dr Haynes, *Rockin' the World with Your Words: An Essential Guide to Developing and Delivering a Life Changing Message*. 21.



from knowing who you are."<sup>29</sup> He sets up a healthy environment that boosts the confidence and belief of Black people in themselves and acknowledges their value and powers. Besides telling the stories and offering viable solutions for everyday problems, Haynes uses his sermons to make and bring peace coupled with guidance and direction into the lives of his listeners so that they can still cherish the distinctive quality thereof and embrace their inner selves to pursue their path for personal fulfillment and power.

Beyond his pulpit ministry, Dr. Haynes is dedicated to challenging governmental policy efforts directed at the underlying socioeconomic injustices and other social amenities. He recognizes that spiritual sustenance as a conduit can be offered to minorities as a means of exposure toward profitable economic opportunities for growth and development. Through his involvement in these efforts, the future of African Americans is being formulated to achieve harmony, fairness, and justice.

The sermons from Dr. Haynes come from a prodigious well of knowledge and serve as a great source of encouragement and strength for African Americans while they endure commonplace troubles and current tragedies. These deposits of self-esteem make them feel cared for and inspired to persevere. Instead of shrinking from telling what he sees, Dr. Haynes preaches with an abundance of conviction based on truth, validity, and his unshakable principles surrounding social justice. As a result, his sermons become an instrument for uplifting the spirit of Black people and imparting high self-esteem and empowerment.

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>29</sup> Dr Haynes, *Rockin' the World with Your Words: An Essential Guide to Developing and Delivering a Life Changing Message*. 21.

From these writings, I created a methodology of how to preach Black biblical characters for Black self-esteem. First, explore a relevant topic or issue that has real world implications in an urban setting. The subject must be one that aligns with biblical text yet create some type of tension to create an ambiance of pride and triumph. Thomas and Mitchell encouraged the writer to be a bold preacher concerning bold matters in the interest of the betterment of the psyche of African Americans.

Next, conjure words and phrases that uplift the Black biblical character to be seen or viewed in the best light. I refer to this as forgecasting. I define forgecasting as constructing a part of an assignment with the intent of it reaching its highest capability. For example, Adam may be depicted as some prehistoric human living in a perfect place, but Adam as a Black man was destined to be the first man to change the arc of human civility because Black men always bring change when they are involved in godly projects. Another example of forgecasting is Noah's ark was more than just the ark of safety. It was a reservoir from a storm during an unrelenting downpour of rain on a rescue mission of deliverance. Wright's skill to carefully combine experiential wit of living life while being despised and downtrodden informed the writer to dial into the cultural innuendo that makes being Black in America uniquely revolutionary.

Lastly, find as many right side ups in a biblical text, in particular when Black biblical characters are challenged with upside down circumstances to enhance the self-esteem of Black people. In other words, draw congregants into a mindset of finding ourselves for ourselves (FoFo) because Black people have always had to locate themselves physically, mentally, and spiritually for the sake of survival while climbing the slippery slopes of self-esteem in this

lifetime. Haynes makes it clear to the writer that transformation is inevitable when the preacher is purposeful in bringing out positive melanated metanoia for the sake of boosting self-esteem during the sermon presentation.

## CHAPTER 4

### EXPANDING THE HOMILETICAL ISSUE

Two millennia after Christianity spread from Asia Minor to Africa, Europeans introduced a westernized form of Christianity to America. Through slavery and colonization, a manipulated Christianity was forced onto Black people in the Americas. During its initial expansion, the church expanded in Syria, Asia Minor, Italy, Achaia, and Africa. Christian leadership structures were present in Carthage, Alexandria, Hippo Regius, and Ethiopia which were all ancient cities in Africa. All modern forms of Christian orthodoxy have also been found to have origins in Africa. Despite this cadre of evidence, Christianity has been referred to as a white religion and attributed to Europeans. The promotion of Christianity as a European religion has left many Black Christian communities to accept it with no regard of historical verification.

The belief that Christianity is a white religion has impacted many Black Christians. The very idea has deterred many Black people from embracing Christianity. The lack of awareness of the African chronicle in the Bible has made many Blacks question their connection to the Christian faith. Hence, revealing to Black churchgoers the true nature of Christianity would likely enlighten this group, e.g., stating the truth and affirming to parishioners that Black Bible characters exist. Teaching Black Christians that Christianity was adopted in Africa before Europeans claimed the origins of the religion as their own would change the lens of empowerment for many African American Christians. Many scholars have written about Black people's history and their presence in the *Bible*.<sup>30</sup> These works reveal Black history and the role of Black characters in it.

Western scholars have devoted time and effort to producing articles and books that downplay the presence of Black people on Earth and their importance to human societies. They have advanced propaganda to make Blacks appear inferior to whites. Black people are typically portrayed as having barbaric civilizations and inferior intelligence to that of other races. Blacks have been discriminated against and are a symbol of backwardness in the Western World. They have been depicted as having no relevant history or historic achievements. Whites want the world, including Black people, to believe that Blacks have no meaningful history and are essentially irrelevant. Black people need to understand that they have a rich and storied history, which, whether documented or not, still belongs to them. Many authors have written books comprising well-researched information as to the history of Black African peoples. The texts

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<sup>30</sup> William Watley D, and Raquel Annette St. Clair. *The African Presence in the Bible*. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2000), 49.

indicate the existence of advanced African civilizations centuries before Whites ever set foot on the continent.

### **Chancellor Williams: The Destruction of Black Civilization**

In his book, *Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.*, Chancellor Williams describes the rich history of Black people. Williams goes back four millennia to a Black history that is not widely known.<sup>31</sup> He presents evidence gathered during sixteen years of research, showing that Africans civilizations go back as far as 4500 B.C. Wars, conquests, and migrations have all contributed to the distortion of Black African history. The author claims that one can piece together traces of this history to compile relevant information. No existing human civilization lacks any meaningful history. However, in the wake of years of oppression and discrimination, Black history has remained largely untraced, undocumented, and undeveloped.

Williams further claims that, after their successful conquest of Blacks, Whites completely and intentionally erased Black history. He claims that this was done by the Black race. According to Williams, Blacks allowed Whites to take control of their lives, culture, and heritage. I would grant that Blacks have had a role in the demise of their own history. Williams's book presents information on African civilizations that existed before the coming of White people. Africa had leaders who were strong role models and led their people to prosperity. However, African civilizations were destroyed after the arrival of Whites in Africa. Ancient

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<sup>31</sup> Chancellor Williams, *Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race From 4500 B.C. To 2000 A.D.*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Third World Press, 1972), 50-56.

Egypt was one of the world's early great civilizations, and Egyptians were Black people.<sup>32</sup>

However, White Asians migrated into Egypt, overthrew Black Egyptians, and forced them southward following many years of integration. The history of Black people who fought slavery is not well documented. Stories of Queen Nzinga, for example, need to be made into movies to encourage Blacks.

### **Jesse Barber: The Negro of the Earlier World**

Jesse Barber writes that a race that does not have a clear history is a race that does not have a backbone, that lacks self-respect.<sup>33</sup> He states that it is prudent for Black people to learn their rich history and embrace their traditions. Many Black Christians, along with the general Black population in the Americas do not even know that they have a history prior to the early 1600s. Years of oppression and discrimination have severed their connections to their roots. Black people lack self-esteem because they see themselves as mere descendants of slaves. They feel inferior to Whites because the attitude of inferiority was forced on them by their White oppressors. Black history is not taught in schools, nor is it documented in any American library. I

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<sup>32</sup> Willams, *Destruction of Black Civilization* 56.

<sup>33</sup> Jesse Barber, *The Negro of the Earlier World: An Excursion into Negro Ancient History* (1915), 2nd ed. (The A.M.E. Book Concern, 2019), 29.

agree with Barber that oppression and discrimination have made Black people forget that they have a history. Whites erased all traces of Blacks in history in an attempt to control them.

In his book, Barber states that Whites made Blacks think that they never had a history. Whites have redefined slavery as a gift to Blacks, suggesting that they should be grateful to Whites for their redemption.<sup>34</sup> Africa has been labeled a land of savagery, and Black people have been encouraged to thank Whites for bringing civilization. Black people have been taught that their motherland is filled with uncivilized people, many dying from hunger and war. Depictions of Africa as filled of diseases, starvation, poverty, and civil unrest has been promulgated by the American media, with the implication that Black Americans should be thankful that their ancestors were brought to North America. These are some of the lies that Barber and other African American activists have struggled to expose.

Barber details in his book that no other race has endured atrocities on the level that Blacks have. Africa remains the most defiled and exploited land, and Black people remain the most disenfranchised modern human beings.<sup>35</sup> Black people have been dehumanized and compelled to see themselves as inferior to other races. Traditional Black African ways of life have been destroyed; much of their history has been erased; and slavery is all that most African Americans know about their history. Africa was invaded by Europeans and others, and many people in Africa were brought to America against their will. Blacks in the United States are a people without a history.

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<sup>34</sup> Barber, *The Negro of the Earlier World*, 17.

<sup>35</sup> Barber, *The Negro of the Earlier World*, 18.

African people were in the cradle of world civilization, and yet they have been relegated to stereotypes labeling them as lazy, poor, and unintelligent. Even today, many white people still think they have superior intelligence to that of Black people. Society has implemented official policies that make it difficult for Black people to progress and regain their status. Over four centuries in North America, Black people have lost their identity and sense of self-worth, which has wholly disadvantaged them compared to all other races. The self-esteem of Black people has been wounded; hence, it is difficult for some Blacks to adhere to a faith that they believe belongs to their oppressors.

### **Joseph Atwill: The Roman Conspiracy to Invent Jesus**

One of the greatest lies that has been told to the world is that Jesus was White, with blonde hair and blue eyes. The images commonly seen hanging in churches and homes are likenesses of the image of Cesare Borgia. Pope Alexander the 6<sup>th</sup> ordered Leonardo da Vinci to paint a portrait of his son, Cesare Borgia, to depict Jesus Christ. The earlier images of Jesus as a dark-skinned Hebrew man were not going to appeal to the Western World. Hatred of Blacks resulted in Christopher Columbus and others being commissioned to explore the world and conquer the Blacks. Some researchers have discovered controversial evidence revealing that the name “Jesus” was invented by the Romans as the letter “J” was not introduced until the 1500s. The Hebrew language also did not include the letter “J,” and so there is no proof that the Savior’s name was Jesus. Several scholars have written about this revelation.



In his book, *Caesar's Messiah: The Roman Conspiracy to Invent Jesus: Flavian Signature Edition*, Joseph Atwill affirms the claim that Jesus was a Roman creation. In his book, Atwill illustrates how the character of Jesus Christ is a Roman creation to infuse and control the world through deceit.<sup>36</sup> The idea of a peaceful messiah was one way to ensure that the Roman Empire would rule effortlessly while placating the masses. Atwill notes that neither Jesus nor the Hebrew people were White. Countless rewritings of the Bible has led to a loss of truth. Many scrolls of the original Bible that Whites discovered have been altered to suit Whites' story.

The Roman Empire ruled most of the world at the time Christianity was spreading. The Roman Empire was pagan, and there are verified records of persecution of Christians by the Romans. They embraced Christianity only to consolidate their rule as they could not contend with a revolution. Christianity was spreading, and the Romans needed to retain their power, which is why they decided to uphold Christianity.<sup>37</sup> Despite taking Christianity as it was, however, the Romans altered many aspects of the Bible to their own advantage. They could not allow a Black religion to dominate the Western World; therefore, the ruling class and religious leaders decided to take pieces of the Bible and reassemble them to make it a White religion. Thus Jesus Christ became White, and so it remains today.

### **James Valliant and Warren Fahy: Creating Christ**

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<sup>36</sup> Joseph Atwill, *Caesar's Messiah: The Roman Conspiracy to Invent Jesus: Flavian Signature Edition*, 2nd ed. (Scotts Valley: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011), 6.

<sup>37</sup> Atwill, *Caesar's Messiah*, 44.

In his book, *Creating Christ: How Roman Emperors Invented Christianity*, James Valliant provides information as to how a White Jesus was created. Pope Alexander the 6<sup>th</sup> must have had significant support to have the confidence to commission da Vinci to paint his son Cesare Borgia as the face of Jesus.<sup>38</sup> Modern Christianity was conceived by the Roman Empire, and most of what we read in the New Testament has been altered. Valliant explains how various Roman Emperors were involved in creating the modern Jesus. Extensive altering of the Bible has taken place over the years to produce the modern New Testament. The “Whitening” of the Bible was a strategy of dominance by the Romans. There are zero Caucasian relationships in the Bible, and this was never going to be accepted in the Western World. Hence, the Roman Emperors ordered the creation of a version of the Bible that would appear European and thus be accepted by Europeans.

According to Valliant, Christianity was born of a war between the Roman and Hebrew peoples. The Romans’ invasion of Hebrew lands brought significant oppression and discrimination against the Jews. The Romans levied major taxes on the Hebrews and passed discriminative laws to govern them.<sup>39</sup> Forcing the Jews to erect statues of Roman Emperors in their places of worship was oppressive. Escalating authoritarian rule by the Romans led to war between them and the Jews for many years. The creation of Christ was a way to reduce conflict

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<sup>38</sup> James Stevens Valliant and Warren Fahy, *Creating Christ: How Roman Emperors Invented Christianity*, 1st ed. (New York: Crossroad Press, 2016), 108.

<sup>39</sup> Stevens and Fahy, *Creating Christ*, 109.

and foster peaceful control and dominance over the Jews. Religious fraud had been employed by Roman conquerors before. This time, it would take place in the form of Christianity.

The whole idea of a White Jesus is a lie that worked well for the Romans, and for white people in general. The Eurocentric nature of modern Christianity is evidenced by the commissioning of an artistic depiction of a White Jesus.<sup>40</sup> The image of Cesare Borgia is the historical face of Jesus Christ. Sadly, even Black Christians have been convinced of the lie; they believe that Jesus was White. Millions of works of literature and art have depicted Jesus and, sometimes, even God as White. The lie was so great that it would seem a great offense to tell the world the truth about a dark-skinned Messiah. Indeed, even many Blacks do not believe the story of a Black Jesus.

Christians worldwide have faith that Christianity is about bringing people together to spread the Gospel. The Gospel should be preached to the whole world to ensure that humankind inherits the Kingdom of God in Heaven. Christians are also taught to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who was sent to save mankind from sin and who died for humanity's sake. Valliant produces thirty years of research indicating that there are reasons why that this was not the reason for the Romans' promotion of Jesus. He suggests that the main reason for promoting Jesus was a war strategy of peaceful dominance and control. Many Christians do not know this, especially Black Christians who feel that they are inferior to Whites.

### **American White Supremacy: The Impact of Biblical Personalities as White**

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<sup>40</sup> Stevens and Fahy, *Creating Christ*, 109.

As Black people were unaware of the true history of Christianity, Whites came with a Eurocentric religion and forced their interpretation on Black slaves. The arrival of missionaries in Africa is documented as the inception of Christianity in Africa, which is a lie. Scholars and historians have provided evidence indicating that some of the earliest origins of Christianity were in Africa. The Hebrew people traded and intermarried with Africans long before the arrival of white people. The history taught today overlooks all of this. Blacks have been convinced that Christianity is a white religion and that the characters in the Bible were mainly white men.

To intensify their dominance and superiority, Europeans whitened the Bible so that Blacks would pay tribute to the white religion. They forced Blacks to accept the religion that clearly placed them at the bottom of the hierarchy of humanity. Black people have been forced to believe that they are the children of a lesser God and a forsaken people. They have been forced to take up a religion that has been altered intentionally to advance a white supremacy agenda. Strategies were put in place to ensure that whites appeared to be the superior race. The total domination of Blacks came after they were forced to denounce their faith, religions, and cultures. They became dependent on the whites' way of life. This dependence on whites led to the colonization and enslavement of Black people.

**Jonathan Wilson -Hartgrove and William Barber: Reconstructing the Gospel**

In his book, *Reconstructing the Gospel: Finding Freedom from Slaveholder Religion*, Rev. Barber explores the history of Christianity being forced on Black slaves. He looks at the circumstances under which the religion was presented and concludes that it was a slaveholders'

religion.<sup>41</sup> Barber discusses how the faith was instilled in his ancestors through the oppressive hand of Whites. He claims that Christianity is a gospel of truth, peace, and prosperity, but this was not the message that Whites sent to Blacks. It has been recorded that in much of the world, Christianity was enforced through violence, wars, and executions. Christianity is supposed to be accepted willingly, but the White man's religion was forced upon the slaves. God is a loving father, and the Gospel should bring people closer to God in a loving way.

Barber parallels the writer's concerns for Blacks, revealing that the gospel has been a bitter pill for Blacks to swallow. Many modern Black Christians are followers of a religion that they do not understand. Conversion to Christianity provided a measure of safety for slaves. Those who converted were given better treatment. Given the pain and suffering to which the slaves had been subjected, many eagerly converted to Christianity to escape their White owners' brutality.<sup>42</sup> Most slave owners pretended to embrace a gospel that was at odds with their everyday actions. The Bible says that each man is equal before the eyes of God, and yet Whites still held their fellow human beings as slaves. Black slaves were abused, maimed, raped, and killed; such deeds were considered sins in the Bible, and yet Whites still claimed the gospel as their moral guidepost.

As they began to follow Christianity, Black people could not find any truth in the religion. In the eyes of Blacks, the pioneers of Christianity were evil hypocrites. Therefore, Blacks were at a crossroads with the religion, to accept it or question it. The impact of this

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<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove and William Barber, *Reconstructing the Gospel: Finding Freedom from Slaveholder Religion*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2020), 54.

<sup>42</sup> Wilson-Hartgrove and Barber, *Reconstructing The Gospel*, 46.

confusion can be seen in the dwindling numbers of Black Christians over the centuries. The minds of Black people have been challenged to believe that Christianity is a religion. Along with ever-increasing discrimination against Blacks, there came a desire among Black slaves to break free. Black Christians should realize that Christianity as it is currently understood is a White fabrication, that Whites have distorted the Bible story. The religion that they forced Black slaves to accept was altered, which is why Whites could not live up to the Bible's teachings. They could not use the teachings of a book they reconstructed to boost their White-supremacy agenda and world domination.<sup>43</sup>

### **Frances Fitzgerald: The Evangelicals**

In her book, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*, Frances FitzGerald tries to navigate the struggles of the American Christian church over the centuries. The book explores the various ways through which the shortcomings of White faith have been exposed. Christians have fought many wars over what is right and wrong. Many of these battles have left the church shaken and Christianity tested,<sup>44</sup> and Black people have been caught in the crossfire. Most of these wars have been a test of superiority and purity. As people converted to the faith through slavery, Blacks seemed to be caught in the center of White supremacy.

A Christian would be described as one who advocates following Christ as their Savior. If this is the general description of a Christian, then why would there be so many denominations

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<sup>43</sup> Fletcher Hill, Jeannine. *The Sin of White Supremacy*. 1st ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2017), 39.

<sup>44</sup> Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*, 1st ed. (Manhattan, New York City: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 25.

under one religion?<sup>45</sup> There have been countless wars between Christian denominations, e.g., Roman Catholics against Protestants, leading to numerous deaths and losses. America has not been left out of this ugly history.<sup>46</sup> Given this country's status as a mostly Protestant nation, Catholics often had a hard time surviving in this country. Black people were voiceless and did not have a side to choose. Because of the war, they were always on the side of their owners. The lack of choice and free will of Blacks was dehumanized and inflicted great harm to the self-esteem of Black Christians. The fact that their ancestors did not have a say in shaping their history excludes them from any entitlement in the religion.

The writer agrees with Fitzgerald; as it has stood for a very long time, white religion does not include Blacks, who are considered to be inferior human beings to be controlled and dominated by whites. Many whites view Blacks as worthless and faithless humans who would be lost if not for Whites' intervention. Whites have put themselves between Blacks and God. The whitening of Christianity has led to the destruction of African heritage and history. Christianity has been used to place whites in control, further consolidating their dominance. White supremacists have used white Christianity and the Bible to legitimize the notion of Black inferiority.

### **The Psychology of White Jesus on Black People of Faith**

The idea of a White Jesus is the basis of the Christian faith to which most Christians in the world relate. It would be devastating to many Christians, including Black Christians, if they

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<sup>45</sup> Kersey Graves. *The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors, Or, Christianity Before Christ*. 5th ed. (Columbia: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011), 19.

<sup>46</sup> Graves. *The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors, Or, Christianity Before Christ*., 27.

were to realize that Jesus Christ was a Black man. When Black people were enslaved, they were forced to accept Christianity. They were not given a choice. Forcing a controlling religion upon enslaved Blacks was enough to completely dominate them. Christianity has kept Blacks of African descent in bondage since they first set foot in this White Christian country. Christianity is, for many, a tool to escape bondage. This was not the case for Blacks, however, and it put many in a psychological prison. The mental and emotional state of Blacks has been impacted in various ways by the psychology of a white Jesus.

### **Charles Colcock Jones: Religious Instruction of the Negroes**

In his book, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the U.S.*, Charles Jones explores the issues of Christianity and slavery. To Blacks, white Jesus is what was taught from the time of slavery to the present. Converting to Christianity was a sign of enlightenment and being a good slave.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, to Blacks, the psychology of a white Jesus has been a shortcut to escape harsh treatment and obtain acceptance by white Christianity. Discrimination against the slaves and the strict measures that were taken to ensure that they stayed in line were extreme. These extreme treatments made Blacks fearful of whites, and, ironically, white Jesus would be their salvation. Slaves who accepted Christianity and were baptized were treated better than those who refused. Receiving Christ meant being a better slave and being rewarded with better roles.

Jones explains clearly in his book that enslaved Black people wanted nothing to do with white Jesus. He says that many slaves rebelled against the religion that was being preached to

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<sup>47</sup> Charles Colcock Jones, *Religious Instruction of the Negroes* (Sabin, Americana: Gale, 2012), 15.



them by the slavers.<sup>48</sup> It would not make sense for one's captor to preach to him about freedom and good deeds. Many slaves tried to escape, and the consequences of such attempts were uniformly fatal. Many slaves who tried to escape were either shot down or publicly whipped, hanged, or lynched. These punishments were typically performed in public by slave owners as a deterrent to other slaves. It was confusing to Black people that those carrying out these heinous punishments were same people who were preaching the gospel. This was why many slaves rebelled against Christianity.

In America today, as Blacks face continued discrimination, segregation, and overt racism, it is difficult for Black people to fathom a white Jesus. However, Black Christians subscribe to white Christianity due to a lack of informed opinion. Christianity is a form of hope for Blacks and a spiritual place of solace. As a people whose culture and history was taken from them, they had no other choice than to accept white Jesus and embrace him as their Savior. Many Black churches have adopted the story of white Jesus and learned to accept the idea. Many Black Christians do not know the truth, and they accept the idea of a white Jesus by default.

### **Franklin Frazier: Black Bourgeoisie**

Franklin Frazier gives essential revelations in his book, *Black Bourgeoisie: The Book That Brought the Shock of Self-Revelation to Middle-Class Blacks in America*. In his book, Frazier examines the structure and nature of the African American middle class. Learning to

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<sup>48</sup> Jones, *Religious Instruction of the Negroes*. 16.

accept and work through the psychology of a white Jesus and accept a White way of life, the Black bourgeoisie were able to navigate to their position. The author claims that the Black middle classes were reviled because they had accepted whites' way of life.<sup>49</sup> White people were also not happy about the Black bourgeoisie as they were navigating the country in ways not expected of Black people. To the Black community, the psychology of a white Jesus is complex. Some Black people are torn between accepting a white Jesus and denouncing this white Jesus.

Despite criticism by the white community and some in the Black community, the Black bourgeoisie had gone into the good books of other Black people. They symbolized success and a story of daring to dream. The Black bourgeoisie rose in the 1950s and 1960s and made their fortunes from what opportunities they could get. They moved from the South to the post-war North, where they succeeded in making their fortunes. However, for these Black people to achieve what was seen as success to many, Frazier notes that they had to forsake their roots and traditions. The same scenario has taken place in the Black church, and many modern Christians have lost their roots.<sup>50</sup> Many modern Black Christians have accepted the psychology of a white Jesus and embraced it. Blacks have struggled for acceptance in American society and accepting a white Jesus has been part of a working formula.

The need for acceptance in American society has been a constant struggle for Blacks. America is still a profoundly racist country, and institutional racism has been the saddest reality

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<sup>49</sup> Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie: The Book That Brought the Shock of Self-Revelation to Middle-Class Blacks in America*, 1st ed. (New York: Free press, 1997), 57.

<sup>50</sup> Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*. 61.

for Blacks. During and after slavery, Blacks were discriminated against and segregated throughout American society. Blacks have been subject to inhumane acts and mass incarceration due to the lack of a fair criminal justice system. Protests and demonstrations have been organized by the Black Lives Matter movement to try to improve Blacks' place in American society.<sup>51</sup> Black people have been forced to go beyond word-of-mouth to express their frustration and the disenfranchisement inflicted upon them by white Christianity. Accepting white Jesus has not gained Blacks any freedom in the modern world. Blacks should know about Jesus' identity in history to gain greater confidence and self-esteem.

The psychological impact of a white Jesus on Black Christians has not been discussed widely. The Black faithful have not taken time to deliberately discuss the psychology of a white Jesus. Black Christians appear to have adopted the faith of a white Jesus that was wholeheartedly sold to them and personalized within religion. The Black church has been around for centuries, but discussions about a White Jesus in Black churches have been far and few between. Whether from denial or sheer ignorance, it is true that the idea of a white Jesus is not a topic that Black Christians have had frequently or are ready to have. Blacks have carried on the teachings of the Gospel as it was taught to them by whites and have continued to pass this message down from generation to generation.

### **Carter Godwin Woodson: The History of the Negro Church**

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<sup>51</sup> Jennifer Jee-Lyn García and Mienah Zulfacar Sharif, "Black Lives Matter: A Commentary on Racism and Public Health", *American Journal of Public Health* 105, no. 8 (2015): 27-30, doi:10.2105/ajph.2015.302706.

In *The History of the Negro Church*, Carter Woodson takes us through Black church history, helping modern-day Black Christians understand the early Black church's struggles. Although conversion to Christianity was seen as an enlightened move by white people, there was no freedom, even after conversion.<sup>52</sup> Blacks were still under white rule, and there were standards that whites wanted to impose on the Black church. Woodson reveals that there were considerable differences between Black and white churches; hence, mutual and respected differences were needed. The traditions and ways of Black church life dictated that their methods of worship were different from those of the white church. Hence, it was only fair that the differences be upheld, and Black Christians were allowed to worship as they saw fit.

Woodson's book also focuses on the fact that the history of the Black church and contributions of Black Christians to the freedom of denominations have not been recognized. Blacks accepted the white man's religion and had a white Jesus psychology forced on them by white people, but they still did not get respect or acceptance from White supremacist American society.<sup>53</sup> Christianity was a way of offering people hope and sanctuary from the world's troubles, and it became a refuge for Blacks. Black people had endured years of torture and mistreatment, and a way to find peace would be welcomed. Religion offered to fill this void for Blacks. Since they had nothing but white religion, they embraced it. Black church history has depicted the evolution of the Black church through the centuries, but it has not been given the

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<sup>52</sup> Carter Godwin Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church*, 1st ed. (Suwanee, GA: 12th Media Services, 1921), 31.

<sup>53</sup> Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church*, 20.

provenance it deserves. The psychology of a white Jesus has not been a problem to Black Christians, but it has been used to create problems for Black Christians.

### **Jeannine Hill Fletcher: The Sin of White Supremacy**

Delving into the issue of White Jesus psychology and Black Christians, it is evident that this is the reason for Black Christians' low self-esteem. In her book, *The Sin of White Supremacy: Christianity, Racism, and Religious Diversity in America*, Jeanine Fletcher explores the topic of White supremacy.<sup>54</sup> According to Fletcher, religion has been one of the most significant contributors to the notion of White supremacy. White Jesus psychology has been behind the discriminative and Eurocentric Christianity that was spread around the world. Black people in America have been subjected to institutionalized oppression and segregation. The idea that Africans are beneath Whites and closer to the apes has been perpetuated across the Western World for centuries. The results of this discrimination and oppression are ongoing poverty, unemployment, inferior healthcare, and mass incarceration. Blacks have been denied basic human decency and forced to live in the shadows for centuries.

According to Fletcher, the idea of “the chosen ones” in the Christian faith has also perpetuated the segregation of Black people and encouraged racism. White Christians have elevated White Jesus psychology to escalate their White supremacy paradigm.<sup>55</sup> White Christians have portrayed themselves as God's chosen children. Eurocentric Christianity was designed to ensure that Jesus and other Biblical characters were portrayed as White. The goal of this strategy

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<sup>54</sup> Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy*, 1st ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2017), 12.

<sup>55</sup> Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy*, 15.

was to ensure that religion would fuel White supremacist ideologies and that the White race would dominate the other races.<sup>56</sup> Blacks were the most affected by this ideology as it has disenfranchised many and thrown them into poverty. Black slavery is one of the worst events to occur in our history. Africans faced cruelty and hatred from the slave owners in America. Therefore, White Jesus psychology has reinforced the sense of inferiority among faithful Black Christians.

### **Why Black People Love White Jesus**

To African Americans, Christianity is one of the main pillars of their history. Having been taken to the new world as slaves, Blacks were ripped from their roots and forced to live in a new and cruel environment. In this new land, Blacks were not allowed to speak in their native tongues. Their traditional cultural practices were also banned. Black people were separated from their families, sold, and transported to various places throughout the Americas, resulting in the loss of their culture and history. Newborn Black children had no history or tradition to inherit but that of Christianity, which was forced upon them by slave owners. The church was a beacon of hope for Blacks and a voice through which they could air their grievances. In fact, the civil rights movement used the church as a platform from which to launch and gain support for their activities.

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<sup>56</sup> Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy*. 17.

## **Charles Colcock Jones: Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States**

In his book, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States*, Charles Jones explains the importance of religion to Blacks.<sup>57</sup> Jones was a Presbyterian clergyman, and his primary role was to preach to slaves. He fought to ensure that salvation was preached to the slaves. Black people love the White Jesus ideology. It is a story of justice and equality that they can relate to, and through which they can find solace. It is through a White Jesus that they perceive opportunities for salvation and serving a higher purpose. Jones had accepted a White Jesus, and it kept him in a country where Black people were discriminated against and seen as inferior. Jones wanted his fellow Black people to experience a religion that allowed them to feel equal to Whites. Conversion to Christianity was a form of emancipation, and through it, Black people could attain some measure of privilege in the White world.

Jones acknowledged that it is only through Christianity that Blacks can be empowered. He believed that embracing a White Jesus would be profitable for Blacks in the long run. To empower Blacks was to ensure that they could heal from the horrors of their past. They would be able to learn how to read and write by accepting White religion.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, Blacks loved the idea of a White Jesus, as he was a symbol of salvation. It is through Christianity that Jones was able to give the slaves meaning and hope. Today, many in Black communities have embraced the Christian faith. Christianity is the significant element that marks Black history in America. The

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<sup>57</sup> Charles Colcock Jones, *Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States* [S.L.]. (BNPublishing.com, 2020), 73.

<sup>58</sup> Jones, *Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States*. 75.

church has played a considerable role in shaping the Black community into what it has become today.

Jones played a key role in ensuring that the slaves were given a right to receive the Gospel's good news. He spoke against the Papists for withholding the word of God from the slaves. Christianity was a shield against an oppressive and discriminative American society. Black Christians find comfort and solace in Biblical messages of equality and salvation, and it is through Christianity that Black people advocate for equality among all human beings. Black Christians love White Jesus, as it was the instrument through which slavery was abolished. Christians led the movement against slavery in the United States. In the post-civil war years, the Black church played a significant role in encouraging Black people and advancing the civil rights movement.

### **Albert Raboteau: Slave Religion -The Invisible Institution**

Albert Raboteau, in his book, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*, writes about first-hand stories of slaves who converted to Christianity. Raboteau writes about the new wave of conversion among the slaves to what is widely known as the slave religion.<sup>59</sup> Black people found a new message of hope in Christianity. They loved and embraced White Jesus given that, through him, they would discover consolation and justification. It is only through a White Jesus that Black people were going to make it through the hardships of America. It is only through Christianity that Black activists were able to relay their message of equality and justice. The stories of the Bible and, especially, Exodus were expounded

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<sup>59</sup> Albert J Raboteau, *Slave Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9.



upon by Black ministers. They preached of a day that Blacks would find freedom in a new promised land.

Raboteau explains that Christianity was a silent institution during slavery, but offered great help to the slaves. It was an emotional cushion against the pressures that the slaves were going through.<sup>60</sup> The church gave hope to the slaves, promising them better times ahead. African slaves were segregated and marginalized. The suffering they endured cannot be imagined. They needed a gateway through which they could relieve themselves of their pain. Christianity offered a sanctuary to Black people, and it has provided a voice to Black communities in the modern world, from taking care of Black orphans and widows to fighting for civil rights. The church has been at the forefront of the civil rights movement. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a church leader and the most renowned American civil rights activist. King fought for the inclusion of Black people in American society and for justice to prevail equally among all of its citizens.

African American Black Christians had neither the time nor the luxury to dig into the truths behind the religion. Most of the new converts were illiterate or semi-literate; hence, they were not well-suited to study the Bible and know the truth. To them, a White Jesus was as good as freedom and some sort of encouragement to continue living in the harsh world. Christianity was an asylum for slaves, who were tired of being mistreated and hated.<sup>61</sup> Treatment of Christian slaves was different from that of non-Christian slaves. To Whites, a converted slave was praised

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<sup>60</sup> Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 11.

<sup>61</sup> Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 16.

as having seen the light and become enlightened. Those who refused to renounce their culture and traditions were regarded as rebels and given harsh treatment. Hence, Christianity, which was viewed as a white religion at the time, was a silent institution. Christianity offered education to some slaves and reassured them that every man was created equal. The Exodus story is also related to slavery and is one of the most prominent reasons why Black Christians embrace white Jesus.

### **Barbara Savage: The Politics of Black Religion**

According to Barbara Savage, in her book, *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us: The Politics of Black Religion*, to Black people, Christianity was a weapon and tool for achieving power.<sup>62</sup> Black Christians love a white Jesus as it is through a white Jesus they can gain a glimpse of power. Savage mentions that Black people took up this faith that did not belong to them and personalized it. She claims that Black people have upheld the Christian faith over the years. They have fought over it as though they were the pioneers. The religious politics seen within Black churches has been dramatic. Despite Blacks learning to love white Jesus, they could not gather under one unified church. The Black church's battle for supremacy ran deep, and separation became the only solution to these wars. Since the 1800s, when many Black people converted to Christianity, there has never been one unified Black church.

Savage observes that there have been enormous differences among congregants on various fronts. The intellectual difference was one of the main causes of separation. With the

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<sup>62</sup> Barbara Savage, *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us: The Politics of Black Religion* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2008), 5.

abolition of slavery, there were different classes of freed slaves. Those who were lucky enough to receive some education thought of themselves as better than their uneducated counterparts.<sup>63</sup> They formed separate churches according to their intellectual capabilities. Theological differences also ran deep in Black churches, and each group came up with specific doctrines about the Christian faith. As these doctrines became different, many sub-groups of Black church sprang up. Denominations resulted from differences in philosophies, ways of worship, and significant beliefs. Political differences also led to the creation of a variety of Black churches.

Black Christians still loved the White Jesus, and never at any point did the Black church try to uncover the truth. The main reason for this is that of power that American Blacks had not felt before. In studies of Black history, it is nearly impossible to separate church and power. Most influential Black people have been men of God and the church.<sup>64</sup> Through their Christian faith, Black people could find a way to push for their civil rights. To affirm the power and religion argument, it is useful to look at the life of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King was a man of the church, and through the church he became powerful. Shaking hands with the leaders of White-dominated America, Dr. King was able to reach out to Black communities through the church's power. Power and politics were the main reasons why modern Black Christians loved the story of a White Jesus. Separating from this White Jesus would mean chaos and loss of power for the Black community.

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<sup>63</sup> Savage, *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us*, 5.

<sup>64</sup> Savage, *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us*, 7.

### **The Image of Jesus Painted by Warner Sallman**

The image of Jesus Christ has been one of the more controversial Christian topics in the modern world. As research continues to support that Jesus was a dark-skinned Hebrew with “wooly” hair, many still cling to the traditional image of a White Jesus. Besides, “the head of Christ,” the portrait painted by Leonardo da Vinci, was recognized mainly by the Roman Catholic Church and European Christians. The portrait had been commissioned by Pope Alexander the 6<sup>th</sup>, depicting the face of his son. The Pope ordered Leonardo da Vinci to paint his son to represent the figure of Christ to ensure that Christianity would be defined as white European Christianity. It was one of the main strategies to “whiten” the Bible and ensure that Eurocentric Christianity was promulgated throughout the world. Whites have worked to ensure that Christianity is associated with them as much as possible, and they have whitened all Bible characters. These were strategies to consolidate white power in society and demonstrate their superiority. White religion was supposed to complement white supremacy.

America reached the dominant position amongst the world’s nations, just as Rome was at the time of the commissioning of the painting of the face of white Jesus. America was a white supremacist society, too, and the population was largely Protestant. Hence, Americans did not want to adopt the image of Christ painted by Leonardo da Vinci. A Chicago-born painter named Warner Sallman came to the rescue. An American of Swedish descent, Sallman was a religious Protestant Christian. One night, he had a vision of Christ and woke up the next day and drew the

face of Jesus.<sup>65</sup> The Jesus that this painter envisioned was a white man with blonde hair and blue eyes. After the artist finished his work, many churches and religious leaders were pleased with the outcome. To whites, a white Jesus represented their presence in the Bible and the salvation story,<sup>66</sup> and the painting of a white Jesus cemented the Eurocentric ideologies of Christianity. A white Jesus ensured that white supremacy would be maintained and even strengthened.

To many American Protestants, this new image of Christ was significantly more appealing than those that had come before. The world's Savior was supposed to be a white man. A white supremacist world would not allow the salvation of all humankind to rest in the hands of a man of color. Warner probably did not care about white supremacy, but his painting was used by a greater power than he could imagine, propelling racist and Eurocentric Christian doctrines. Billy Graham, one of the most renowned preachers of his time, was even heard making controversial statements, claiming that the new image of Christ represented the Christ that the American people needed. Graham claimed that earlier depictions of Christ represented him as weak and skinny.<sup>67</sup> The new painting by Sallman showed Christ as a strong, white man. Americans would relate to this image as it represented a dominant America.

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<sup>65</sup> Mark Rosen, "Much-Beloved, Much-Maligned 'Head of Christ' Has Graced Many Walls — And Now A Dallas Museum," *The Dallas Morning News*, 2018, <https://www.dallasnews.com/arts-entertainment/visual-arts/2018/07/15/much-beloved-much-maligned-head-of-christ-has-graced-many-walls-and-now-a-dallas-museum/>.

<sup>66</sup> Watley and St. Clair, *The African Presence in the Bible*. 53.

<sup>67</sup> Mark Rosen, "Much-Beloved, Much-Maligned 'Head of Christ' Has Graced Many Walls — And Now A Dallas Museum," *The Dallas Morning News*, 2018, <https://www.dallasnews.com/arts-entertainment/visual-arts/2018/07/15/much-beloved-much-maligned-head-of-christ-has-graced-many-walls-and-now-a-dallas-museum/>.

The painting, now referred to as “the head of Christ,” went into mainstream circulation. After its acceptance by churches and ministers, it became famous quickly. It was so loved that Sallman partnered with Kriebel and Bates Christian publishers, to manage its copyright. The picture soon saturated the American population, and many Christians had a copy of the painting. In the Museum of Biblical Arts, the image has stood as one of the most popular pieces of art. Wallet-sized versions of the painting were made by Kriebel and Bates and distributed to every corner of the United States. All servicemen in World War II and all religious-affiliated hospital beds in the country were given card-sized copies. The picture resonated with the Protestants as a symbol of morality and reward. The painting was widely circulated, and more than half a billion copies of it have been produced.<sup>68</sup> Despite the painting’s wide distribution, Warner Sallman never benefited much from his work; he lived a humble, middle-class life while his work was reproduced in the millions.

Sallman’s Christ painting has gained tremendous popularity in Christian circles. What began as a painter’s dream became the symbol of the Savior to the world’s largest religion. Painting the face of Christ was a considerable feat, and Sallman did it in the humblest of ways. However, critics say that no one ever painted the actual face of Christ and that the painters are heretics. The Hebrew Jesus has been replaced with the Caucasian version seen today, with white face, blue eyes, and blonde hair representing the typical white rather than Jesus himself. Some

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<sup>68</sup> Mark Rosen, “Much-Beloved, Much-Maligned ‘Head of Christ’ Has Graced Many Walls — And Now A Dallas Museum,” *The Dallas Morning News*, 2018, <https://www.dallasnews.com/arts-entertainment/visual-arts/2018/07/15/much-beloved-much-maligned-head-of-christ-has-graced-many-walls-and-now-a-dallas-museum/>.

have quoted the Ten Commandments, which warn against making any graven images as His symbol. Jesus is God as much as the Holy Spirit and God the father. They are the Holy Trinity, and making images of any of them goes against the commandments.

### **What Did Jesus Really Look Like?**

As discussed earlier, no one really knows what Christ looked like; his portrait was never painted. However, anthropological and ethnological studies may prove helpful in determining Jesus' appearance. Biblical evidence is crucial in gaining some idea of what Jesus may have looked like. The question was not an issue until the rise of Eurocentric Christianity. White people's quest for world dominance has brought confusion around Jesus' appearance. From the Whitening of Bible characters to the proclamation of a White God, White people wanted to rewrite history. To impose White supremacy effectively, they had to ensure that the world's most significant religion was associated with Whiteness. The first painting of a White Jesus resulted from this White supremacist ideology. Pope Alexander the 6<sup>th</sup> ordered the portrait of his son to be painted to represent the face of Jesus, which the Western World would accept. However, many authors have written about the likeness of Christ, and they differ with the Pope and the Western World.

### **William Hunter: Jesus Christ Had Negro Blood**

In his book, *Jesus Christ Had Negro Blood in His Veins: The Wonder of the Twentieth Century* (1901), William Hunter presents research proving that Christ was Black. Hunter carefully went through the bloodlines of various Bible characters.<sup>69</sup> The lineage of

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<sup>69</sup> William Hunter, *Jesus Christ Had Negro Blood in His Vein* (Museum Audiobooks, 2020), 38.

Christ goes back to Ham, son of Noah. Biblical evidence shows that Noah was an albino man, but Ham was a dark-skinned individual, known to be an ancestor of the Kush. The Kush people of the Bible are modern-day Africans. Since Jesus descended from Ham, he likely had dark skin. Hunter claimed that there was no way that Christ was White as the Hebrews themselves had relatively dark skin. Therefore, it is evident that the Eurocentric ideology of Christianity had made Bible characters White intentionally, to serve the White supremacist ego.

Hunter explains that White men had been worshipping a Negro Savior, but never knew it. He goes on to imagine how White people would react if Jesus Christ came back and they learned that he had been Black. Hunter claimed that God had honored Blacks by allowing a Black man to bear the burden of the cross for the Savior of the World. Hunter affirmed that Jesus Christ was Black, and that if he were to appear in present-day America, White people would call him Black. Despite this revelation, Whites continued to have a White Jesus in mind. Even if Jesus was Black, the Jesus they had constructed and were presenting to the world was White.

### **Edward Blum and Paul Harvey: The Color of Christ**

Edward Blum and Paul Harvey have deconstructed what Christ's appearance represents to modern Americans. In their book, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America*, Blum and Harvey illustrate how the face of Christ applies to every individual in America. They explore how Christ's image has been used to fuel White supremacy atrocities while simultaneously firing up the civil rights movement. The controversies behind the face of Christ are some of the worst pitfalls of Christian history. Various groups have used the image of Jesus Christ to match their affiliations and struggles. America was settled by Puritans, who destroyed all depictions of Christ and did not believe in any embodiment of Christ. Eventually,



however, the Puritans embraced the Whiteness of Christ and used it to defend their White supremacist ideologies and propagate racial crimes. For example, the extermination of Native Americans and enslavement of Black people were all done in the name of Jesus Christ.

The image of a White Jesus represented horror and atrocity to Native Americans. The White men taking their lands and killing their family and tribe members bore the face of Jesus. Therefore, the Natives resisted the idea of Christ as the people who came bearing witness to this Christ committed all manner of evil deeds. This symbol of a White Christ that Whites had established was a tool for oppressing and enslaving Black people. The civil rights movement was supported by the church, which was made up of converted slaves. The slaves hated the idea of a White Jesus, but they adopted the idea to gain freedom and justice. Nothing was more critical to Blacks than freedom from slavery and reclaiming their human dignity. They had been regarded as property, and only through the symbol of Jesus would they find redemption.

### **Preaching Black Biblical Personalities**

The Bible has been Whitened over many centuries, and the true nature of the people in the Bible has been hidden. Many African American Black Christians do not know the history of Christianity, and they do not know that their heritage is in the Bible. In their quest for White supremacy and global domination, Whites have attempted to brainwash the entire world. They made African people believe that the Bible was a White affair. Disconnecting Blacks from the story of salvation ensured that Blacks would feel inferior. Many Black people do not know their own history, and they do not understand that the Jews were people of color, contrary to what they have been accustomed to in today's world. Therefore, Black people must be enlightened to the fact that they share the "People of God in heritage."

Preaching a Black presence in the Bible does not occur often, and Black characters in the White Bible have been made irrelevant. It should be the responsibility of every preacher to ensure that they research Blacks' presence in the Bible and preach about them. Many people of color in the Bible gave service to God and confirmed that his will of salvation was effective.<sup>70</sup> In the second book of Samuel 6:6-11, David was transporting the Ark of the Covenant and had no place to put it during his journey. Obed-Edom, a Gittite, offered sanctuary for the Ark, and it remained with Obed for three months as David was afraid of going with it to his city. The Lord blessed Obed-Edom and his entire family because of his act.

Ebed Melek was an official in the King's courtyard. In Jerimiah 38:6, the prophet of God had been put in a cistern and left to die. Ebed Melek witnessed this atrocity and pleaded for Jeremiah's life. Ebed Melek was a Cushite, an African man who believed that the living God sent the Prophet Jerimiah.<sup>71</sup> Only Ebed Melek, the only African man in the court, acknowledged that Jeremiah was a prophet of God. With the help of other soldiers, Ebed Melek was able to pull Jerimiah out of the pit and save his life. Melek is just one example of the many African characters who performed noble acts in the Bible, but does not receive recognition for them.

In Mathew 27:32, a man from Cyrene was appointed to help Jesus carry his cross. Jesus had endured torture and beating and was unable to move the cross any farther. Simon of Cyrene was asked to take the cross for Jesus, and he did so up to Golgotha, where they would crucify

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<sup>70</sup> Walter Arthur McCray, *Black Presence in The Bible and The Table of Nations, Genesis 10:1-32* (Chicago, Ill.: Black Light Fellowship, 1995), 39.

<sup>71</sup> McCray, *Black Presence in The Bible*, 20.

Jesus. In modern times, Cyrene lies in the land of Ethiopia.<sup>72</sup> Just as Ebed Melek was an African man, so was Simon of Cyrene. The Bible hints at the early interaction of the Jews and the Africans. These interactions often led to marriage and cordial trade between Africans and Jews. Hence, it is evident that the Africans had a significant presence in the Bible and played a role in Jesus' salvation.

Many questions have been asked as to the identity of Christ, and colossal lies have been told to conceal it. Eurocentric Christianity has been practiced by the Whitening of the Bible and depictions of Jesus as a White man. The ancient Egyptians were Black, and the Jews were very similar in appearance to the Egyptians, with darker complexions, not White.<sup>73</sup> The Roman Catholic Church has tried to depict Jesus Christ as White due to its White supremacist ideology, but it is wrong. In Revelations 1:14-15, Christ's appearance is nowhere near White. Christ's hair was "wooly," and his feet were "the color of bronze."<sup>74</sup> This description best fits an African man, not a White man as the world has been compelled to believe.

The Whitening of the Bible was a strategy to support White superiority. They lied to the world about the nature of Christianity and made other people feel inferior. Black people should embrace their heritage as central to the Bible and learn about their great history.<sup>75</sup> Slavery is not

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<sup>72</sup> F. S. Rhoades, *Blacks in Every Book in The Bible: A Study Guide*, (1995), 3.

<sup>73</sup> Hunter, *Jesus Christ Had Negro Blood in His Veins*, 44.

<sup>74</sup> Charles Anemelu, *His True and "Unveiled" Face: A Personal Search and Perspective* (Lumen Educational Publications, 2017), 28.

<sup>75</sup> Nana Banchie Darkwah, *The Africans Who Wrote the Bible* (HBC, 2000), 109.

the beginning of Black history. Blacks of African American ancestry are children of a great God and deserve to share in the same glory as all other human beings. Homiletical preaching should embrace these teachings, to ensure that Black Christians' self-esteem is raised.

## CHAPTER 5

### SOCIAL DOCUMENTATION OF BLACK OPPRESSION

I met with the PPG to discuss what we believed were concerns that cause low self-esteem among African Americans today and how those issues affect Black Christians in the modern-day church. After a round robin session of naming issues, the PPG at Phillips Temple consulted with the congregation about these topics. Seven topics proved to be prevalent-intergenerational oppression, racial discrimination, white acceptance, housing disparity, healthcare differences, education inequality, incarceration, drug abuse. Further explanation for each topic is offered in this chapter.

#### **Blacks and Intergenerational Oppression**

##### **Jeannine Hill Fletcher: The Sin of White Supremacy**

Oppression is part of daily life for Blacks of African ancestry. As it stands, Black African Americans are the most oppressed citizens in America. Throughout our nation's history, oppression against Blacks has continued across economic, political, social, and educational realms. Black people cannot have the confidence to uphold Christianity and proclaim the word of God because they are fearful that expressing their faith will result in discrimination. African Americans suffer under the actions of Whites and do not expect a lasting solution to their concerns.

Black communities are among the poorest in the United States. Many Black people cannot afford adequate food, housing, or education due to systemic oppression. Moreover, the White ruling classes have made it difficult for Blacks to enter corporate society. These elite

positions are reserved largely for white people, and they control the nation's economy. Hence, it is challenging for Blacks to prosper. As descendants of slaves who were owned by white people, Black people have far less generational wealth, and it remains difficult for Black people to acquire wealth and property. Slaves owned nothing, and after the abolition, they left their owners with nothing, entering a world that gave them scant opportunities or human dignity. With no education—no right to education—no property, and no money, slaves started their lives as free people with nothing, and the cycle of poverty and oppression continues to this day.

Blacks have been denied political rights in the United States. Even after slavery was abolished, Blacks were denied the right to vote.<sup>76</sup> Political oppression continued even after Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, prohibiting racial discrimination in voting. Despite this legal protection, white people came up with new tactics to prevent Black people from voting. The “grandfather clause” extended Black voting prohibitions, stating that Blacks could not vote if their grandfathers were slaves, and nearly all Black people at the time were grandchildren of slaves.

Other oppressive tactics, such as poll taxes, prevented Blacks from voting because they were poor and could not afford the tax. It was not until 1965 that Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led protests across the United States that Black people were finally allowed to vote. However, this was not the political freedom that Black people expected; indeed, they still were politically

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<sup>76</sup> Library of Congress. n.d. “Voting Rights for African Americans | the Right to Vote | Elections | Classroom Materials at the Library of Congress | Library of Congress.” Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA. Accessed October 7, 2021, <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/elections/right-to-vote/voting-rights-for-african-americans/>.

oppressed. Their political representation was insignificant and could not help them eliminate political oppression.

During slavery, it was illegal for Blacks to read and write. They were not allowed to go to school as their function was strictly labor.<sup>77</sup> Slave children were given duties and chores and taught how to work through apprenticeship. They were not allowed to mingle with white children and were not allowed to learn how to read and write. Even after abolition, whites ensured that Blacks were treated as second-class citizens through legal racial separation and preventing white people from mixing with Black people. Separation of races by law cut across every aspect of life, including education. After years of being prevented from reading and writing as slaves, African Americans were still shut out of education as free people. whites and Blacks went to segregated schools, and the best educational resources were reserved for whites. Hence, the historical ripple effect of slavery has continued to impact Black people. Many African Americans who want an education cannot afford to pay for college.

Lack of economic, political, and educational opportunities has resulted in social and cultural oppression. Social oppression began with separation of slaves and forcing them to renounce their cultural names and languages. Destruction of their culture resulted in the obliteration of their social makeup. Black people were forced to adapt to a new culture, civilization, and social norms that were unfamiliar to them. Moreover, they were forced to make these radical changes under extreme hardship. As a result, the social cohesiveness of the American people was lost. Due to poverty and disenfranchisement, many Black people resorted

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<sup>77</sup> National Archives. 2020. "Black Americans and the Vote." National Archives. Accessed October 7, 2021. <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/vote>.

to drugs, prostitution, and crime. American society had left Black people a world of disorder and ruin. Therefore, they could not expect white Christianity to answer the problems of the Black community.

The nature and structure of our society make this a daunting task. Black African Americans have not made the intentional decision to avoid the truth or embrace it. Rather, a discriminatory system has impacted Black people's self-esteem. Historically, power structures have employed strategies to disenfranchise Black people<sup>78</sup>. Hence, it is essential to understand the causes of the current situation; only through identifying and understanding the root causes. There are several reasons for low self-esteem among Black African Americans, and they are examined through the following dynamics.

### **Historical Dehumanization and Marginalization**

Before people from various parts of the world came to Africa, Africans had their own civilizations and cultures. They were happy people who had respect for one another, and they valued morality and order in their communities. Traditional African religious beliefs were organized, and they worshiped a god. With the arrival of Christian missionaries, African cultures were altered. The missionaries came with a religion and faith to ensure that they acted holistically to have a pathway to heaven. The new religion brought challenges, though, requiring Africans to forsake their beliefs and traditions in favor of those being introduced by the Christian

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<sup>78</sup> Barbara Dianne Savage, *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2012), 5.



missionaries. Africans were implored to reject their shrines and follow a new form of worship with its own rules and rituals.

At the time the trans-Atlantic trade was becoming established, most Africans were not Christians. The growing market for sugar in the Americas demanded considerable amounts of labor, creating a new business opportunity: slavery. The harsh conditions of work in the cane fields required able-bodied laborers<sup>79</sup>. The trans-Atlantic trade drove entrepreneurs to Africa, where they purchased slaves for use on the sugarcane and cotton plantations. Millions of Africans were abducted and sold into slavery in the Americas. These slaves were often treated poorly, and their status was reduced human beings to beasts of burden. Worse, given the wretched conditions typical of the slave ships, many did not survive the trans-Atlantic voyage. The dead were simply thrown into the ocean, as though they were dead animal carcasses.

Upon their arrival in the Americas, slaves were paraded like animals, put up for auction, and sold to the highest bidders. Human beings who once had families, children, and social ties were now considered property in this new and unfamiliar land. They were denied their human rights. White owners forced enslaved Blacks to renounce their traditions and cultures as a means of enforcing White superiority.<sup>80</sup> They were not allowed to communicate in their native tongues, under threat of punishment to set an example to others. Their names were changed, and they

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<sup>79</sup> Mark Rosen, "Much-Beloved, Much-Maligned 'Head of Christ' Has Graced Many Walls — And Now A Dallas Museum," *The Dallas Morning News*, 2018, <https://www.dallasnews.com/arts-entertainment/visual-arts/2018/07/15/much-beloved-much-maligned-head-of-christ-has-graced-many-walls-and-now-a-dallas-museum/>.

<sup>80</sup> Mark Rosen, "Much-Beloved, Much-Maligned 'Head of Christ' Has Graced Many Walls — And Now A Dallas Museum," *The Dallas Morning News*, 2018, <https://www.dallasnews.com/arts-entertainment/visual-arts/2018/07/15/much-beloved-much-maligned-head-of-christ-has-graced-many-walls-and-now-a-dallas-museum/>.

were forced to bear the name of their owners. It is well documented that enslaved Black Africans who were captured as families were separated and sold to different owners. Wives and husbands were separated, and children were taken from their mothers.

The slaves were forced to live under miserable conditions. They were offered no human decency, and whites ensured that they were reminded constantly of their supposed inferiority. The ill-treatment of Blacks made the entire white world believe that they were superior to Black people. Enslaved Africans were regarded as dumb and illiterate and therefore beneath Whites.<sup>81</sup> As the slave population grew, increased surveillance was imposed upon the slaves. Those who tried to escape were hunted down like animals and, if caught, either punished or executed in front of their fellow slaves to keep others from making the same mistake. Hanging and shooting were both employed as forms of execution. Other punishments included whippings and maimings.<sup>82</sup> All of these methods were employed to keep the slaves in check. How could one expect a Black person to embrace a white religion in the wake of such atrocities?

Even after slavery was abolished in 1868, whites still considered Blacks to be inferior. References to Africans' similarity to apes were widespread, with books written comparing Black Africans to monkeys. Black people were still considered to be lazy, slow-witted, and criminally minded. Blacks were reduced to a set of negative stereotypes, and there was no contrasting narrative. Even after slavery was abolished in 1865 by the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, Black people were systematically denied education, housing, and access to

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<sup>81</sup> Barbara Dianne Savage, *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2012), 5.

<sup>82</sup> Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy*, 1st ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2017), 12.

healthcare. They were subject to discrimination and denial of Constitutional rights and left to live in misery in a country where White people enjoyed all the privileges.<sup>83</sup> The historical depiction of Blacks as lower primates impacts African Americans in the present. Blacks of African American ancestry still suffer from discrimination and are treated as de facto second-class citizens. The potential of African Americans is still underrated and not entirely accepted in the white community.

### **The Trepidation of Desiring White Acceptance in America**

Africans did not leave their homeland willingly to come to America. They were abducted and taken by force to live in a strange new land. Worse, they were not seen as human beings in America but as property. They were regarded as inferior, uncivilized beings of low intelligence compared to Whites.<sup>84</sup> They were compelled to denounce their cultures, traditions, languages, and even their names. Their entire sense of self was taken from them. The disenfranchisement of Black people in the United States is not comparable to the experience of any other group of human beings.<sup>85</sup> Learning new ways of living amidst hardship and discrimination was not easy. Forced to live in poverty under dehumanizing conditions, enslaved Black people had no choice but to accept their new life and do their best to survive.

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<sup>83</sup> Mark Rosen, "Much-Beloved, Much-Maligned 'Head of Christ' Has Graced Many Walls — And Now A Dallas Museum," *The Dallas Morning News*, 2018, <https://www.dallasnews.com/arts-entertainment/visual-arts/2018/07/15/much-beloved-much-maligned-head-of-christ-has-graced-many-walls-and-now-a-dallas-museum/>.

<sup>84</sup> Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy*, 1st ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2017), 12.

<sup>85</sup> Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie: The Book That Brought the Shock of Self-Revelation to Middle-Class Blacks in America*, 1st ed. (New York: Free press, 1997), 57.

After slavery was abolished, many slaves thought that their lives would improve. However, whites devised new strategies to ensure that Blacks remained second-class citizens, even after emancipation. Segregation of formerly enslaved Black Africans began in the United States, and systematic denial of opportunities made life as free people extremely challenging for the former slaves. Having lost their traditional culture due to years of discrimination and mistreatment, Blacks had no choice but to adopt white culture. They hoped for full integration into American society, but this did not happen. Racism was embedded deeply in American society, and Black people were not welcomed.

Some Blacks have struggled mightily to be accepted by the dominant white culture of the United States. They traded their traditions and culture and simulated the white way of life in hope that life in America would be overly profitable. Moreover, Blacks who succeeded in achieving a good education and successful careers often did not want to associate with their less successful Black brethren.<sup>86</sup> Many successful Black people intermarried with white people to give their children better lives. Even within the Black community, light-skinned Black people are considered more attractive lending credence that white supremacy and subjugation runs deep in American society.

Blacks are affected by white dominance even in the church. A White God and White Jesus have misled many Blacks of the Christian faith.<sup>87</sup> They do not understand nor have been

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<sup>86</sup> Mark Rosen, "Much-Beloved, Much-Maligned 'Head of Christ' Has Graced Many Walls — And Now A Dallas Museum," *The Dallas Morning News*, 2018, <https://www.dallasnews.com/arts-entertainment/visual-arts/2018/07/15/much-beloved-much-maligned-head-of-christ-has-graced-many-walls-and-now-a-dallas-museum/>.

<sup>87</sup> Watley and St. Clair, *The African Presence in the Bible*. 53.

offered a cadre of information about the contribution of Blacks in the stories of the Bible. Some hung pictures of a white Jesus in their homes and believed that the gospel was born and bred from whites. Christianity has been called a white religion, but this is not entirely true. It is not the acceptance by Whites that Black people should seek; rather, they should take a stand for the uniqueness of their way of life.<sup>88</sup> They should strive for equality, justice, and change in the minds of Blacks. Even with White acceptance, there are significant inequalities that cannot be ignored. It would take 200 more years for the average Black household to achieve financial equality with the average White household.

### **Blacks' Self-Esteem Affected by Racial Discrimination**

**Danyelle Solomon, Connor Maxwell, Abril Castro and Henry R. Willis**

Racism is at the top of the list of problems facing Black Christians in America. Having been built upon slavery, American society continues as a racist society that is still unable to move past its racism. Upon their first interactions with the Africans, Europeans described the African people as categorized between the Greeks and apes.<sup>89</sup> This complete disregard began many years ago. Many scholars supported and advanced the notion that Africans are ape-like. Even scientists have intensified racism by depicting Whites as the apex of human evolution.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Rosen, "Much-Beloved, Much-Maligned 'Head of Christ' Has Graced Many Walls — And Now A Dallas Museum."

<sup>89</sup> Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy*, 1st ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2017), 29.

<sup>90</sup> Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy*, 57.

The lowest form of human is defined as Black and ape-like, while modern civilized humanity is described as White. These claims have led to the concept of White superiority, which further encourages racism.

Blacks were viewed as backward and unintelligent in scholarly works written and distributed throughout the Western World. White people felt that they were superior among the races. Slavery, the epitome of structural racism in America, was foundational to American racism. The separation policies, denying Black people the right to education, preventing Black people from voting and from holding many jobs are all forms of structural racism. Black people were segregated legally in the 1800s and early 1900s.<sup>91</sup> They were denied freedom and justice and denied basic human dignity. They were left out of the governance process and had no one to defend their rights. Even today, structural racism contributes to the segregation of Black people. They cannot afford opportunities for growth and prosperity. They lack access to quality jobs, healthcare, housing, education, and equal criminal justice.

Institutionalized racism has been part of the American story for centuries. Black people have been stereotyped in ways that locked them into institutionalized racism. They are routinely defined as “criminals” and violent animals that need to be policed constantly. The result of this stereotype has been police using excessive force on African American people and applying racial profiling techniques to accuse them of committing crimes.<sup>92</sup> Institutions of higher learning

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<sup>91</sup> Library of Congress. 2004. “A Century of Racial Segregation 1849–1950 - Brown v. Board at Fifty: ‘with an Even Hand’ | Exhibitions - Library of Congress.” Loc.gov. 2004. Accessed October 7, 2021, <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/brown/brown-segregation.html>.

<sup>92</sup> Danyelle Solomon, Connor Maxwell and Abril Castro, “Systemic Inequality: Displacement, Exclusion, And Segregation – Center for American Progress,” Center for American Progress, Accessed October 7, 2021,

frequently give priority to White students over Black students. The judicial system also incorporates institutionalized racism through unfair, unequal sentences. A young African man might be given a 30-year sentence for the same crime that would get a White person a 10-year sentence. Employers prefer White employees to Black employees, and employment rates for White people are higher than they are for Black people. White employers believe White employees to be better qualified than their Black counterparts. Institutionalized racism has left Black people in poverty. They have harder experiences in schools, jobs, and life because of the pervasive nature of racism.

Besides structural and institutionalized racism, African Americans also face individual racism. Individual White citizens have been found to be racist and promote a racist ideology. During slavery, farm owners sought, bought, and owned slaves. Individual White people hunted down, shot, maimed, hung, and lynched Black slaves trying to escape. Even after abolition, the anti-voting clause, and the segregation laws, it took the efforts of many individuals to ensure that Black people were oppressed. White citizens made personal attacks on Black people, both verbally and physically, that broke the separation laws. Recently, nearly all police brutality cases have been based on statements of individual racist police. White civilians have called the police on their Black neighbors based on wholly unfounded suspicions of wrongdoing. White people have moved out of their houses because a Black family became their neighbor. Hatred of Black people by White citizens in America is not new, and sadly, it is still happening in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/reports/2019/08/07/472617/systemic-inequality-displacement-exclusion-segregation/>.

Racism is deeply rooted in hatred based on the ethnocentrism of a White supremacy ideology. The White race has been obsessed with domination, and because of this, earlier scholars and scientists poisoned White populations. It is evident in a historical study of Nazi Germany, where Nazi leaders declared the White race pure and all others impure. White supremacy is not a myth in the United States. The Ku Klux Klan, or KKK, committed racially based acts of terror to establish and maintain White supremacy.

Regarding Black people as closer to humans' primate cousins has long been promulgated by White American society. Racism has thus made Black Americans feel unwelcome and discriminated against. Blacks of African American ancestry live every day in a racist country that does not consider them to be equal to the White majority. Events in the lives of Black people have made them feel alone in a cruel, unwelcoming world, which would damage the self-esteem of any Black Christian.

Recently, there have been psychological cases recorded among Black African American ancestry. Most of them accepted their place in a White-dominated society and accepted White supremacy. This is referred to as "internalized racism."<sup>93</sup> It occurs when an individual accepts the racial stereotypes placed upon them and learns to hate themselves. Many Black people have been recorded stating that they are inferior to Whites and have decided to allow slavery to define their history. They have learned to dislike their complexion and hair and try to fit in with White

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<sup>93</sup> Henry A. Willis et al., "The Associations Between Internalized Racism, Racial Identity, And Psychological Distress", *Emerging Adulthood* 9, no. 4 (2021): 384-400, doi:10.1177/21676968211005598.



people rather than spend time with other Black people. Internalized racism is widely understood as the greatest cause of low self-esteem among Black people.

In Black communities, people with light complexions are regarded as more attractive than darker people. Individuals from mixed or White communities are similarly regarded as more attractive. It has also been established that many Black women are not proud of their natural hair, preferring to wear wigs and weaves. Some Black people have been heard stating that Whites are more intelligent based on skin color. Self-hatred and inferiority complexes are the result of deeply internalized racism, which has been perpetuated by years of oppression and discrimination.

### **Lack of Necessary Resources and the Opportunity Deficiency**

Black people in America face significantly greater challenges than their White counterparts. Despite the U.S. being a fully developed first-world country and filled with opportunities, most Black people still suffer from extreme poverty. Black neighborhoods have been neglected for decades, and the government has intentionally left them out of national planning. Many Blacks lack the essentials that human beings need to be comfortable and productive. Years of marginalization have left Black neighborhoods in turmoil, with many controlled by criminals and drug gangs. Systemic racism has denied Black people opportunities to achieve the quality education that translates to stronger career outcomes.<sup>94</sup> Banks and other institutions intentionally reject loan applications made by Black people. As a result, Black people

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<sup>94</sup> Solomon et al., “Systemic Inequality: Displacement, Exclusion, And Segregation - Center for American Progress”

are left struggling with homelessness, poverty, poor healthcare, and unemployment. These problems are discussed in detail in the following sections.

## **Blacks and Housing Disparities**

### **Andre Perry and Michela Zonta**

Black people have struggled for equality in housing and property ownership. For descendants of slaves, it was not easy to earn enough working to buy a home. Residents of most predominantly Black communities are poor and uneducated. They have higher rates of unemployment, and so it is not easy for them to earn enough money to buy or rent decent housing. Systemic racism has also made it hard for Black people to own proper housing. Continual displacement of black people under the guise of community redevelopment has taken place in Black neighborhood after Black neighborhood. In the 1850s, New York City lawmakers devised a plan to destroy a thriving African American neighborhood to create a public space.<sup>95</sup> This Manhattan neighborhood was demolished to give way to what is now Central Park. Many such displacements have taken place over the years, and more extreme measures, such as the devaluation of Black-owned property, have also happened.

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<sup>95</sup> Andre Perry, “Discriminatory Housing Practices Are Leading to the Devaluation of Black Americans,” Blog, *Brookings*, 2020, Accessed October 7, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/02/13/discriminatory-housing-practices-are-leading-to-the-devaluation-of-Black-americans/>.

The devaluation of Black-owned property results from discriminatory public policies. Homes owned by African Americans are valued at 23% less than those owned by White people.<sup>96</sup> Devaluation of houses in predominantly black-owned housing communities result from the racism that is intertwined in U.S. history. Every personal asset that could help build Black wealth has been attacked by racist administrations for centuries. Without decent homes for many, low self-esteem has been endemic. Black Christians are part of this discriminated and oppressed group; hence one would not expect them to have strong faith.

### **Blacks and Healthcare Differences**

#### **Wayne Riley and Zinzi D. Bailey**

Matters of race and discrimination also affect healthcare. Infant mortality in the Black community is 2.5% higher than that in the White community. Black people are more likely to die from chronic diseases than White people, and life expectancy for Black people is a decade less than for White people.<sup>97</sup> These statistics demonstrate a significant racial disparity in American healthcare. A large part of the problem is the lack of financial resources for most Black families. After years of oppression and marginalization, Black families are generally poorer than White

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<sup>96</sup> Michela Zonta, “Racial Disparities in Home Appreciation – Center for American Progress,” Center for American Progress, Accessed October 7, 2021  
<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2019/07/15/469838/racial-disparities-home-appreciation/>.

<sup>97</sup> Wayne Riley, “Health Disparities: Gaps in Access, Quality and Affordability of Medical Care,” *Transactions of the American Clinical and Climatological Association* 123 (2012): 167-174,  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3540621/>.

families. Therefore, quality healthcare is a major problem for most Black families. Racial discrimination is a problem in American hospitals, with most African American patients unattended or mishandled. Healthcare is an essential aspect of modern life, and universal healthcare needs to be made a priority.

The issue of affordable healthcare was addressed in part with the Affordable Care Act, popularly known as “Obamacare,” which seeks to ensure healthcare for every citizen. Despite the Obama administration’s efforts, the Black community still suffers. During the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, proportionally greater death rates occurred in poor and African American communities.<sup>98</sup> With greater rates of uninsured people, a large proportion of the Black population suffers from inadequate healthcare. Poor health keeps individuals from working and supporting their families, often resulting in depression. Mental health crises have been reported within the Black community. Mental health cases can result from poverty, drug and substance abuse, mental disease, and general racial trauma. Addressing these matters requires elaborate and straightforward strategies. As it is, the Black community still faces considerable healthcare challenges, and without good health, a Christian does not have the strength or courage to work for the Lord.

### **Blacks’ Self-Esteem Affected by Education Inequality**

**Sean F. Reardon**

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<sup>98</sup> Zinzi D Bailey et al., “Structural Racism and Health Inequities in the USA: Evidence and Interventions,” *The Lancet* 389, no. 10077 (2017): 1453, doi: 10.1016/s0140-6736(17)30569-x.

Regarding educational disparities, African Americans' lack of educational achievement is quite visible. Many Black children come from poor communities, and their parents cannot afford better schools. They receive average teaching at best, and so their performance is lower than that of their White counterparts who have access to higher quality schools. Education has been a problem for the Black community since as early as the 1870s.<sup>99</sup> Segregation ensured that people of color lived in separate neighborhoods, and it also resulted in Black children going to substandard schools. The ripple effect of this discrimination is still felt more than 100 years later by the children of African American parents. The inability to pay for quality education has become the most significant problem for modern African American children. If a child cannot access a good education, they cannot compete in the job market.

The schools that Black children attend are not funded at comparable levels to schools attended by White children.<sup>100</sup> Money is an essential determinant of educational quality for any child. It is wrong to impose a racially discriminative system on children, thereby increasing the likelihood of poor futures. Inadequate funding impacts both school infrastructure and staffing. Libraries, classrooms, and teaching equipment—all be substandard without adequate budget. Teacher quality in these schools will be average at best. These factors have a significant impact on students' performance and, eventually, their futures.

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<sup>99</sup> Library of Congress. n.d. "Voting Rights for African Americans | the Right to Vote | Elections | Classroom Materials at the Library of Congress | Library of Congress." Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540. Accessed October 7, 2021, USA. <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/elections/right-to-vote/voting-rights-for-african-americans/>.

<sup>100</sup> Sean F. Reardon et al., "Is Separate Still Unequal? New Evidence on School Segregation and Racial Academic Achievement Gaps," (Hdl.Handle.Net, 2021), 2.

## **Blacks and Incarceration**

### **Terry Jones: Institutional Racism in the United States**

Recently, nationwide protests followed the untimely death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin. The police officer was video recorded kneeling on Floyd's neck until he died, nine minutes later. Mr. Floyd begged for help, saying that he could not breathe. Another police officer held Floyd's legs, and a third put pressure on Floyd's back. The video went viral on the internet.<sup>101</sup> However, many other incidents have not been recorded to video and are thus never seen.

For many years, the criminal justice system has been accused of systemic racism. The problem is seen in community policing, prosecutions, pretrial processes, sentencing, and corrective discipline. Racism is inherent in the justice system and has been for a very long time. However, ever growing numbers of videos capturing acts of police brutality against people of color and reports of disproportionate levels of mass incarceration are exposing the disparity.

Community police patrols are twice as prevalent in communities of color.<sup>102</sup> The patrols typically do not enhance security, however, but rather target people racially. Crime is still rampant despite the patrols. Racial profiling has been reported by many people of color. It is said that a Black person is five times more likely to be stopped by the police on the street than a White person. The amount of force used against a Black person being arrested is typically greater

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<sup>101</sup> Terry Jones, "Institutional Racism in the United States," *Social Work* 19, no. 2 (1974): 218-225, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23712909>.

<sup>102</sup> Jones, "Institutional Racism in the United States," 220.

than during a White person's arrest.<sup>103</sup> Police officers respond more rapidly for calls made against Black individuals by White persons than when a Black person makes a call against a White one. These issues are common, and if left unaddressed, will prolong Black oppression in America.

Mass incarceration of Black people and other people of color still occurs disproportionately to their representation in the American population. Black prisoners significantly outnumber White prisoners.<sup>104</sup> Mass incarceration is part of the systemic racism practiced by this country's criminal justice system. Unfair trials of Black people are common. America boasts democracy and freedom, but we still inflict considerable injustice upon our citizens. Sentencing has been found to be discriminative, with Black people receiving considerably longer sentences than White people, and disproportionate incarceration rates impact post-prison life outcomes for Black people.

Black children are also arrested as juveniles more often than White children.<sup>105</sup> Black children are often raised in poor communities and are introduced to crime at early ages, including drug dealing and trafficking. Black people face severe marginalization, with alarming rates of unemployment and poverty rates. Therefore, Black children are at greater risk of arrest than their

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<sup>103</sup> National Archives. 2020. "Black Americans and the Vote." National Archives. Accessed October 7, 2021. <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/vote>.

<sup>104</sup> Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy*, 69.

<sup>105</sup> Terry Jones, "Institutional Racism in the United States," *Social Work* 19, no. 2 (1974): 218-225, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23712909>.

White counterparts. The most disturbing scenario in recent years is Black children being considered to be “dangerous individuals” and given adult sentences. White children are typically given more lenient sentences. Incidents such as these reveal the systemic racism that is embedded in the American criminal justice system. A solution needs to be found to end this oppressive system and ensure that justice is meted out equally.

Mass incarceration impacts prisoners in a bevy of ways. Prison brings trauma and stigmatization, resulting in mental health issues. Prisoners are released as hardened criminals who commit further crimes just to survive. A criminal record impacts an ex-prisoner’s chances of employment. With reduced employability, Black people cannot provide for their families, resulting in persistent poverty. Many return to crime and are arrested and re-incarcerated, while others commit suicide. These outcomes also impact parents, spouses, and children, who all suffer because of just one family member’s incarceration, which is a prevalent scenario in many Black families. Incarceration also leads to divorce and broken families. Clearly the justice system is racist and needs to be restructured.

### **Drug and Substance Abuse**

Drug and alcohol abuse has long been an issue in the Black community.<sup>106</sup> Many young Black people find themselves in the drug business, mainly as peddlers and distributors. The

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<sup>106</sup> Sean MacCabe et al., “Race/Ethnicity and Gender Differences in Drug Use and Abuse among College Students,” *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse* 6, no. 2 (2007): 75-95, doi:[https://dx.doi.org/10.1300%2FJ233v06n02\\_06](https://dx.doi.org/10.1300%2FJ233v06n02_06).



average Black youth is less likely to be involved in drug use at an early age compared to their White and Hispanic counterparts. Black children involved in early drug use are affected by their environments, and due to the extreme impacts of drugs on the Black community, many parents are strict with their children to keep them off drugs. The raging poverty that affects Black communities causes many young Black people to become involved in the drug business. Alcoholism is not an issue in the Black community, and most addicts are isolated cases. However, cases of drug and substance abuse could be lower.

Many White children are exposed to drug use at an early age. Peer pressure is a significant factor in early drug use. However, young Black children often start using drugs due to the environments in which they are raised. Most Black kids are exposed to drugs either through siblings or friends. The drug business is lucrative, and once the youths see a successful young man, they are lured into the business. Life is hard in Black neighborhoods, and extra money makes is less so.

Even though drug use is overt in Black communities compared to covert in White communities, discriminatory law enforcement makes it look like the problem is exclusive to Black communities and communities of color. Law enforcement focuses more on low-income communities, urban areas, and communities of color. Hence, drug arrests occur disproportionately in predominately Black communities. White people are largely exempt from these mass incarcerations for drug use and low-level drug peddling. Drug laws often target people of color, and thus they are arrested in greater numbers compared to White people.

It has been reported that people of color arrested with small amounts of drugs typically receive longer sentences than White people. People are also incarcerated for selling small

quantities of drugs to maintain their drug habits. There is significant inequality in drug dependency cases. People of color who are addicted to drugs are more often sent to prison while White addicts are placed in rehabilitation centers.

The U.S. “war on drugs” has been racist and discriminative, and young Blacks in this country have been criminalized by it. Racist laws have been instituted in this country to ensure that Black people and people of color are segregated and oppressed. There has also been clear bias in the drug laws and their enforcement for decades. Black communities and communities of color have suffered under this bias and continued incarceration, and many Black families have suffered and continue to suffer.<sup>107</sup> The biased drug war has been waged since the Nixon era. The turning point was the legalization of marijuana, which benefits wealthy White investors, a drug for which Black people have been incarcerated for years. Discriminative drug laws and harsh sentencing have had severe impacts on the lives of Black people.

People of color are arrested more often for drug-related incidents compared to White people. Sentencing is also biased, with people of color receiving longer sentences than White people. A prison record affects people’s lives, and a felony conviction can prevent individuals from voting. Communities of color have been impacted by unfair sentencing for non-violent crimes. The drug war has also had a significant impact socially. Due to high poverty levels in Black communities, addicts cannot afford reliable healthcare and rehabilitation. Due to lack of quality healthcare, most drug addicts become worse, and many die from drug overdoses and

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<sup>107</sup> MacCabe et al., “Race/Ethnicity and Gender Differences in Drug Use and Abuse among College Students,” 77.

other drug-related causes. Discrimination and segregation also ensure that rehab facilities and mental health clinics are less accessible to Black people. These factors make it difficult for Black communities to fight the impacts of drugs.

## **Conclusion**

After extensive research to contribute acceptance to the factors that lead to low self-esteem among Black people, the writer will explain the intricacies of planning to preach Black biblical characters to heighten self-esteem.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **PROJECT, PLAN, AND PROCESS**

#### **Year I**

#### **Phillips Temple Christian Methodist Episcopal Church**

The goal of this research project is to determine whether preaching the Black presence in the Bible might boost the self-esteem of a specific group of Black churchgoers. The project was initiated at the Phillips Temple Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Houston, Texas. The method was to preach about Black characters in the Bible and their roles in the Bible.

Homiletical observations were made to establish whether preaching the Black presence in the Bible and Black empowerment might improve the self-esteem of Black congregants.

Qualitative research was chosen as the research method. The need for a qualitative approach was compelled by the need to ensure that the reaction to the proposed strategy was

captured. The project's goal is to boost esteem, which, as an emotion, cannot be quantified, but can only be observed and questioned.

Observation was going to be one of the procedures used to collect data in this project, and so taking a keen interest in the preachers' homiletical sermons and the congregation's reactions was crucial. Descriptive or reflective field notes were essential in recording observations. These notes describe the effects observed. Self-critiques to sermons were used to gather data that would be important to the project. Questionnaires given to both clergy and congregants were helpful in analyzing the data.<sup>108</sup> Surveys and journaling were also used to gather data.

### Variables

In statistical research, a "variable" refers to an object, place, phenomenon, or person that researchers would like to study. There are two types of variables: independent and dependent. A "dependent" variable is hypothesized to be impacted by interactions with one or more "independent" variables.<sup>109</sup> The independent variables are not expected to change due to interaction with the other variables in the study. After gathering data, the researcher may decide that the independent variable is the cause of the phenomenon under investigation. In this project, the dependent variable is the self-esteem of Black congregants and their active involvement in

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<sup>108</sup> Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, Or. Wipf & Stock, publishers, 2011), 41.

<sup>109</sup> Nancy J Vyhmeister, *Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology* (Zondervan, 2008), 24.

the church. The research examines the loss of esteem among Black churches and explores solutions that to the problem.

Research conducted at the church indicates that the number of Black Christians has been dwindling steadily. The cause of this is hypothesized to be a lack of motivation and low self-esteem witnessed in Black Christians of African American ancestry. This is the dependent variable. The cause of the problem is defined as the independent variable. However, the study identified more than one independent variable. The historical impact of slavery is one of the leading causes of low self-esteem among Black Christians. The other independent variable is ongoing racism, which has affected Black people since their arrival in North America. The absence of recognition of Black characters in the Bible and lack of Black presence in preaching may have contributed to the loss of self-esteem. These are the primary independent variables of the study and helped give the thesis its direction.

### **Sample Population**

#### **Year II and Year III**

##### **Phillips Temple CME Church and Bethel CME Church**

The “sample population” is the group of people, objects, or phenomena under study. It is essential to identify a sample population upon which to base the research question. The project’s primary goal was to study Black Christians of African American ancestry. The main congregation for the study was the Phillips Temple Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, coupled with Bethel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. These congregations were the focal

point of the research and their reactions to the homiletical sermons involving Black characters in the Bible. The writer presented sermons based on the essential roles of Black people in the Bible, in an effort to enhance the self-esteem of Black congregations. The population selected for the study was a necessary sample given that they belong to a Black church, and their preacher was willing to participate in the survey. The results would provide accurate evidence for the hypothesis under study.

### **Instruments/Materials**

Specific materials were used to gather information on the research topic. Extensive internet searches were performed for scholarly journals and articles with relevant, verified information on the subject.<sup>110</sup> Academic journals were chosen since they are reliable, verifiable sources of information. Peer-reviewed sources contain information that has been reviewed and verified by professionals and deemed safe for reference. The library was also a vital resource to look for relevant books for research on the topic. Online libraries were helpful for current and less-common books that may not be found in the library. Going through books written by homiletical preachers was also essential for drawing crucial information and using the information to answer the research question.

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<sup>110</sup> Vyhmeister, *Quality Research Papers* 14.

Other resources and materials used for research included websites containing rich American and African histories. It was necessary to study African and American records to get a glimpse of events of the time, leading to exploration of the research question. YouTube videos with relevant information were to be used to obtain additional information. Personal observation of sermons was essential in gaining firsthand information on the congregation and the homiletical effect of preaching as to the Black presence in the Bible. Interviews and dialogue with African American preachers on the possible relevance of the project were also important to the project's success. *The Bible* was another one of the most significant resources used in the project. A study of Black characters in the Bible requires solid evidence and support, and the Bible itself was the most useful resource for this.

### **Year III:**

#### **Methods of Analyzing the Results**

This project's primary method of analysis is qualitative, and the results will be analyzed using qualitative methods. Getting complex numbers for this project would be difficult; hence, the choice of qualitative data analysis. Qualitative methods used in the project include grounded theory, thematic analysis, narrative analysis, and qualitative content analysis.<sup>111</sup> These were deemed the most appropriate qualitative analysis methods to use for this project. The project involves a social experiment using homiletical and textual evidence. It is necessary to ensure that the results are monitored closely to capture them in real time. The qualitative methods identified

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<sup>111</sup> William R Myers, *Research in Ministry: A Primer for The Doctor of Ministry Program (Studies in Ministry & Parish Life)* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Theological Seminary, 1993), 26.

above have been used over the years, providing researchers with the most accurate results.<sup>112</sup>

Testing a hypothesis requires patience and focus, to determine whether a theory is valid.

Qualitative analysis is used to evaluate patterns within a data set. Determining and testing the frequency with which an idea is shared across a population helps in analyzing the information. The narrative analysis is another critical method given that the project involves listening to people's stories and analyzing the information.

The project consists of measuring people's self-esteem resulting from new homiletical approaches; thus, narrative analysis would be efficient. Thematic analysis helps review the data collected over the course of the project. Identifying a particular pattern in the data leads to a specific revelation that would allow the project's success. Grounded theory analysis would facilitate exploration of the theory incorporated in the research question. The research question examines the cause of low motivation and self-esteem among Black Christians. These qualitative data analysis methods give the best results for the research project, and so they support the thesis.

### **Limitations**

Qualitative research methods are efficient if used correctly and within a suitable timeframe. The methods help in the appropriate interpretation of the results. However, despite significant advantages to the research process, the methods also have limitations, the most important of which is that it is time-consuming. It takes time to observe and draw conclusions on

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<sup>112</sup> Myers, *Research in Ministry*, 27.



the recorded observations. Interpretations of qualitative analysis are limited, and the observations and findings are impacted by personal experience and knowledge.

Most qualitative analyses are open-ended and verification of results difficult. Significant effort is required to determine results. Categorization, sampling, and recording are some of the effort-intensive processes involved. Qualitative data analysis does not include statistics; hence, the causality of a given phenomenon is not easy to determine.

## CHAPTER 7

### RESULTS AND EVALUATION

This research project sought to determine the causes of low motivation and self-esteem in the Black church. The project investigated the research topic's culturally, congregationally, socially, and geographically relevant characteristics. The hypothesis was studied through various available texts to formulate the best research question. The issue of concern was low self-esteem among Black Christians in America, with the churches in the study as a research example. Many Black Christians do not appear to have any Black Bible characters to whom they can relate.<sup>113</sup> The Bible has been whitened, and even Jesus Christ is worshiped as the world's white Savior. The research would then explore the various homiletical books, ethnographic texts, and historical documents to attempt to justify the thesis. The issue of concern was an open and observable scenario in the modern Christian church.

It was essential to attempt to navigate the problem and determine its possible causes. Several suggestions were made in the report. Slavery as one of the oldest issues affecting the Black church given that most African Americans are descendants of slaves who were held against their will and were forced to work on White people's farms. The effects of slavery are still being felt daily by Black across the African diaspora. Race is also another problem facing modern-day Black Christians. Racism is embedded in American society, and for centuries Black people have been plagued by unequal access to healthcare, education, career opportunities, and

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<sup>113</sup> Emil M Thomas and Henry H Mitchell, *Preaching for Black Self-Esteem* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 112.

other disparities. Racial prejudice and segregation have also been experienced by the Black community for centuries, significantly impacting Black Christians' self-esteem. The destruction of much of African history and the Whitening of the Christian religion are other factors that may have led to a loss of motivation among African American congregations.

The lack of homiletical sermons preaching a Black presence in the Bible may have contributed to low self-esteem among Black Christians.<sup>114</sup> The fact that Black characters played essential roles in the Bible needs to be known.<sup>115</sup> Black people have been made to feel as though they have no cultural or historical prestige, and Black Americans have been disenfranchised and separated from their culture. Their history has been stolen from them, and they have been told that Christianity is a White person's religion. Whitening of Bible characters, paintings of a White Jesus, and forcing this revised religion on Africans are some of the strategies that have been used by White people to disenfranchise Black people.

Slaves and their descendants were compelled to embrace White Christianity. They were forced to adopt it for some form of acceptance. Black people came to love White Jesus as presented to them by Whites. White Jesus was a sign of hope, justice, and equality and was the only way to thrive in an extremely challenging environment. The Black church was formed as a haven for slaves and a shield against harsh treatment by Whites.

Black people have lived as second-class citizens in North America for centuries, while craving acceptance by American society and equal access to life, liberty, and the pursuit of

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<sup>114</sup> Watley and St. Clair, *The African Presence in the Bible*. 15.

<sup>115</sup> James H. Warden, *Blacks in the Bible: Volume I: The Original Roots of Men and Women of Color in Scripture*. (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2006), 36.

happiness. Racial segregation, oppression, poverty, unemployment, police brutality, and lack of self-esteem are the problems facing the Black community in America today. Despite the church's position on the frontline of the fight for equality, many Black people are losing faith. The church has pushed for civil rights activism, social justice, and equal treatment of the children of God. However, the lack of homiletical support for this fight against oppression has not enhanced the self-esteem of Black Christians.

The purpose of this research is to explore solutions that have been suggested to address the problem of Black Christian self-esteem. Black people need to understand that the Hebrews, including Jesus, were Black. The notion that the Hebrews were white people and that Jesus was white is simply untrue. The idea of Eurocentric Christianity, advanced by White supremacy, altered these aspects of the Bible to fit into their ideology of world dominance.<sup>116</sup> To conquer people of color, they had to establish Christianity as a white religion that would make them superior. Depictions of Jesus as a white person have been regarded as part of this strategy. Black people should know that they are not inferior and are destined for greatness.<sup>117</sup> The Bible is not a white story, and Black people should not view it as such.

Teaching Black history to Black congregations is another method used to ensure that Black Christians know about their history before the homiletical preaching of Black presence in the *Bible*. Most Black people interviewed did not have faith in Christianity, thinking that they

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<sup>116</sup> John Bossy and Jaroslav Pelikan. "Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture." *The American Historical Review* 92, no. 3 (1987): 1-636. doi:10.2307/1869917.

<sup>117</sup> Theron D Williams, *The Bible Is Black History* (Indianapolis, 2018), 10.

were children of a lesser God. Most of the congregants did not view themselves as worthy of God's presence. Therefore, learning about Black characters in the Bible has helped them realize that the Bible is their story. The homiletical preaching and the teaching of African history are strategies employed to show that the self-esteem of Black Christians can be uplifted. According to the results observed after weeks of homiletical preaching and historical revelations, church attendance increased. Many of those interviewed reported that they liked the new approach and felt better about being Black.

The use of biblical texts showing that Black presence and books written by ministers of African descent as to the true nature of the Jews and the role of Black people in the Bible was successful. After receiving this crucial information, their attitude toward being Black presence in the Bible changed. Many of the interviews and questionnaires presented resounding negativity about Christianity as some believed that White people have been granted advantages given that the Bible was a story of their people. After the revelations about the great African civilizations and how Christianity came to Africa before Europe, more of the remarks and interviews were positive. African Americans need to be enlightened as to their rich history and the truth about the Bible. The revelation they will receive from this enlightenment will help them feel less inferior and improve their self-esteem.

Based on the results of the questionnaires, surveys, and observations, the research hypothesis is deemed valid. Preaching about Black characters in the Bible and teaching Black people about their history can help renew their motivation and increase their self-esteem.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Thomas and Mitchell, *Preaching for Black Self-Esteem*, 116.

Despite the problems mentioned in this research, such as slavery, racism, poverty, and oppression, the preachments among Black Christians that heard the sermons can help them overcome these challenges. Some of the congregation wondered why this had not been taught in Black churches all along. They thought it would have strengthened Black communities and Black churches, leading to more effective solutions in the fight for justice. Many in the churches said that they had been drawn to new revelation by the new sermons. They claimed it was bold and necessary for the Black church community. This progressive homiletical approach would help Black people achieve greater self-respect and realize that they are equal as children of a great God.

## CHAPTER 8

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT

The findings of this research project are meaningful to the research problem under study. The project sought to ensure that homiletical sermons covered Black characters of the Bible and underscored their relevance. The findings support the thesis as to the need to improve the self-esteem of Black Christians. Results indicate that self-esteem of Blacks was enhanced, and that many people from the Black community are willing to come to church to hear these types of sermons. The findings provide evidence for the research project. Preaching Black presence in the church was determined to boost the self-esteem of Black people in predominantly Black church. The findings complemented the aims of the project and supported the thesis of the research project.

#### **Implications of the Findings**

The study's findings can be used to establish homiletical sermons that describe Black characters in the Bible. Embracing African history and knowledge of African heritage is also an essential aspect of improving Black people's lives. At Phillips Temple and Bethel, it was observed that the congregation was more informed after hearing sermons on Black Bible characters and the relevance of the Black race to the biblical story. The impact on the congregation's self-esteem was significant. Black Christians had not heard much preaching on the role of Black people in the *Bible* and their role in the salvation story. Improving the self-esteem of Black people can help ensure that they value themselves and work to empower their

communities. Knowing that one's ancestors were a great people and having a strong biblical legacy are necessary steps toward reclaiming lost glory.

### **Limitation of the Research**

Despite the research project findings that the hypothesis is valid, the research does not offer a comprehensive solution to the problem of Black self-esteem. Some of the causative factors of low Black self-esteem have been discussed, including slavery, segregation, racism, police brutality, and oppression. White supremacy lies at the epicenter of all of these factors, and this project does not offer solutions to such causal factors. It only provides consolation for Black people to help boost their self-esteem, which does not solve the state of poverty in which most Black Americans still live. It does not spell out any workable solution in dealing with increased police brutality on people of color; it does not solve the problem of unemployment; and it does not make Black people immune from police brutality.

The research does not offer any solutions to help Black people overcome the oppression they have endured through the centuries. The analysis explored the causes of congregants' low self-esteem and how to increase it, but not how to eliminate the causes. There was no clear mention of how to solve these problems. The research does not elaborate on how Black people should interact with their White counterparts after their self-esteem boost. What might be done with this enhanced esteem has not been discussed, and the main goal of improved self-esteem has not been stated clearly.



## Conclusion

The research project met the listed objectives in reference to preaching as to how extensive Black presence in the Bible would increase or improve the self-esteem of Black Christians. Ethnographic texts, historical analysis, and preaching Black presence in the Bible were strategies suggested for boosting the self-esteem of Black Christians. Black people have experienced significant historical injustices, both as slaves and as free American citizens. Their rights have been violated, and they are still victims of a racist government and a biased legal system. These phenomena have put Black lives in jeopardy and hurt their self-esteem. Helping raise their self-esteem is the goal of this project, and the ways in which this might be accomplished have been explained in the project.

Bethel has a member who turned 101-years-old in February 2021. During the congratulatory salutations, another member, who had just turned 95, marveled as to how the 101-year-old lady used to pick three hundred pounds of cotton every day. When asked how she accomplished this daily feat, the woman gave several reasons. One of them was that she went to church as a child, and she heard the preacher talk about how God heard the cries of the children of Israel, and God hears the cries of black people when we suffer. I felt shame after hearing that reflection. I said to myself, *who am I to tell people who have lived through segregation, Jim Crow, and a civil rights movement that they have low self-esteem? How dare I open my mouth and have the audacity to accuse them of not knowing or questioning these things?* That is how this project began. I now know that this is not so much about self-esteem as it is about identity. I wonder if the preacher considered the outcome of the lives of Black people from those past

generations. Would they have aimed higher and achieved more? Would they have been able to ease the burden of their trials knowing that their ancestors were in the Bible?

This project resulted in the church members at Bethel putting a red curtain over the white Jesus in the sanctuary (see Figure 2). I'm personally not sure how much the preaching tied into them making that decision. Nonetheless, it makes me feel better when I'm proclaiming scripture in the pulpit. It is my assessment that we dutifully owe it to this present generation to inform them thoroughly of the role of their forgotten ancestors in the Biblical text. Identity is everything, and I am making a conscious decision to continue saying it loudly, in hopes of drawing someone closer to God and strengthening the self-esteem of Black people by identifying them with Black relevant characters in the Bible.

## APPENDIX A

### Figures



Figure 1-Picture of White Jesus in Bethel CME Church Tadmor, Texas (2020)



Figure 2-Red Curtain Covering the White Jesus in Bethel CME Church Tadmor, Texas (2023)

## APPENDIX B

### Survey

#### PREACHING MINISTRY PROJECT

#### PREACHING AS PERFORMANCE

(Please fill out the demographic information) Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: M \_\_\_ F \_\_\_ Age: 0-17 \_\_\_ 18-39 \_\_\_ 40-59 \_\_\_ 60-79 \_\_\_ 80 \_\_\_

Race: African American \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_

Marital Status: Married \_\_\_ Widowed \_\_\_ Divorced \_\_\_ Separated \_\_\_ Never Been Married \_\_\_

Education (check the highest level): 1<sup>st</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> \_\_\_ 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> \_\_\_ HS Diploma/GED \_\_\_

Some College/Vocational Training \_\_\_ Associate's Degree \_\_\_ Bachelor's Degree \_\_\_ Master's Degree \_\_\_

Professional Degree \_\_\_ Doctorate Degree \_\_\_

Employment Status: Employed \_\_\_ Self-Employed \_\_\_ Unemployed and Looking \_\_\_

Unemployed and Not Looking \_\_\_ Homemaker \_\_\_ Student \_\_\_ Retired \_\_\_ Disabled/Unable to Work \_\_\_

How many years have you been a member of Phillips Temple? 0-10 \_\_\_ 11-20 \_\_\_ 21-30 \_\_\_ 31-40 \_\_\_ 41-50 \_\_\_  
50+ \_\_\_

On a scale of 1-10, how much does preaching make a difference in your life?

Scale: 1-4=No Difference/5-7=Somewhat of a Difference / 8-10=Major Difference

Please write the number: \_\_\_\_\_

**DISCLAIMER STATEMENT:** This survey is being taken as part of the Doctor of Ministry in Preaching Program at Chicago Theological Seminary where Reverend Landers is currently a student. Please be assured that your responses are completely anonymous and confidential meaning that your responses will not and cannot be traced back to you as the respondent. No personally identifiable information is captured unless you voluntarily offer personal or contact information in any of the comment fields. Additionally, your responses are combined with those of many others and summarized in a report to further protect your anonymity. Thank you for your participation in this endeavor.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** This survey is based upon you as the respondent hearing him preach the sermon titled "Jesus Can't Be White" from Revelation 1:12-19a. Read the statements on the left side of the sheet and put a check under the appropriate column. Reply with 1 of the 4 ratings: Did Not Meet Expectation, Somewhat Met Expectation, Met Expectation, or Exceeded Expectation.

If you would like to make a comment in reference to the specific statement being asked of you, please feel free to do so after giving your rating.

## Backstory

	Did not Meet Expectation	Somewhat Met Expectation	Met Expectation	Exceeded Expectation	Comments
<b>Utilization:</b> Rev. Landers connected the scripture to a life event in the sense that the sermon felt like the Living Word of God.	_____	_____	_____	_____	

## Structure

	Did not Meet Expectation	Somewhat Met Expectation	Met Expectation	Exceeded Expectation	Comments
<b>Arrangement:</b> Rev. Landers' sermon presented an organized form of preaching.	_____	_____	_____	_____	
<b>Focus:</b> Rev. Landers' sermon had a main point and a central idea.	_____	_____	_____	_____	
<b>Comprehension:</b> Rev. Landers' sermon was easily to follow and palatable for listening.	_____	_____	_____	_____	

## Appeal

	Did not Meet Expectation	Somewhat Met Expectation	Met Expectation	Exceeded Expectation	Comments
<b>Curiosity:</b> Rev. Landers captured my interest with the sermon topic.	_____	_____	_____	_____	
<b>Invitation:</b> Rev. Landers held my attention by inviting me to be involved in the preaching moment by way of pitch, music in the voice, and sermon flow.	_____	_____	_____	_____	
<b>Authenticity:</b> Rev. Landers used his body and voice to make the preaching moment believable and genuine.	_____	_____	_____	_____	

## Henry Mitchell's Consciousness of Preaching to the Whole Person

	Did not Meet Expectation	Somewhat Met Expectation	Met Expectation	Exceeded Expectation	Comments
<b>Cognitive Consciousness:</b> Rev. Landers made me think during the sermon with clarity of words and the articulation of consonants.	_____	_____	_____	_____	
<b>Intuitive Consciousness:</b> Rev. Landers made me sense the sermon through the use of invitation, tone of voice and the articulation of vowels.	_____	_____	_____	_____	
<b>Emotive Consciousness:</b> Rev. Landers made me feel the sermon using body language and breathing.	_____	_____	_____	_____	

## Overall Sermon Evaluation

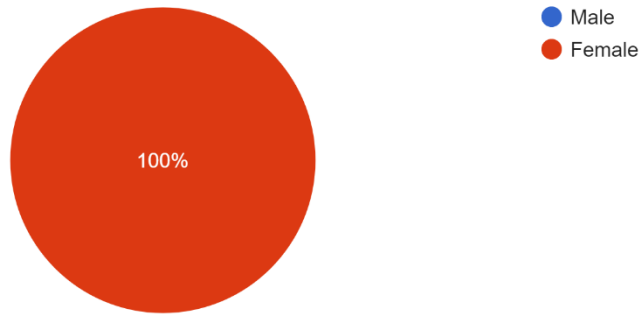
	Did not Meet Expectation	Somewhat Met Expectation	Met Expectation	Exceeded Expectation	Comments
Please rate Rev. Landers' sermon "Jesus Can't Be White".	_____	_____	_____	_____	

**Additional Comments:**

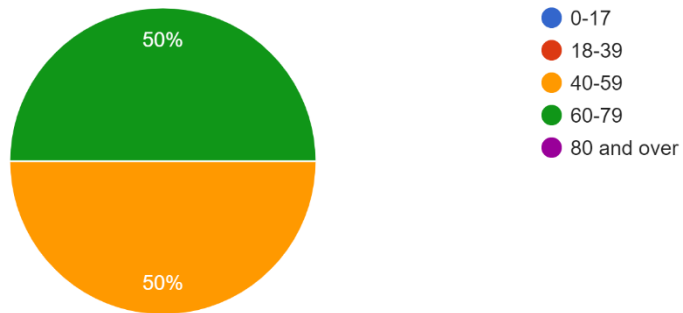
## APPENDIX C

### Survey Results

Gender  
4 responses



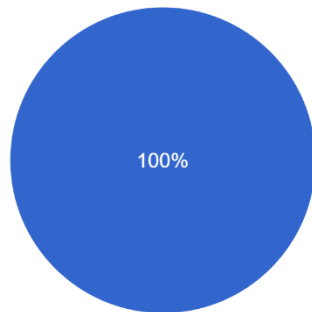
Age  
4 responses





### Race

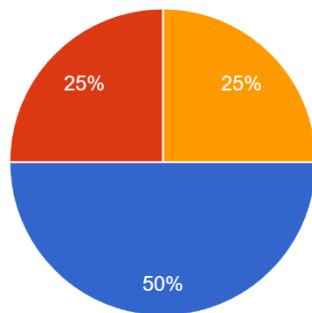
4 responses



● African American

### Marital Status

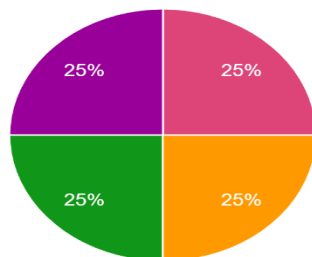
4 responses



● Married  
● Widowed  
● Divorced  
● Separated  
● Never Married

### Education (Please choose highest level attained)

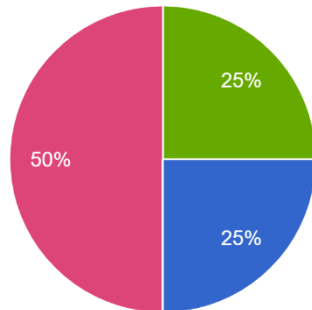
4 responses



● 1st-8th Grade  
● 9th-12th Grade  
● High School Diploma/GED  
● Some College/Vocational Training  
● Associate Degree  
● Bachelor's Degree  
● Master's Degree  
● Professional Degree  
● Doctorate Degree

### Employment Status

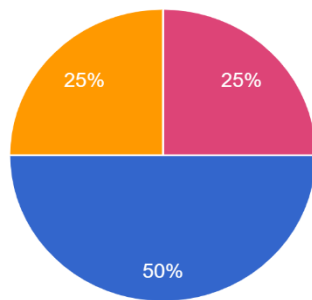
4 responses



- Employed
- Self-Employed
- Unemployed and Looking
- Unemployed and Not Looking
- Homemaker
- Student
- Retired
- Disabled/Unable to Work

### How long have you been a member at Phillips Temple/Bethel?

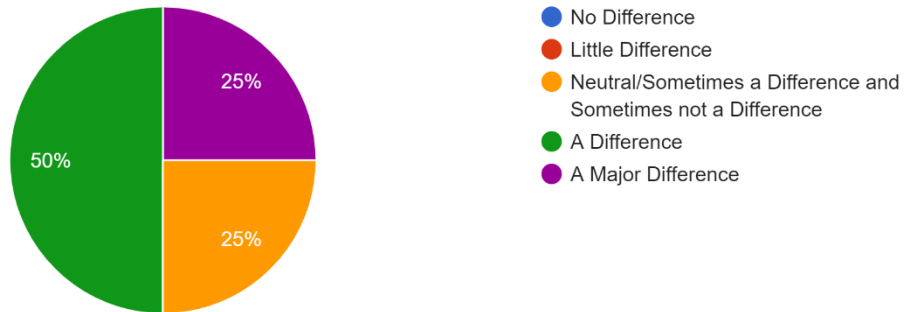
4 responses



- 0-10 years
- 11-20 years
- 21-30 years
- 31-40 years
- 41-49 years
- 50 plus years
- I'm not a member

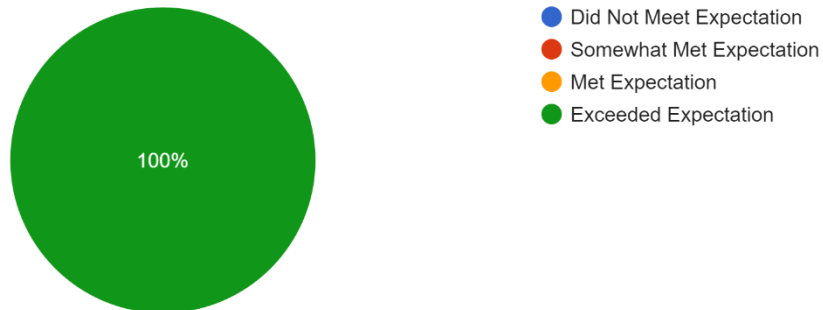
How much difference does preaching make in your life?

4 responses



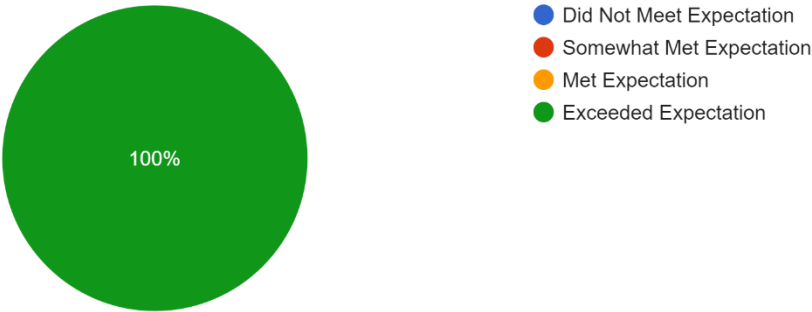
Backstory: Rev. Landers connected the scripture to a life event in the sense that the sermon felt like the Living Word of God.

4 responses



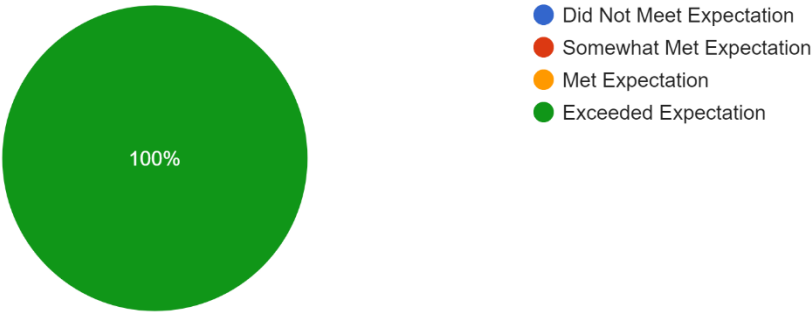
Structure-Arrangement: Rev. Landers presented a sermon in an organized form of preaching.

4 responses



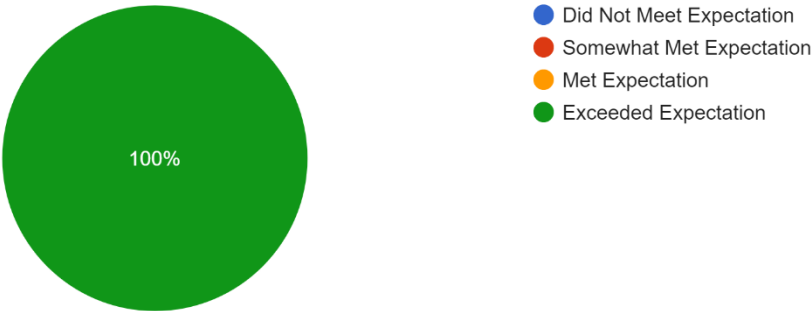
Structure-Focus: Rev. Landers had a main point and a central idea in the sermon.

4 responses



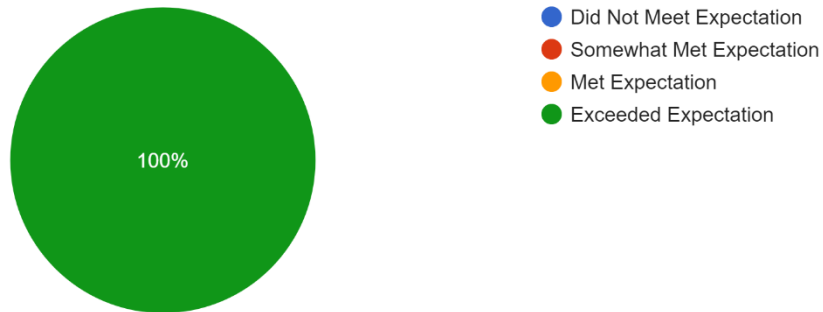
Structure-Comprehension: Rev. Landers was easy to follow and palatable to hear.

4 responses



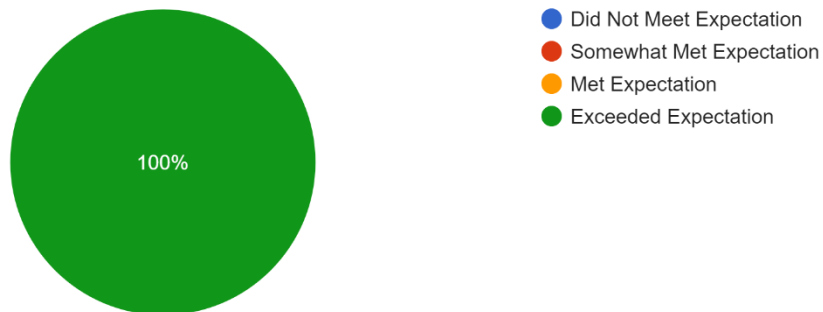
Appeal-Curiosity: Rev. Landers captured my interest with the sermon title/topic.

4 responses



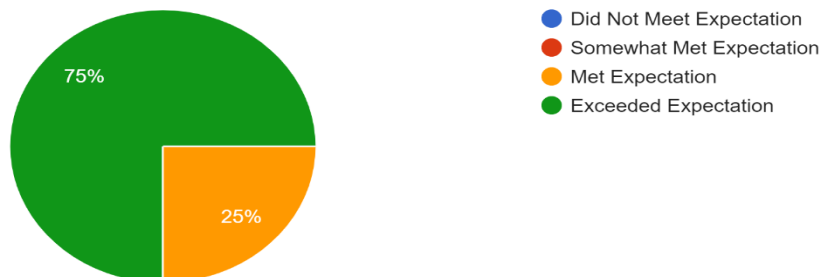
Appeal-Invitation: Rev. Landers held my attention by inviting me to be involved in the preaching moment by way of pitch, music in the voice, and sermon flow.

4 responses

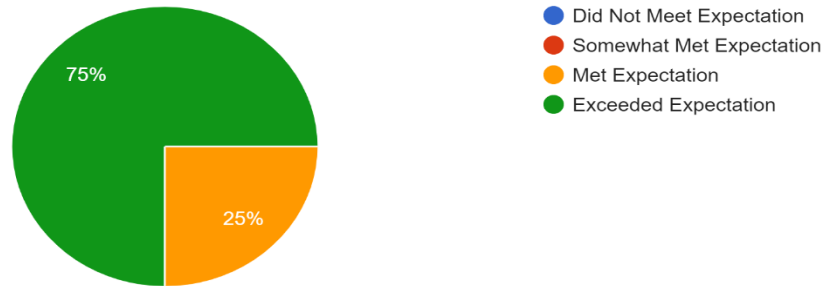


Appeal-Authenticity: Rev. Landers used his body and voice to make the preaching moment believable and genuine.

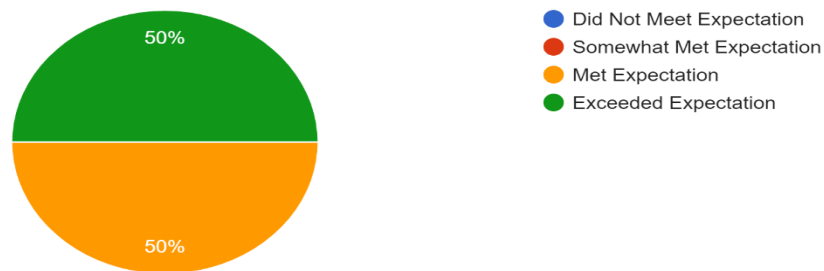
4 responses



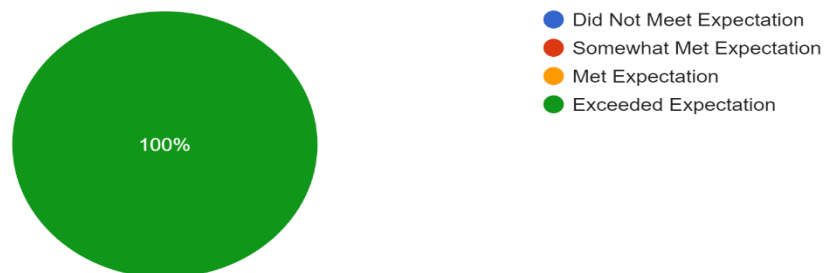
Henry Mitchell's Consciousness of Preaching to the Whole Person-Cognitive Consciousness: Rev. Landers made me think during the sermon with clarity of words and the articulation of consonants.  
4 responses



Henry Mitchell's Consciousness of Preaching to the Whole Person-Emotive Consciousness: Rev. Landers made me feel the sermon through gesticulations, body language and methodical breathing.  
4 responses



Overall Sermon Evaluation: Please rate the sermon "Jesus Can't Be White" as preached by Rev. Landers.  
4 responses



## **APPENDIX D**

### **Homiletical Interview Form**

Disclaimer: I am conducting interviews as part of a research study to bring validity to preaching Black biblical characters for self-esteem. As a fellow homilist, you are in an ideal position to give valuable first-hand information from your own perspective. Although there is no compensation for participating in this study, your participation will be a valuable addition to my research and findings could lead to a greater understanding of African American homiletics and people preaching the Gospel. Please respond to the following questions at your earliest convenience:

1. Why do many Black Christians today feel that Christianity is a predominantly white religion?
2. What are the main reasons behind the low self-esteem among certain Black Christians today?
3. Please read each question carefully and answer accordingly.
  - a. Have you ever preached about Black characters in the Bible?
  - b. If you answered YES to part a, how often do you preach or have preached about Black personalities in the Bible?
  - c. If you answered YES to parts a and b, was your preaching audience mostly African Americans?
  - d. If you answered YES to parts a, b, and c, did you perceive your preaching audience befuddled by the knowledge, accepting of the knowledge, or indifferent toward the knowledge concerning the Black biblical character you preached in a sermon?
4. What can be done to help Black Christians understand that they are part of the biblical narrative and that there are many Black characters in the Bible?

## APPENDIX E

### Homiletical Interview Form Responses

Disclaimer: I am conducting interviews as part of a research study to bring validity to preaching Black biblical characters for self-esteem. As a fellow homilist, you are in an ideal position to give valuable first-hand information from your own perspective. Although there is no compensation for participating in this study, your participation will be a valuable addition to my research and findings could lead to a greater understanding of African American homiletics and people preaching the Gospel. Please respond to the following questions at your earliest convenience:

1. Why do many Black Christians today feel that Christianity is a white religion?

Interviewee 1: Most African Americans recall the original or the rebroadcast of Good Times where J. J. painted a picture of a Black Jesus. Florida was furious that J. J. hung his painting on the wall! Most African American homes always had a picture of a white Jesus hanging on the wall and church programs depicted a photo of Jesus as a white male. It was common for most African Americans to think Jesus is white when one has never fully understood the description of Jesus in Revelation 1.14-15. In the passage, Jesus' hair is described as wool, his eyes like balls of fire, and his feet like bronze. One must not accept the systematic belief that Jesus is white, which has given a limited understanding and a distorted view of Christianity.

Interviewee 2: I am not so certain that many Black Christians feel that Christianity is a white religion. On the other side of the spectrum if they did, I can totally understand their misconception. The Christian faith did not create meanness, unfairness and social injustice. Mankind did these horrors. But, God who has the power to stop the lack of inequity allows these detriments to continue. No other race of people face the struggle to simply survive as Black folk. I heard the late Dr. Mack King Carter, say in a lecture approximately 15 years ago which was a couple of years or so before his death that... "Black peoples are on the bottom everywhere. You can go all over the world and Black peoples are on the bottom. You can go to Africa and Black peoples are on the bottom." And it seems to me that the distribution of every resource is controlled by the white race. Jewish people are almost as hated as Blacks, but they are hated with money in their coffers that Black Christians don't have. In the world we live in everything seems to be white oriented. Even the White folk's Jesus got to be white with blue eyes. And they identify with and celebrate a white risen glorified Jesus. Black folks on the other-hand identify with the suffering crucified Jesus. Another question or concern that could be raised concerning this matter is, even now during the current and deadly pandemic, Blacks were negatively affected than their white counterparts. Why wouldn't Black Christians think Christianity is anything but a white religion. Black Christians are left with God's response to Job in the 38th chapter—we were not there when God created the awesome splendor of His Creation. And we dare not raise a fuss with questions.



Again, the scriptures put us in our place. “But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to the one who formed, why did you make me this?” Yes, Christianity much of the time does appear to be a white religion. Still, one of the few things that gives Black peoples hope is the miracle of not having but still loving, still worshipping, and still forgiving the oppressor. Black peoples can go to church as broke as a convict and still praise God. In these unfashionable possessions Black peoples are rich in the Christian faith.

Interviewee 3: I’ve never heard Christianity be called a white religion.

2. What are the main reasons behind the low self-esteem among certain Black Christians today?

Interviewee 1: Just as the Israelites/Hebrews suffered oppression and the silence of God, many African American Christians question why God allows oppression and suffering. The Israelites/Hebrews endured the hardship of slavery in a foreign land just as African Americans endured slavery in America. African Americans have a low self-esteem because of a lack of Biblical teaching and knowledge of the faith that God is always on the side of the oppressed. Faith and belief in God should be two key fundamentals to eradicate a low self-esteem with a hope that the last shall be first. God is a change agent who can turn life around when we trust in the Lord.

Interviewee 2: The main reason behind the low self-esteem of Black Christians is the generations and generations and many, many, many more generations of intentionality of white society and others to cultivate a substandard race. That implementation was sadly bought into and perpetuated by every nationality and race of people—even the Black race. Black people have always been depicted in subservient roles on TV, movies, and in the public arena. Black or Liberation Theology is more than a black portrait of Jesus. That is not Black empowerment. There is a cadre a reasons why Black peoples suffer poor self-esteem; not to leave out their own lack of effort to improve, to learn, to study, and show themselves as human beings with godly integrity. Black people must invest in empirical study to overcome a multiplicity of generational taught and learned tomfoolery. Black people have poor self-esteem because they allow themselves to be labeled by people who hate them.

Black religious leadership also contribute directly to the void of spiritual academics. In the Black church Jesus has been divided by class, social order, and size. The preacher/pastor’s attire, the whoop, and the upbeat choir take supremacy over the life-giving word of God. Finally, on this question, let me say the thing that hurts but no doubt can initiate needed change in Black peoples. They have to want to stop being docile and ignorant, but apply themselves to the arduous task of re-educating themselves.

Interviewee 3: Many Black Christians like Black people in general have low self-esteem because they don’t know who they are in Christ. They need to seek God.

3. Please read each question carefully and answer accordingly.

A. Have you ever preached about Black characters in the Bible?

Interviewee 1: Yes, I have preached the presence of Black characters in the Bible and I certainly encourage others to do so.

Interviewee 2: Yes I have.

Interviewee 3: No, I haven't. Maybe one day, I will.

B. If you answered YES to Question 3A, how often do you preach or have preached about Black personalities in the Bible?

Interviewee 1: I have preached sermons relating to the presence of Black or African in the Bible extensively. It is not just limited to Black History Month, but all year long.

Interviewee 2: Yes but not too often

Interviewee 3: N/A

C. If you answered YES to Questions 3A and 3B, was your preaching audience mostly African Americans?

Interviewee 1: I have preached sermons relating to the presence of Black or Africans in the Bible to Black and white individuals in the audience.

Interviewee 2: Yes

Interviewee 3: N/A

D. If you answered YES to Questions 3A, 3B, and 3C, did you perceive your preaching audience befuddled by the knowledge, accepting of the knowledge, or indifferent toward the knowledge concerning the Black biblical character you preached in a sermon?

Interviewee 1: I experienced acceptance from the audience. It was educational and theological. It was not just the statement, but an exegesis of the text that provided background, knowledge, and citing of geographical references.

Interviewee 2: They were indifferent in my estimation. It didn't matter to them.

Interviewee 3: N/A

4. What can be done to help Black Christians understand that they are part of the biblical narrative and that there are many Black characters in the Bible?

Interviewee 1: I strongly feel when Christian Education curriculums are taught and exegetical sermons preached that illustrate and explain Africa and African Biblical characters it will place African Americans in the context of text and connect African Americans to the Bible in profound ways. The teaching and preaching with insight and understanding of the African presence in the Bible changes the entire dynamics of one's thoughts and beliefs about Christianity.

Interviewee 2: Fortunately, something can still be done; more importantly, must be done to address the problems and needs of Black Christians. I am fully persuaded that few people will accept the challenge to pursue a seminary or even a marginal education. When I say marginal education, I mean just enough education to understand a little more than elementary biblical concepts. In my opinion, they must be overflowed with pedagogical opportunities. Methods and opportunities must be innumerable and without effort. The content of the subject matter must be easily accessible, i. e., people who want you to purchase their products put a billboard on side the highway. Whether it is good or bad we learn their message while on a Sunday stroll. How do you make people read the Bible when it's already accessible in every conceivable medium? I do not know! Still, think that is the place to start a transformation.

I do not think that you can find yourself in the Bible until you first know who you are. I don't care how much you read the Bible, if you don't know who you are and cannot tell that the anthropological African diaspora are the same as yourself and being told to "shush" you need to be re-educated—and the teacher must not be above the people in any way. Apart from Jesus, God called his servants from AMONG the people.

Interviewee 3: The preacher will have to be emphatic in proof and patient in presenting credible evidence.

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