OH FIX ME: MODIFYING WORSHIP PRIMARILY IN BLACK CHURCHES TO HELP FOSTER RESONANCE AND AFFECTION FOR NEGRO SPIRITUALS AMONG YOUNG ADULT BLACKS AGES 21-38

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of the project was to introduce a worship model for churches that inspired young adult blacks, ages 21-38, to love and appreciate Negro Spirituals used during the worship service. For three weeks, the project took the existing worship template at United Cornerstone Missionary Baptist Church in Winston Salem, NC and modified it to ensure that the entire worship component connected to a word, theme, thought, or message of the selected Negro Spiritual. The intent was to present other ways— beyond vocal performance—that the Negro Spiritual could be used during a worship service to inspire resonance and appreciation among young blacks, ages 21-38.

One of the key components to ensure the success of the project was spending time training the young adult worship leaders. They spent time reading, listening, reflecting, and discussing each Negro Spiritual. It was important for the worship leader to discern if he or she resonated with the song and translated that feeling to the whole congregation.

Another key component was consulting with the music director to make sure all other worship songs used during the service connected with the Negro Spiritual.

In measuring the success of the project, young black members at United Cornerstone Missionary Baptist Church were asked to personally reflect on the Negro Spiritual, evaluate the musical presentation of the Negro Spiritual, and assess whether the words, themes, or messages of the highlighted Negro Spiritual aligned with other elements of the worship service.

To my voice teachers, Marsha Henderson, Talmage Fauntleroy, Fran Shafter, Bobby Honeysucker, and Richard Heard

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INTRODUCTION

Over my head, I hear music in the air.
Over my head, I hear music in the air.
Over my head, I hear music in the air.
There must a God somewhere.

—Anonymous

The unknown author of this Negro Spiritual speaks to the ubiquitous nature of music. One could even surmise that air and music are identical twins because each can only be felt and heard but not smelled, seen, or touched. What makes it possible for one to hear and feel the air and the musical melodies that accompany her? Deep in the bowels of the atmosphere is a huge fan called the wind. When the wind ignites, it causes the air to move; and when she moves, musical melodies caress the earth like rain on a parched surface. Thus, humanity gets to hear and enjoy the songs of nature.

For example, one hears the songs of the oceans at the crack of dawn as it settles on the soft sands of the seashore or the soft voice of the river as it meanders through the heart of nature before it sets off into the ocean. What sound is sweeter the melodious morning chirp of birds in the spring time that serve as life's alarm clock?

In the second creation story in Genesis 2, the author writes in verse seven, "Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." As God breathed life into air, God gave birth to humanity with air. As a result, every person is a divinely constructed hand-made wind instrument with each carrying a unique sound, a distinct beat, and a different song. Perhaps, the Negro Spiritual "Steal Away to Jesus" describes it best:

> My Lord calls me, He calls me by the thunder; The *trumpet* [emphasis added] sounds within a my *soul* [emphasis added]. Green trees are bending. Poor sinner stands a trembling; The *trumpet* [emphasis added] sounds within-a my *soul* [emphasis added].[1]

This verse is an example of music's aesthetic expression that the author illuminated but did not create. The music of the spiritual represents the breath or the spirit of God innately established within when given life. However, the words were derived and created from the individual's contextual experience and location.

In his book, *Models of Contextual Theology,* theologian Stephan Bevans discusses several models of contextual theology. However, the key factor of distinction in contextual theology is its level of consideration in valuing the human over contexts, cultures, experiences, perspectives, and the changes that could result. By including the human as a 'first-order' source, contextual theology encompasses all the experiences that comprise a person's life. The human experience reflects one's views, understandings, and constructions on a reality which (optionally) can be juxtaposed with one's perception and expression of God before, during, or after an event.

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[1] "Steal Away," Wikipedia, last modified December 2, 2017, accessed March 17, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steal_Away.

For example, when listening to Mahalia Jackson[2] and The Mighty Clouds of Joy[3] sing the Negro Spiritual "Steal Away to Jesus," one hears two different sounds and colors. This signifies how one's contextual location impacts the vocal interpretation of the song during a performance. The notion of 'first-order' gives equal value to each vocal presentation because of its great affection for the individual and appreciation on how each person's experiences shaped the delivery of the song.

In addition, one's contextual experience and location existentially forms one's opinion about songs. During a casual conversation with a young black musical professor at one of the local universities, he expressed to me a disdain for hearing Negro Spirituals sung during a worship service. He prefers hearing Negro Spirituals at a production or a concert. For him, Negro Spirituals are a musical menace during a worship service. A fellow pastoral colleague shared similar sentiments. At his pastoral location, the Negro Spirituals are driving young blacks ages, 21-38 away from the church.

Have the Negro Spirituals become unpalatable songs for young adult blacks ages, 21-38 during a worship service? If so, what are the causes? More importantly, what can be done to help young adult blacks, ages 21-38 become more receptive to hearing Negro Spirituals in worship?

In II Kings 2:19-22, the prophet is informed by his pupils that the water in the city was bitter and the land was unproductive. In addressing the issue, Elisha has his students

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[2]To hear Mahalia Jackson sing "Steal Away," see: Mahalia Jackson, "Steal Away," (sound recording), posted June 21, 2005 (Acrobat Music Limited, 2005) accessed June 13, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Af9-usAO8Hw.

[3] To hear The Mighty Clouds of Joy sing "Steal Away to Jesus" see "The Mighty Clouds of Joy Steal Away to Jesus," (video), posted January 15, 2011 by blessedover, accessed June 14, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xr1Xigs8n-M.

find him a new bowl and place salt in the bowl. Then he goes to the bitter spring and throws the salt into it. Then the spring was cured and became productive.

This small miracle is a metaphor for the importance of this project. The land represents the church, the new bowl represents the project, and the bitter spring represents the Negro Spirituals. From the conversations listed above, the Negro Spirituals leave a bitter after-taste for young adult blacks, ages 21-38 during worship, making the church less worshipful.

The salt represents modifications to a church's worship service that could potentially generate resonance and affection for Negro Spirituals among young adult blacks ages, 21-38. And those modifications are not limited to just singing rearranged renditions. The project will provide examples to highlight the ubiquity of the Negro Spirituals.

This paper will provide a modified worship template using a Negro Spiritual as the centerpiece that will help foster resonance and affection of Negro Spirituals for young blacks ages, 21-38. The intent is not to rearrange, redesign, or change a worship service, but to take an existing template and ensure that each component of the worship service connects to a word, theme, thought, or message of the selected Negro Spiritual and is delivered and communicated in a way that fosters resonance and affection for young blacks ages, 21-38. The benefits of modifying the worship service highlights the ubiquity in Negro Spirituals, allows a church to keep its worship itinerary, and alleviates pressure and attention that sometimes comes with singing or instrumentally playing a Negro Spiritual. Furthermore, it is a creative way to teach a history lesson and to show that the Negro Spiritual is as important to the church as air is to breathing.

Chapter one discusses the nature of suffering and its role in the formation of Negro Spirituals and black religion. Chapter two explores the history and controversy surrounding the formation of the Negro Spirituals. Chapter three examines the role of theodicy and its impact on the nature of Negro Spirituals. Chapter four introduces, measures, and evaluates the success of the modified template. Chapter five passionately exhorts the necessity of making Negro Spirituals have an enduring and active place in the church worship.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ROLE OF SUFFERING IN THE FORMATION OF THE NEGRO SPIRITUAL AND BLACK RELIGION

In the antebellum period in the United States of America, people from various countries and cultures on the continent of Africa were kidnapped and sold into transatlantic slavery which resulted in Africans being abandoned in unfamiliar societies and nations. A 12-year-old boy named George Allen writes this poem to describe slavery:

> Slavery, oh, thou cruel stain,
> Thou dost fill my heart with pain
> See, my brother, there he stands
> Chained by slavery's cruel bands.[1]

In *Exorcizing Evil: A Womanist Perspective on the Spiritual*, Cheryl Kirk-Duggan provides a very graphic depiction of slavery in America:

> Slavery is evil. The systematic, legal practice of making people chattel, breeding them, punishing them with tar and feathers, lynching them, and cutting off their hands and breaking their legs as punishment because they tried to read, write, and run away was immoral, depraved, and base. This dehumanizing, vile institution in America was based on economics and greed, and used prejudicial, biblical, scientific, political, and psychological myths—collections of cultural stories or themes—to shape the United States' view of the 'peculiar institution.'[2]

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[1] Dorothy Parker, ed, *Early Negro Writing 1760-1837* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1995), 574.

[2] Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, *Exorcizing Evil: A Womanist Perspective on the Spirituals* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 16.

In describing suffering, renowned black mystic Howard Thurman declares:

> Suffering is universal for mankind. There is no one who escapes. It makes demand alike upon the wise and the foolish, the literate and the illiterate, the saint and the sinner. Very likely it bears no relationship to the character of the individual; it often cannot be assessed in terms of merit or demerit, reward or punishment. Men have tried to build all kinds of immunities against it. Suffering stalks man, never losing the scent, and sooner late seizes upon him to wreak its devastation.[1]

However, there are some limitations to Thurman's philosophy on suffering. He interprets suffering in a way that lacks contextual variance and specificity. In Thurman's notion of suffering, there is no mention of the people who carry out suffering. From Thurman, one gets the idea that suffering is a universally serendipitous phenomenon. One can interpret his notion as "to be human is to suffer." By making suffering universally applicable he collapses forms of suffering into one category of suffering that does not speak specifically to the experiences of enslaved Africans in United States of America. A more concentrated view on suffering identifies and examines causes, types of suffering, and the impact on specific groups and cultures.

Theologian William R. Jones creates a more precise explanation/definition of suffering and identifies one form of suffering as ethnic suffering:

> Four essential features constitute **ethnic suffering**: (a) maldistribution, (b) negative quality, (c) enormity, and (d) non-catastrophic character. By accenting the ethnic factor, I wish to call attention to that suffering which is maldistributed; it is not spread, as it were, randomly and impartially over the total human race. Rather, it is concentrated in an ethnic group. My concern in utilizing the concept of ethnic suffering is to accentuate the fact that black suffering is balanced by white non-suffering instead of white suffering. Consequently, black suffering in particular and ethnic suffering in general raise the issue of the scandal of particularity.[2]

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[1] Howard Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit* (Richmond, IN, Friends United Press, 1963), 64.

[2] Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 21.

From Jones, it is poignantly clear that slavery, Jim Crow, and segregation were concentrated examples of deliberate, concerted, and passionate acts of oppression by whites onto blacks in the United States of America. Moreover, the notion of 'white non-suffering' appears as a euphemism for white privilege. The idea or practice of white privilege through slavery, Jim Crow, and segregation were used to personify more the privilege of being white as opposed to the disadvantage of being black, the penultimate when it comes to suffering.

There was some suffering that a pen could not describe. The writing by David Ruggles entitled "The Abrogation of the Seventh Commandment by the American Churches," describes the treatment of women.

> It may not be accurately comprehended by you, that in addition to all the other most odious and criminal attributes of American slaveholding, a licentiousness of intercourse between the sexes, constant, incestuous, and universal exists; the aggravated corruptions of which, no pen can describe, and no unpolluted imagination conceive; and that this direful calamity is an essential portion—or rather the very heart's blood—of that debasing bondage in which the colored women are held, and by which they are defiled and destroyed.[3]

M. Shawn Copeland recounts the story of Harriet Jacobs from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* to illustrate the character's perspective that slavery was more brutal to women than men:

> Ma mamma said that a nigger 'oman couldn't help herself, fo' she had to do what de marster say. Ef he come to de field whar de women workin' an tell gal to come on, she had to go. He would take one down in de woods an' use her all de time he wanted to, den send her on back to work.[4]

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[3] Parker, *Early Negro Writing*, 479.

[4] M. Shawn Copeland, "Wading through Many Sorrows: Toward a Theology of Suffering in Womanist Perspective," in A *Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil & Suffering*," edited by Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 116,

Copeland also shares the voices of black women that illustrate their gendered suffering:

> My sister was given away when she was a girl. She told me an ma that they'd make her go out and lay on a table and two or three white men would have sex with her before they'd let her up. She was just a small girl. She died when she was still in her young days, still a.[5]

The following stories illustrate on one level surrogacy (i.e., forced surrogacy), the roles black women played as coerced care givers through domestic service, child care, physical field labor (man's work, and sexual exploitation).[6] During slavery, black women were bound to a system that had respect for neither their bodies, their dignity, their labor, nor their motherhood except as it was put to the service of securing the well-being of ruling class white families.[7]

One of the ways the slaves dealt with their suffering was by singing the Negro Spirituals. The Negro Spirituals were the folk product of a tragic moment, a moment of consummate suffering and complete passion, a moment that embraced the history in which the black man and woman melded his/her vision of his/her own tragic story—all one with that of Moses, the Hebrews and Jesus—with the native rhythms of the natural man.[8] The spiritual, then is key to the slave's description and its criticism of his

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[5] Ibid., 112.

[6] Anthony B. Pinn, *Why Lord?: Suffering and Evil in Black Theology* (New York: Continuum Press, 1999), 104.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Leroy Moore, Jr., "The Spiritual: Soul of Black Religion," *American Quarterly* 23, no. 5 (December 1971): 668-669.

environment.[9] Just to be able to voice through song one's laments was redemptive and cathartic.

The Negro Spirituals when syncretized with Christianity radically revolutionized the practice of religion in America. Arthur Jones states:

> It would be difficult to find in history a more advanced example of a religious system able to integrate so effectively the seemingly contradictory tasks of inner solace and meaningful action in the world. It is clear that some of the best features of African religious traditions, interacting with the severely oppressive circumstances of slavery in America, resulted in a new, unique religious system of incomparable vision and power, expressed actively in an archetypally potent body of songs.[10]

The syncretizing of Christianity and the black experience in America gave birth to what historian Joseph R. Washington calls, Black Religion.[11] He explains it thusly:

> Black Religion is unique to the Negro folk, born as it was of slavery, and it ties them each to the other in times of stress by a racial bond, which cuts across all other variables. Given enough facts about his ecclesiastical affiliation and his status we are often able to generalize accurately about beliefs and attitudes of any particular non-Negro person with whom we are concerned. The fact that a Negro, however, is Protestant, Roman Catholic, or in rare instances Jewish is of minor and less predictable value in determining his beliefs and attitudes.[12]

Therefore, Black Religion is more than just an adaptation of the Christianity practiced by blacks living in the United States of America. Rather, Black Religion is a fusion of African tradition, culture, the suffering experiences of slavery, and a radical

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[9] John Lovell, Jr., "The Social Implications of the Negro Spiritual," *The Journal of Negro Education* 8, no. 4 (October 1939): 638.

[10] Arthur C. Jones, *Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books,
1993), 90.

[11] Joseph R. Washington, Jr., *Black Religion: The Negro and Christianity in the United States* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 31.

[12] Ibid., 31.

alteration of Christianity as practiced in the United States of America. All of this was made possible, expressed, and reflected through a unique gift called the Negro Spirituals.

However, The Negro Spiritual does more than sing. She is the mother of Black Religion. She is an all-encompassing, multi-dimensional worship mechanism that can stimulate the mind, regulate the heart, and set the body in a rhythmic motion. She is also an innovator. Among the American music art forms that the Spiritual counts as its heirs are the minstrel songs, jazz, blues, ragtime, gospel and 'soul' music.[13]

She is also a dancer. Depending on the song, the motion could be as simple as a smooth, slow, and soft nodding of one's head or a frantic full-bodied display of rhythmic expression. Along with the words and the music, the Negro Spirituals carry a dance routine.

In summation, this chapter gives an intensive outlook on the nature of black suffering in America and its role in the formation of the Negro Spirituals and black Christianity. It is important to note that the Negro Spirituals were critical in giving black Christianity a distinct flavor and personality aside from white Christianity. In addition to being an original and authentic mode of musical expression in America, the Negro Spirituals help produce a form of Christianity pure and unique from its counterpart. This is one example that proves Negro Spirituals exhibit qualities outside of singing and performing. The songs carry a powerful flexibility that can be used in a variety of ways to create attention, bring awareness, foster resonance and affection, and produce everlasting change in community. It is a grave injustice to limit the scope and influence of Negro Spirituals to singing and performing. We should allow Negro Spirituals space to breathe and see how much more they can accomplish.

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[13] Ibid., 48.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY AND CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING THE ORIGIN AND FORMATION OF THE NEGRO SPIRITUALS

In discovering the origin of the Negro Spirituals, Miles Mark Fisher in his book *Negro Slave Songs in the United States* quotes Miss Helen G. Ludlow, Music Director of Hampton Institute as saying, 'No one exactly knows' the origin of spirituals.[1] Similarly, William McClain states:

> The earliest form of Afro-American religious music was the spiritual. We do not know exactly when spirituals began to appear on the scene. However, it is estimated that the development of this folk song began around 1775 and continued until about 1875. It is remarkable that more than 6,000 spirituals emerged from slavery. Just as remarkable is the fact that these songs were passed intact from generation to generation.[2]

However, Rev. Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker in his book *Somebody's Calling My Name: Black Sacred Music and Social Change* states, "The music, religion, and culture of Black Americans are fundamentally African, both in form and substance."[3] In tracing the origin of the Negro Spirituals, they were African before becoming Negro. Even after years of

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[1] Miles Mark Fisher, *Negro Slave Songs in the United States* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1963), 20.

[2] William McCain, *Come Sunday: The Liturgy of Zion* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 130.

[3] Wyatt T. Walker, *Somebody's Calling My Name; Black Sacred Music and Social Change* (Valley Forge, PA, Judson Press, 1983), 15.

forced assimilation of slavery that ripped apart tribes, families, and indigenous languages, traditions, religions, cultures, the African retained their original musical styles and patterns. Therefore, the origin of the Negro Spiritual is planted in the existence and nature of the African Spiritual.

In tracing the origin of the Negro Spiritual, former assistant professor of Christian Education at Yale Divinity School, Yolanda Y. Smith in her book *Reclaiming the Spirituals*: *New Possibilities for African American Christian Education* states, "The African American experience of slavery gave birth to the spirituals through the secret religious meetings, the work environment, and the harsh realities of bondage."[1] Even with the first importation of Africans into America in 1619 in Jamestown, Virginia, Walker posits an observation that softly challenges the notion to simply acquiesce slavery as the notable factor that led to the birth of the Negro Spiritual. He states:

> With no common tongue, the musical expression was reduced to chants and moans on the rhythm forms and in the musical idioms that survived. As the slaves learned the language of the masters, their verbal commonality became most pronounced in the music that developed in the context of slavery.[2]

For a period during slavery, the first spirituals sung in America were still African. A key line of demarcation between the African Spiritual and the Negro Spiritual comes down to learning the language. Therefore, the origin of the Negro Spiritual is when the slaves developed what would be considered a reasonable command of the English language. Without formal training, the slave learned enough to partially speak the language, albeit broken English. Nevertheless, the broken English was the paintbrush slaves needed to draw a picture on the nature and effect of slavery, and to propel the

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[1] Yolanda Y. Smith, *Reclaiming the Spirituals: New Possibilities in African American Education* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press), 2.

[2] Walker, *Somebody's Calling My Name*, 29.

Negro Spirituals in a proper place to be acclaimed as an original and authentic form of musical expression birthed in the United States of America.

How many years had gone by before it was safe to assume that slaves had developed a reasonable enough command of the English language and use the Negro Spiritual as an historical archive to record the brutal and unbearable life of slavery? Both Fisher and Walker base the evolution of the Negro Spiritual around mid-18th century.[3] As time progressed and with more educational opportunity, the Negro Spirituals were rearranged and refined. In determining the birth of the Negro Spirituals, it is an indubitable fact that slavery was paramount. However, since the slaves already brought with them spirituals, slavery was more influential in transforming the African spiritual from its original form. Slavery amongst other factors made the Negro Spiritual a by-product of the African Spiritual.

In addition to slavery, other inspirations or sources used by the slaves to create Negro Spirituals came from a variety of areas. Anthony Pinn explains it as such: “Of necessity the slaves shaped and described their responses to these issues using the tools available to them, namely pieces of the Hebrew Bible, The New Testament, African cultural patterns, their reality as slaves, folk wisdom, and ‘the world of nature.”[4] Howard Thurman shares similar sentiments: “There were three major sources from which the raw materials of Negro Spirituals were derived: the Old and New Testaments, the world of

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[3] See Walker, *Somebody’s Calling my Name,* 40, and Fisher, *Negro Slave Songs in the United States,*183.

[4] Pinn, *Why Lord?* 25.

nature, and the personal experiences of religion that were the common lot of the people, emerging from their inner life."[5]

However, James Cone adds a different paradigm:

> Considering that large numbers of Africans were imported as late as 1807 it would be surprising if African influence were not present in the theology of the spirituals. If that datum is taken seriously, then there is reason to believe that freedom in the slave songs has a decisive historical referent. Africans viewed life as a whole and did not make the distinctions between the 'secular' and the 'sacred' that are found in Western Culture. With this perspective as a starting point, it is reasonable to conclude that African slaves could not and did not accept a religion that negated historical freedom.[6]

Is it possible that African cultural patterns, as mentioned by Anthony Pinn, could be the same as the African influence? It appears that African cultural patterns are circumscribed constructs that offer insight on the style used by slaves, which mirrors how Africans sang songs. To expand the "African cultural pattern" and use Cone's phraseology, "African influence" it encompasses in its entirety the human-historical experience of the African before, during, and after the Middle Passage. Had the Negro Spirituals not included the full existential, and contextual experience of the slaves, then what are now called the Negro Spirituals would just be songs sang by black people.

In quoting Richard Walaschek who wrote *Primitive Music* in 1893, Cone proves that some people thought Negro Spirituals were nothing more than poorly composed archetypes of European music. Walaschek says, "Black songs were 'mere imitations of European compositions which Negroes have picked up and served up again with slight

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[5] Howard Thurman, *Deep River and The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1975), 12. It is important to note that *Deep River and The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death* are separate documents that are now printed into a single volume with its own page numbers.

[6] James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1972), 38-39.

variations."[7] There are others who have similar thoughts regarding the evolution of the Negro Spirituals. George Pullen Jackson in *White and Negro Spirituals* states:

> In closing the discussion of folk-creative activities of the white and Negro races, I should like to call attention to one important factor which differentiates the song activities of the two races, the time factor. We know that our fathers brought to this land a rich and hoary heritage of folk melody. We know that the Negro slave entered into this heritage eventually by adopting it to the extent of his abilities and desires. Thus, the melodies of past centuries became the black man's tunes comparatively recently. But from the time of his adopting it the heritage was no longer the cultural property of one race.[8]

It appears that Jackson only accepts the Negro Spirituals as a blackened version of white spirituals.

In a counter argument, John Garst with the help of William H. Tallmadge in *"Mutual Reinforcements and the Origins of Spirituals"* gives a different outlook:

> William H. Tallmadge proposes an alternative view whereby slaves brought call-and-response music, ubiquitous in Africa, to the New World. They continued their musical forms even after taking up a new language and applied their musical methods to whatever songs they took up. During the last half of the eighteenth century, American blacks sang religious songs in call-and-response and brought these songs to the earliest camp meetings. The call-and-response forms they introduced proved ideally suited for camp meetings, and whites quickly adopted them.[9]

Lovell adds:

> The term 'spiritual song' originally referred to formal hymns and had no reference to popular or folk songs, black or white. To say that the white spiritual is the oldest is to make an extremely precarious statement which cannot even be classified as an educated guess. The African had been making songs all along about the conditions of his life and religion. He composed and sang original songs in his native land for centuries and on the slave ships all the time he was

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[7] Ibid., 10.

[8] George Pullen Jackson, *White and Negro Spirituals: Their Life Span and Kinship* (Locust Valley, NY: J.J. Augustin Publisher, 1943), 268.

[9] John F. Garst, "Mutual Reinforcement and the Origins of Spirituals," *American Music* 4, no. 4 (Winter, 1986): 391; also see William H. Tallmadge, "The Black in Jackson's White Spirituals," *The Black Perspective in Music* 9 (Autumn 1981): 139-160.

> carried around the world. Never forget that the Portuguese were struck by his remarkable songs as early as 1444, an event reported by Dena Epstein.[10]

In preparation for the book *White and Negro Spirituals*, Jackson studied and allocated twelve collections of Negro songs. In these twelve books are 1413 song titles.[11] Because some songs appear under different titles, Jackson states, they "reduce the total of 1413 titles then by that percent (thirty-seven) and we have 892 as the approximate number of reasonably different Negro Spiritual tune entities recorded in the books under consideration.[12]

In addition, Lovell points out a few texts and collections omitted by Jackson. For example:

> His flat omission of Johnson's *Book of American Negro Spirituals* (1925), second book of *American Negro Spirituals* (1926), and the two published together (1940), each with elaborate introductions, is almost beyond belief. These collections were the most popular and the most highly praised in the field for at least a generation, and are probably so today.[13]

As an added twist, Guy Johnson believes that part of what should make up a Negro Spiritual is the use of native tongue:

> That the songs with African words surviving in this country are so few as to be insignificant except as curiosities, and that no instance is known of a translation of an African song bearing any resemblance to the words of any American song.[14]

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[10] John Lovell, Jr., *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 72.

[11] Jackson, *White and Negro Spirituals*, 142.

[12] Ibid., 143.

[13] Lovell, *Black Song*,10. Lovell gives an extensive list of materials pre-1940 that Jackson omitted from his study. It was during this time that the Negro Spiritual became widely known on a global scale. Moreover, it was universally agreed that the Negroes were the progenitors. Therefore, Jackson and others were trying to promote an alternative perspective that would stifle the notoriety and respect given to the Negro. It would be fair to assume that Jackson and others never thought the Negro Spiritual would be so popular and loved by those outside the song's context.

[14] Guy B. Johnson, "The Negro Spiritual: A Problem in Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 33, no. 2 (April-June, 1931): 160.

The oppressiveness of the American system of slavery prohibited slaves use of their native languages.[15]

In addition, Johnson argues that the structural pattern of the spirituals sung by white and Negro people is quintessentially the same, "They have the same types of stanza, refrain, and chorus patterns, the same simplicity and repetition, the same tendency to make many stanzas by merely varying a word or two."[16] However, he also states, "The spiritual is superior rhythmically and melodically to white song, nevertheless it is derived from it or from a variant of it."[17]

Another factor that can be used to solidify the Negro as a genuine musical art form is that the original songs of the African were not Christian-based. John Lovell in *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame* explains:

> The originators of the Negro Spiritual were African in their attitudes toward religion and music. Religion to the ancestral group from whom these Africans were sprung did not splinter, into social, political, and philosophical subdivisions. It spoke of the social, the political, and the philosophical with one voice born of the overriding desire to fathom the workings of the universe. In every way it trained the individual to adapt himself to those workings for his own good and hope of prosperity and security.[18]

Hence, the slave quarters, the ships, the auction blocks, the shacks, the fields, the caves, the swamps, the woods, the rapes, beatings, lynchings, and other evil practices of slave masters, street patrollers, and overseers became a part of the experience of the

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[15] Charshee Charlotte Lawrence-McIntyre, "The Double Meaning of the Spirituals," *American Quarterly* 23, no. 5 (December, 1971), 379.

[16] Johnson, "The Negro Spiritual, 161.

[17] Ibid., 168.

[18] Lovell, *Black Song*, 14.

Negro in the United States of America. Without the influence of Christianity, the songs of the Negro were still African.

When Christianity was introduced and fully incorporated as a pillar of Negro life it served as a key factor, demarcating the distinction of the African Spiritual from the Negro Spiritual. Another measure that helped forge the line of distinction was the orientation of the Bible. The Christian Bible furnished much of the imagery and ideas with which slave singers fashioned their melodies.[19]

The slaves loved the story of the Israelites being held in captivity and eventually being freed from Egyptian bondage. The sustaining influence exerted upon Blacks of the trials and tribulations of the Jews as related to the Old Testament is inestimable.[20] Identifying particularly with the Israelite slaves, Black slaves often sang songs about the exodus event, which expressed a certainty that God would deliver them as God delivered the Israelites.[21]

When Israel was in Egypt's land
Let my people go
Oppressed so hard,
They could not stand
Let my people go
Go down Moses
Way down in Egypt's Land
Tell ole Pharaoh
Let my people go

This well-known spiritual has often been regarded primarily as a code song, that is a song which not only expressed a yearning for deliverance from southern slavery but

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[19] Thurman, *Deep River,* 12.

[20] Lawrence-McIntyre, "Double Meanings of the Spirituals," 387.

[21] Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 26.

also signaled the moment for action to achieve it.[22] What was most appealing to the slaves was that God empathized with those who suffered under the suppression of oppression. This song portrays God as immanent and caring, not distant.[23] The slaves had a soul-warming example of a righteous and just God who had the power to set them free. For the enslaved Africans, the first blows of liberation from bondage could only have been brought about by those liberated from a slave mentality—who, being brought up in the midst of oppressors, appropriated the power and wisdom of the gospel.[24] Even amidst the harsh reality of slavery and vitriolic treatment by slave masters and overseers, the slaves believed that God was compassionate and righteousness. Daring to believe that God cared for them despite the cruel vicissitudes of life meant the giving of wings to life that nothing could destroy.[25] The slaves were convinced that God had something good in store for them beyond slavery, and that they only had to wait on God, trust in God, and persevere.[26] Moreover, the slaves knew that God not only heard their cries of protest as God heard the Israelites, but God was keeping a close eye on their plight and would deliver them from bondage into freedom, whether on earth or in heaven.

Cone enumerates other biblical accounts from the Old Testament in their religious canon:

> Black people sang about Joshua and the battle of Jericho, Moses leading the Israelites from bondage, Daniel in the lion's den, and the Hebrew children in the

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[22] Christa K. Dixon, *Negro Spirituals: From Bible to Folk Song* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 23.

[23] Kirk-Duggan, *Exorcizing Evil,* 82.

[24] Jon Michael Spencer, *Protest and Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 5.

[25] Thurman, *Deep River,*15.

[26] Pinn, *Why Lord,* 29.

> fiery furnace. Here the emphasis is on God's liberation of the weak from the oppression of the strong, the lowly and downtrodden from the proud and mighty.[27]

The Old Testament stories in the Negro Spirituals started the formation of the liberation movement for black people in America. The stories in the Old Testament loosened the chattels that held captive the slaves' ontology, which allowed for inward liberation. The inward liberation further leads to a reformed religious consciousness that challenged the hermeneutic that supported slavery:

> Slaves looked at their existential condition and were not satisfied with the so-called 'Christian' explanations provided by slaveholders and their ministers. Many slaves could not believe that God condoned their condition and rejected their efforts at liberation. Obedience to unjust practices and laws could not be consistent with the divine design of a loving and just God.[28]

A good illustration of the slaves hermeneutic of suspicion is found in a book by historian Erskine Clarke entitled *Wrestling Jacob: A Portrait in Antebellum Georgia and the Carolina Low Country.* Clarke portrays the religious life of slaves in two totally different settings. He provides a comparative analysis of the religious life of slaves in the rural area of Liberty County, Georgia and the city of Charleston, South Carolina.

One of the key characters mentioned is a man named Charles C. Jones. Jones, a minister who owned slaves, was born in Liberty County, Georgia. He received his theological education from Andover-Newton and Princeton Theological Seminary in the late 1820's and early 1830's. What is most interesting about Jones is that he was totally convinced in seminary that slavery was an evil system. When he moved back to Georgia where he fought to improve the condition of slaves but not for the abolition of slavery. Moreover, Jones is most noted for his catechism entitled *The Religious Instruction of the*

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[27] Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues,* 33.

[28] Pinn, *Why Lord?,* 33.

Negroes in the United States. In the book, Clarke recalls a moment when Jones was preaching to some slaves, and records the slaves' response:

> I was preaching to a large congregation on the Epistle of Philemon and when I insisted upon fidelity and obedience as Christian virtues in servants and upon the authority of Paul, condemned the practice of *running away*, one half of my audience deliberately rose up and walked off with themselves, and those that remained looked anything but satisfied, either with the preacher or his doctrine.[29]

This new hermeneutic was taken to another level when Jesus entered the theological picture. The Negro Spirituals reveal a peculiar, and, at first sight, contradictory view of Christ. He is depicted as an intensely human personality who shared many of the same problems and frustration as the slaves, while on the other hand, he is seen as King, as Ruler of the Universe, whose Being seems to merge with that of God.[30] It was dangerous to let the slave understand that the life and teachings of Jesus meant freedom for the captive and release for those held in economic, social, and political bondage.[31] He was God's active presence in their lives, helping them to know that they were not created for bondage but for freedom.[32]

Kelly Brown Douglas offers another perspective regarding the significance of Jesus to the slaves:

> The significance of Jesus for the slaves had little to do with God becoming incarnate in him. Jesus' meaning had more to do with what Jesus did in their lives. Jesus was a living being with whom the slaves had an intimate relationship.

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[29] Erskine Clarke, *Wrestlin' Jacob: A Portrait of Religion in Antebellum Georgia and the Carolina Low Country* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University Press of Alabama, 2000), 40. The first portion of this quote is taken from a primary source, but it appears in the book that Dr. Clarke may have forgotten to footnote.

[30] David Simms, "The Negro Spiritual: Origins and Themes," *The Journal of Negro Education* 35, no. 1 (Winter, 1966): 39.

[31] Thurman, *Deep River, 16.*

[32] Anthony B. Pinn, ed., *Moral Evil and Redemptive Suffering: A History of Theodicy in African -American Religious Thought* (Gainesville, FL: University of Press of Florida, 2002), 294.

> To the slaves, Jesus was a trusted companion who understood their pain, sufferings, and sorrows.[33]

In their oppression, the slaves found it natural to identify with the sufferings of Jesus, who was depicted in the spirituals as an ever present and intimate friend.[34]

One song that perfectly captures the synthesis of Jesus' life and the experience of the slave is:

> Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
> Oh, Sometimes it causes me to tremble
>
> Were you there when they pierced him in the side?
> Oh, Sometimes it causes me to tremble
>
> Where you there when they laid him the grave?
> Oh, Sometimes it causes me to tremble
>
> Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

The slaves not only empathized with the crucifixion, but they literally felt his suffering. Moreover, the slaves understood Jesus' innocence and that he did not deserve to die, especially in the manner that he died. The slaves were able to see in their own situation the significance of the Crucifixion.[35]

The slaves equated Jesus bearing the cross up Calvary's hill with the weight of the chattels around their bodies. The slaves knew the pain of the whip as it drew out snippets of flesh, blood, bone, and tendon. The slaves understood the awfulness of being stripped naked to the cruel jokes, incessant jeers, and crude remarks of those who regarded them as caricatures of themselves. The slaves empathized with the pain felt from stakes

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[33] Douglas, *The Black Christ*, 21.

[34] Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press), 259.

[35] McCain, *Come Sunday*, 107.

piercing Jesus' hands and feet. The suffering of slavery and the suffering of the cross were synonymous.[36]

M. Shawn Copeland explains the significance of the cross:

> And, if the makers of the Negro Spirituals glorified in singing of the cross of Jesus, it was not because they were masochistic and enjoyed suffering. Rather, the enslaved Africans sang because they saw on the rugged wooden planks One who had endured what was their daily portion. The cross was treasured because it enthroned the One who went all the way with them and for them. The enslaved Africans sang because they saw the result of the cross—triumph over the principalities and powers of death, triumph over evil in the world.[37]

Jesus' death on the cross was a ceremonial rite that consummated the slaves' marriage to Christianity. The old rugged cross symbolized a sense of hope because the cruel and inhumane death of Jesus gave meaning, value, and purpose to the life of a slave. The cross let the slaves know that Jesus was with them. The song illustrated that evil, trouble, and suffering although macabre at times, was seasonal and transitory.

The death and resurrection of Christ instilled hope and a refreshing sense of pride for the slave in America. As Howard Thurman explains, "But the great idea about death itself is that it is not the master of life"…"It may be inevitable, yes; gruesome, perhaps; releasing, yes; but triumphant, *NEVER*."[38]

In a lecture given at Harvard University, known as the Ingersoll Lectureship,[39] Howard Thurman gave a presentation that decoded the mystery of life and death through

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[36] Douglas, *The Black Christ,* 22.

[37] Emilie M. Townes, ed. *A Troubling in My Soul*: *Womanist Perspectives on Evil & Suffering*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 120.

[38] Thurman, *Deep River,* 24.

[39] In his book Deep *River and The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death*, Thurman provides a history surrounding how the Ingersoll Lectureship evolved. In the preface he talks about when he had the opportunity to lecture, but he does not provide the actual date of the lecture on "The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death."

the eyes of the Negro Spirituals. He gave three points on the meaning of death. First, death was in fact, inescapable, and persistent,[40] with the overseer as the symbol of death.[41] His second point focused on one's deliberate and intentional detachment from death because of its potentially horrible nature. Lastly, death was the ultimate benchmark of liberation. When one died, the weight of slavery and false presuppositions concerning the intellectual capacity of the slave was left behind. No longer did they have to meet at the hush harbors to praise God without the concern of night watchmen disrupting their worship.

With each breath bringing one closer to death, the slaves looked to heaven. Heaven was often viewed as a new world in which the abused African was relieved of all earthly burdens and given the humanity and treasures her/his labor had provided.[42] In Heaven or the New Jerusalem, parents, relatives, and friends would meet again—a devout hope for slaves who had seen parents, sisters, brothers, and children sold away with no chance of reunion in this world.[43] Although some slaves feared death, Christian slaves delighted in imagining future happiness in heaven as exemplified in this spiritual:[44]

Roll Jordan, Roll
I want to go to heaven when I die
To see sweet Jordan roll.

Before the Civil War, the possibility of Heaven on earth was dismal. Heaven as alluded to in the Negro Spirituals represented two realities. One reality was

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[40] Ibid., 13.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Pinn, *Why Lord?,* 31.

[43] Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 262.

[44] Ibid., 263.

transcendence and ascendance into a space beyond and above the earth of which death was the vehicle. The other reality was leaving the plantation and migrating to the North or Canada by the Underground Railroad. For those who continued enduring the hardship of slavery, Heaven was that so-called place beyond the sky. The songs that exuded this reality provided the slave an opportunity to have a platonic encounter that allowed them temporary residence in this new world for momentary privacy, peace, and tranquility as illustrated here:

> I've got shoes, you got shoes
> All of God's children got shoes
> When we get to Heaven,
> We gonna put on our shoes
> We gone walk, talk, all over God's Heaven.

Regardless of which reality of heaven was reflected in a Negro Spiritual, each song shared the hope and vision of a better tomorrow. Despite the hardships and pain, the slaves exhibited a strong faith in the liberating power of God and a strong connection with the life of Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament, God is the agent for social change. No longer did the slaves have to utter cries of protest petitioning to God for deliverance. God as incarnate in Jesus and dying portrayed God as a being holding the hands of slaves as they walked through the valley of slavery. In developing this intimate relationship with Jesus, God had become a friend more so than a deity. As a result, the slaves understood that they had the power to be agents for social, political, economic, spiritual justice, freedom, and equality.

For a unique interpretation on the nature of Negro Spirituals, Cheryl Kirk-Duggan elaborates on the "lighter side" of the Negro Spiritual:

> Negro Spirituals elicit humor via allegory's symbolism, satire's distortions, or parody's destruction of illusion. The music and text combine comedy-humor with faith to foster survival. Humor sensitizes religious person to the holy, the mysterious, to suffering, and joy. Graced with humor, the slaves' cosmological faith tolerated ambiguities and contradictions because these perimeters were not conclusive. Faith knows laughter and shapes our concept of finitude.[45]

In addition to retaining their style(s) of song, the Black slaves in America could keep their sense of humor. From the African, one sees that a critical element of faith is the importance of laughter. A good laugh has the power to release emotional, spiritual, and mental toxins residing in the body that inhibit inner and outer freedom, peace, joy, and community. Singing the Negro Spirituals momentarily loosened the psychological restraints and the temporal harshness of slavery.[46] A Negro Spiritual that illustrates this kind of reaction is, "Scandalize My Name:"

> I met my preacher the other day
> Gave him my right hand
> Just as soon as ever my back was turned,
> He scandalized my name.
>
> Do you call that a preacher (3X)?
> NO, NO (3X)
> He scandalized my name.[47]

In closing, it is very important that we preserve the Negro Spirituals. The survival of the Negro Spirituals today demonstrates the triumph of life over death, of justice over injustice.[48] The Negro Spirituals indicated that the Negroes who created them thought of themselves as a people of destiny, participating in God's working in history.[49]

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[45] Townes, *A Troubling in my Soul*, 157.

[46] Ibid., 159.

[47] To hear a great recording of this song, see "Kathleen Battle, Jessye Norman: "Scandalize My Name" 15 / 22," (video), posted March 30, 2012 by Opera Buff, accessed March 19, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6EOXT6_inw.

[48] Townes, *A Troubling in My Soul*, 165.

In a country comprised of immigrants, these songs are the only indigenous historical, archive we have of Negro slaves that stamps their origin outside of the United States of America. What else is there? Is there anything else to lay claim to? All other records of history, cultures, languages, stories, traditions, and tribal affiliations were wiped out during the point of sale at the auction block. The only thing retained was the love, joy, form, rhythm, and cadence of African music. And this could have been lost if it were not for the secret hush harbor gatherings that allowed temporary opportunity for the slave to relive and reimagine life before slavery.

The Negro Spirituals were part of the original worship itinerary of Negro slaves in the United States of America. Even today, these songs deserve some space and time to function and participate in worship and not just become centerpieces at concerts. Although dated, the messages, words, thoughts, and themes of these songs still have much to offer to help maintain a relevant, fresh, and fruitful worship experience.

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[49] Simms, "The Negro Spiritual," 38.

CHAPTER THREE

WELCOME TO THE ROUNDTABLE: DISCUSSING THE PRESENCE AND EFFECTS OF THEODICY IN THE NEGRO SPIRITUALS.

> O God? How long shall the mounting flood of innocent blood roar in Thine ears and pound in our hearts for vengeance? Forgive us, good Lord, we know not what we say! Bewildered we are and passion-tossed, mad with the madness of a mobbed and mocked and murdered people; straining at the arm posts of thy throne, we raise our shackled hands and charge to Thee, God, by the bones of our stolen fathers, by the tears of our dead mothers, by the very blood of the Crucified Christ: What meaneth this? Tell us the plan; give us the sign.[1]
>
> — W.E.B Dubois

This prayer is from noted historian W.E.B Dubois, an African-American and historian who was co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Noted black theologian William R. Jones heard this prayer and was on a journey to seek the answer to the question it poses. He shares insights in his book *Is God a White Racist*?[2]

From the question, "Is a God a White Racist?" Jones considers that the maldistribution of black suffering in comparison to white non-suffering supports that God

[1] William R. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?: A Preamble to Black Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), xvii.

[2] Ibid.

practices racism, making it divine. In constructing a definition of divine racism, he appropriates his position from an interpretation by Thomas Gossett in *Race: The History of an Idea in America* on sections in Hindu scripture of the Rig Veda.[1] In summation, Indra, the God of the Aryans, is so repulsed by the dark and black skin of the Anasahs that he annihilates them, bequeathing their lands and commanding the Aryans to excoriate them. What is most paramount in Jones' proposition from the example is categorizing humanity into two groups; both you are 'in' or 'out', and that God is "responsible for the imbalance."[2] On theological grounds, Jones is charging God with 'divine misanthropy'[3] and is seeking extensive compensatory remunerations. Jones states, "no doubt the combination of terms 'divine' and 'racism' is novel—some will say blasphemous."[4] However, to raise the question of divine racism is actually to revive a perennial issue in black religion: what is the meaning, the cause, and the 'why' of black suffering?[5] In short, theism for Jones is not a sufficient foundation for black religion, because to speak on black religion, one has to account for black suffering; therefore, irrespective of which theistic angle one chooses, God is either responsible through divine participation, or God is at fault for allowing the suffering to happen.

Is Jones the first to make the claim of accusing God of divine racism? The unknown author of this Negro Spiritual raised similar sentiments:

Lord, how come me here (3x)

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[1] Ibid., 3.

[2] Ibid., 4.

[3] Ibid., 64.

[4] Ibid., xx.

[5] Ibid.

I wish I never was born (2x)
Lord how come me black (3x)
I wish I never was born (2x)[6]

This song is one of the saddest Negro Spirituals. One of the most damaging effects of slavery is mirrored in this song. African-Americans' existential ambivalence about their bodies may be the most painful legacy of slavery and racial oppression in the United States.[7] After constant inculcation by the slave-masters, and overseers, the slaves accept their inferiority and ask God, why did you make me black? Almost instantly, the slave is now deemed socially detestable. What makes matters worse is to believe that not only you, but also anyone who is black is biological garbage.

The most damaging effect is the indirect elevation of whiteness in the African-American community. Supposedly, the author of this song has placed great value in the color white. It is one thing not to like your color, but to not like the fact that you are black is something very different. If the author of this song chastises his/her color, then most likely he/she carries that same attitude regarding those with a similar or darker hue. Moreover, this song sheds light on the unofficial social caste system in the African-American community. Noel Erskine draws a picture of a black social caste in Jamaica that would be like the system in the United States of America:

Sambo: the child of a mulatto and a black man
Mulatto: the child of a black woman and a white man
Quadroon: the child of a mulatto and a white man
Mustee: the child of a quadroon and a white man
Mustiphini: the child of a mustee and a white man
Quintroon: the child of a mustiphini and a white man

[6] I first heard this song performed in Cortona, Italy by Gregory Thompson. For two additional recordings see, "Kathleen Battle, Jessye Norman: "Lord, How Come Me Here" 06 / 22" (video), posted March 30, 2012 by Opera Buff, accessed March 19, 2018, https://youtu.be/hD3jmgYLQmA and "Lord, How Come Me Here? Marion Anderson," (sound recording) posted November 5, 2014 by Sony Music Entertainment, accessed March 20, 2018, https://youtu.be/3TEgRix-hOQ.

[7] Townes, *A Troubling in My Soul,* 245.

Octoroon: the child of a quintroon and a white man.[8]

In the scale, the sambo is the darkest and the octoroon is the lightest. An octoroon was legally white and therefore free—automatically—in Jamaica.[9] In the scale, one only sees the participation of a 'pure' black person at the lowest ends, but a white man is involved at every level. Also, this scale illustrates an attempt to completely dilute on the surface black skin. If one can dilute black skin on the surface, then physical features exemplified in black people become nullified.

What comes next is the inner reformation where blackness[10] as a philosophy resides and is replaced with whiteness. With each level in the color scale, the meaning and existence of blackness becomes lightness. Because of miscegenation, "black" altogether becomes obsolete. This is precisely what this scale represents, the anthropological absence of black men and black women.

On the surface, it would be impossible to eradicate black in a physical sense, but if someone were to perceive the scale in a psychological sense then complete, as opposed to virtual, absence is a greater possibility. It is very possible for someone to be black physically, but in his/her mind believe and ultimately express that they are not black. As a result, black men and women develop what W.E.B Dubois called the 'double consciousness':

> One ever feels his two-ness, --an American, Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two

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[8] Noel Erskine, *Decolonizing Theology: A Caribbean Perspective* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 1998), 35: Erskine borrows the scale from Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 67.

[9] Ibid., 35.

[10] When I use the term *black* or *blackness*, I am referring to the distinctive history, way of life, traditions, cultures, beliefs, languages, religions, etc. that characterize Black life before and after slavery in the Americas, the Caribbean, and Europe.

> warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength
> alone keeps it from being torn asunder.[11]

In the slave's quest to find or rediscover the "truer self," many come across an insurmountable obstacle. Some accepted white as being right, pure, and just. Therefore, they felt that they would never amount to their true self because like Cain, they were marred with an indelible black scar. Moreover, some internalized their horrific life was due partly to their black skin.

As a personal example, I will never forget the moment when my late grandmother told my sister—who has dark skin—that she must marry a light-skinned man so her children will not be as dark as she. And the same grandmother told my other sister—who has light skin—that she should marry a dark-skinned man so her children would not be as light as she. From my grandmother's perspective, it would be safe to assume that my grandmother was partial to a 'brown-skinned' color ideology.

And true to form, my light-skinned grandmother married a dark-skinned man and had ten children. Of the ten children, six were light-skinned, two were dark-skinned, and two were anomalies. One of my uncles came out lighter than the dark-skinned siblings, but not as light as the other six. And my mother came out darker than the light-skinned siblings, but not quite as dark as the other two. To explain the anomaly, my uncle would be a little too dark to be light-skinned and my mother a little too light to be dark-skinned. My mother would be classified as 'dark' brown and my uncle as 'light' brown. Hence, even a large variance in the colors of brown.

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[11] W. E. B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk: W.E.B Dubois, A Centenary Edition*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 10-11.

Based on the children my grandmother conceived, her theory of colorism is not scientific. Per her example, it is no guarantee that two people on opposite ends of the color spectrum will have children that will fall in the middle.

In thinking about my sisters, it is important to know if her theory had any theological bearing at all. If her answer is strictly a sociologically product of how black, brown, and light people related to each other during that time and in the location where she lived then her statement is just a tradition passed down. Therefore, it would be up to my sisters to either continue or discontinue that tradition. From a theological standpoint, the color of God is irrelevant

However, my grandmother's comment to my sisters highlights a strong complexity when it relates to complexion and even hair texture in the black community. As a result, I wonder how much Rosa Park's complexion and hair texture played in the enactment the Montgomery Bus Boycott? Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, the first African-American elected into the House of Representatives out of Harlem, NY in 1941 serving twelve terms had light skin and wavy hair. Attorney Thurgood Marshall, the founder of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, who was part of the legal team in the *Brown vs. Board of Education* who fought to end legalized segregation of schools and subsequently became the first African-American to become a Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1967 had light skin and wavy hair. In 2008, the United States elected its' first African-American president Barack Obama whose father is Nigerian, and mother is a Caucasian from Kansas. And he has 'middle-brown' skin and wavy hair. These examples highlight the possibility that the color of one's skin and hair texture can make a difference.

The Negro Spiritual “Lord, How Come Me Here?” deals with the pain associated with the notion of blackness and issues surrounding complexion. However, classic Funk singer the late James Brown performed the hit song, “Say It Loud, I’m Black and Proud,” in 1968 that created a social buzz by giving a positive spin on what the Negro Spiritual otherwise deemed negative. Black is beautiful. The song celebrates the struggles that blacks in the United States of America had to overcome. Therefore, blacks have no reason or excuse to feel ashamed. Also, the song encourages blacks not to settle, but continue seeking and striving for excellence. Because now, being black, no matter the complexion or hair texture, can no longer hold one back.

> Look a'here, some people say we got a lot of malice
> Some say it's a lotta nerve
> I say we won't quit moving
> Till we get what we deserve
> We've been buked and we've been scorned
> We've been treated bad, talked about
> As just as sure as you're born
> But just as sure as it take
> Two eyes to make a pair, huh
> Brother, we can't quit until we get our share
>
> Say it loud,
> I'm black and I'm proud
> Say it loud,
> I'm black and I'm proud, one more time
> Say it loud,
> I'm black and I'm proud, huh
>
> I've worked on jobs with my feet and my hands
> But all the work I did was for the other man
> And now we demands a chance
> To do things for ourselves
> we tired of beating our heads against the wall
> And working for someone else[12]

[12] Alfred James Ellis and James Brown, “Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud,” AZ Lyrics, accessed March 20, 2018, https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/jamesbrown/sayitloudimblackandimproud.html.

Jones' Models of Black Liberation Theology

In his quest to ensure a seat for black humanistic thought at the round-table of black liberation theology, Jones presents two models to validate the reservation: 1. virus-vaccine model, 2. humanocentric theism.

According to Jones, the virus-vaccine model has two phases. The first phase "gives dedicated attention to the infectious agent—the 'virus of oppression'—acquiring as much knowledge as possible about its composition and vital processes—in other words, an accurate phenomenology (grid) of oppression"[13]. The second phase "develops a specific vaccine or antitoxin that neutralizes or destroys the noxious agent"[14]. Of the models presented, I find this model to be most problematic because it is quixotic to speak of oppression in biological terms. Oppression is horrific not scientific.

The next model, humanocentric theism, is a mode of thinking that elevates the status of man and gives more freedom and flexibility in practicing and administering authority. For biblical validation, Jones uses Genesis 1:28 where God has given both Adam and Eve the responsibility to care for the earth. Jones concedes that part of Gods' plan for humankind is to allow humans the freedom of determination, preparation, and implementation. In addition, God gives humanity the freedom of choice, which includes the choice to accept or reject God. In the model, God allows humanity to shape and affect the course of nature, forge the course of time (present, past, future), and the course of human history. Humankind is a codetermining power, possessesing this ontological

[13] Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 206.

[14] Ibid., 206.

status by virtue of his creation.[15] As a result, this freedom carries such flexibility that the people can affect (both negatively/positively) the welfare of another group of people. In this case, freedom becomes a form of oppression implicated by the group who at the time has more freedom to affect the freedom and future of another group. Therefore, suffering, oppression, and pain, are uncivil products of freedom.

Also, this freedom affords blacks suffering from slavery to question the absence/silence/existence of God and still be a Christian. As an example, Jones quotes Bishop Daniel Payne of the A.M.E. Church (elected 1852) who agonized deeply over the problem of black suffering:

> I began to question the existence of the Almighty, and to say, if indeed there is a God, does he deal justly? Is he a just God? Is he a holy being? If so, why does he permit a handful of dying men thus to oppress us?[16]

Payne's statement of protest is antidotal to the lethal virus caused by quietism. Some of the common symptoms of quietism are complacency, mediocrity, contentment and even assimilation among those who should stand up, speak up, and speak out. Just as the dominant group makes decisions and implements policies of suffering, humanocentric theism provides ample opportunity for those suffering under oppression to voice their concerns to humanity and God.

In his book, Jones aggressively targets five premier black theologians and provides critical commentary on each theologian's major work. They are James Washington, James Cone, Albert Cleage, Major Jones, and J. Deotis Roberts. With trenchant theological excavation of each theologian's foremost published contribution, Jones concludes that the "normative frameworks of the black theologians are

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[15] Ibid., 188.

[16] Ibid., 291.

questionable, because they raise the issue of divine racism, and once raised, cannot effectively refute the charge with their present theological resources."[17] His goal was "to show that the black theologian must consider and demolish the charge of divine racism,"[18] because his stance makes it a central issue.

Joseph Washington

Initially, Jones goes to task with Joseph Washington's, *The Politics of God*. Jones' criticism is focused on "two places where Washington is significantly vulnerable: his deficient refutation of the theodicy of deserved punishment and his inadvisable classification of blacks as a contemporary suffering servant."[19] Jones cites Washington's view of slavery in America as a divinely appointed task:

> Slavery with eventual emancipation has too long been misconstrued as the end rather than the beginning to which God has called the Negro people of America. Slavery was but the means for inextricably binding the Negro and the Caucasian. Without this binding, the immeasurably more bruising work of releasing whites from their blasphemous bondage to whiteness and racial superiority cannot be done.[20]

In speaking of slavery, Jones recalls his initial impression when he read Washington's work:

> The image that comes to my mind in reading Washington is that of the faithful, involuntary slave who gives his all for the life and safety of his master, hoping all the while that his freedom will follow his faithful execution of his assigned task. I have visions of a slave rushing into a burning house to save the master's child spurred on by the master's promise of freedom if the rescue is successful—and if he survives.[21]

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[17] Ibid., 68.

[18] Ibid., 90.

[19] Ibid., 78.

[20] Ibid., 92.

[21] Ibid., 91.

First, Jones is critical of Washington's position because he does not provide an exaltation-liberation event. A valid question for Washington is, "Where and when did the exaltation-liberation happen for blacks in America?" Even with the eradication of slavery in 1865, the monumental *Brown vs. Board of Education* that refuted the conceptual claim of 'separate but equal', the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that was signed into law requiring people and institutions to desist the practice of racial and gender discrimination, segregation, isolation, and alienation, or the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that required fair voting practices in America, equate to an exaltation-liberation event.

A formidable, new age black humanistic reason to substantiate Jones' claim comes from Cornel West in *Prophesy Deliverance: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity.* West declares that, "racist practices intensify the degree of powerlessness among black people. This is illustrated by the high rate of black unemployment, the heavy black concentration in low-paying jobs, inferior housing, education, police protection, and health care."[22] The predicament of blacks in America can be attributed to: 1. God actively participating or 2. God quietly watching. Either way, God is guilty of being a white and racist due to the intense imbalance of suffering endured by blacks in America countered by the non-suffering of whites.

Second, Jones criticizes Washington's analysis of black suffering in America as akin to the suffering servant motif personified in Isaiah 52:13-53:1-13. Washington identifies the suffering servant as a group, and not as a single individual. The second prophet Isaiah envisioned one who would come to care for the world by bearing the

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[22] Cornel West. *Prophesy Deliverance: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), 11.

iniquities of the world to ensure a future for the world. With this call, suffering would be paramount for the cause. The suffering servant:

- Borne our infirmities (53:4a)
- Carried our diseases (53:4b)
- Wounded for our transgressions (54:1a)
- Crushed for our iniquities (54:1b)
- Upon him was the punishment that made us whole (54:1c)
- By his bruises we are healed (54:1d)
- Through him, the *WILL* of the Lord shall prosper (54:9d)

According to Jones, Washington's suffering servant model is a weak resolution to account for black suffering in America. For Jones, the suffering servant is not a sign of divine favor. If anything, it would be a sign of divine disfavor. As validation to prove Washington's argument to be weak and hypocritical, Jones uses Washington's own words against him:

> Historically, the systematic victimization of the African and the American Negro has been accepted as the punishment of the will of God. But this very belief sparks the reality to opposite, the truth of hope; these victims bear the marks of those blessed of God to do his work of love, rejected by men more acceptable to each other but not to God.[23]

The above statement does not personify the suffering servant model, unless God is white and racist. If Washington argues that black suffering is a divinely salvific missional opportunity, then how long will the suffering last and what more needs to be done to fulfill the mission? Therefore, I agree with Jones. As a strong, devout Christian, it is hard for me to reconcile the suffering of blacks as God's plan of salvation for white people who practice racism and blacks who perpetuate colorism. Using Jones' virus-vaccine model, one gathers from Washington that black people are the vaccine to heal whites who suffer from this racist disease. If Washington is right, it would give me the

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[23] Ibid., 83.

impression that God has mental challenges. Why would God sacrifice an innocent group of people for centuries irrespective of their allegiance to him and prayers for deliverance?

James Cone

After the critique of Washington, Jones evaluates Cone's, *A Black Theology of Liberation*. James Cone is the heralded Godfather of black theology because he coined the term black liberation theology. This term gives scholastic comprehensive insight into the nature, personality, and identity of God and Christ from the experience of oppression suffered by blacks in the United States of America. A good theological hors d'oeurve used by Jones for one to taste the depth of Cone's school of thought would be:

> What we need is the divine love as expressed in Black Power, which is the power of black people to destroy their oppressors here and now by any means at their disposal. Unless God is participating in this holy activity, we must reject his love.[24]

In reading the quote, one may gather that the hors d'oeurve was a bit spicy. The spicy taste comes from the humanistic undertone exuding from the statement. Keep in mind that *A Black Theology of Liberation* was published two years after the assassination of noted civil rights pioneer, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. After his death, race riots were so pervasive that the National Guard was summoned to protect the White House from black nihilists.

To begin his argument, Jones uses Washington's model as a contrast to Cone. According to Cone, God had chosen blacks for freedom and not willed them to suffering. It is oxymoronic, for God to be the God of black people and allow their suffering.

However, Cone does not refute that the prerequisite to freedom is suffering. For Cone, it appears easier to accept blacks' election for freedom than for redemptive

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[24] Ibid., 101.

suffering. In this way, Cone's position on freedom is more in line with the Exodus story. The Israelites were elected by God to be 'freed' from Egyptian slavery, and not chosen as redemptive agents to be used to suffer for the cause of Egyptian liberation.

On the surface, Cone's model rejects Washington's position, but Jones contends that Cone's theodicy is virtually identical to Washington because Cone fails to show or list a definitive exaltation event and fails to deal with the position on the sovereignty of God considering black suffering in America. In a debate, Jones would want Cone to explain how racism can thrive in the United States of America if God advocates black freedom.

Albert Cleage

The next debate is with Albert Cleage and his anthology of sermons, *The Black Messiah*. At the very outset, Cleage is vociferous that God and Jesus are black soul brothers. The physical blackness of God and Jesus insures their identification with and participation in the struggle for liberation.[25] Cleage, as highlighted by Jones, goes on to say:

> We know that Israel was a black nation, and that the descendants of the original black Jews are in Israel, Africa and the Mediterranean area today. The Bible was written by black Jews. The Old Testament is the history of black Jews….Jesus was a black Messiah. He came to free a black people from the oppression of the white Gentiles. We know this to be a fact.[26]

God's black skin is his pledge of allegiance to black people and black liberation. However, Cleage as shown by Jones shoots himself right in his theological foot when he states:

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[25] Ibid., 117.

[26] Ibid., 236.

> If God created man in his own image, then we must look at man to see what God looks like. There are black men, there are yellow men, there are red men and there are a few, a mighty few white men in the world. If God created man in his own image, then God must be some combination of this black, red, yellow, and white. In no other way could God have created man in his own image.[27]

If God is all of these different colors, then it would be challenging to refute the notion of divine racism by stating that God has black skin.

Unlike others, Cleage does give concrete exaltation-liberation events. As examples, he lists the ministry of Jesus and the Israelites exiting out of Egypt. Also, Jones gives Cleage high praise for a strong exegesis on the Exodus story, pointing out the Israelites greatest sin was not living up to their image in the quest to attain the land God promised them. For Jones, this exegesis sends a strong imperative to black people who practice quietism and permit an individual or group to be treated mercilessly.

Major Jones

Major Jones in his work entitled, *Black Awareness: A Theology of Hope* endorses Bonheoffer's concept of man as co-sufferer with God."[28] Appropriately William Jones quotes Major Jones validate the claim:

> The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypotheses of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God and with God we live without God. God lets himself be pushed out of the world onto the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and this is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps. *Matthew 8:17* makes it quite clear that Christ helps us not by virtue of his own omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering.[29]

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[27] Ibid., 124. Jones is directly quoting from Albert Cleage, *Black Messiah* (New York, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 42.

[28] Ibid., 133.

[29] Ibid.

Interestingly, Matthew 8:17 is a biblical text borrowed from the prophecy of the suffering servant from Isaiah 53:4. Unlike, Washington, Major Jones does not state that blacks are God's chosen vessel to suffer oppression for sake of white freedom and salvation.

This perspective adds fuel to William Jones' position because it lets God off the hook because God is not in a position of power to help the powerless overcome the powerful. As Major Jones himself argues, "God himself is helpless to relieve those who suffer at the hands of the ruthless enemy."[30] Therefore, the ending of oppression is based on humanity deciding to suffer with God.

For Major Jones, the word 'man' does not connote a color or is ethnically specific. Human oppression is a problem of humankind and not a certain kind of people. As a result, all 'men' need to play a role in the eradication of human oppression.

The other major feature of Major Jones' black theology of hope is his position on black eschatology. For Major Jones, a black eschatology must create a connection of current Christian eschatological trends while constantly being aware of the existential experience of blacks who desire freedom. Second, there must be an 'anthropology of hope' by providing 'an ontological analysis of man that illuminates the black man's situation as oppressive and at the same time arms him with a sense of worth.'[31] Lastly, black eschatology, "must affirm that God possesses the appropriate attributes that are foundations for the possibilities of the future."[32]

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 137.

[32] Ibid.

William Jones throws the same theological challenge to Major Jones. With your 'theology of hope', can you state an exaltation-liberation event within black human history event to support your claim? Although Major Jones lays claim that his "theology of hope presupposes that God supports black liberation," William Jones asks, "But what does that mean except that God is not a white racist, and that He is not hostile to blacks?"[33]

Unique to the other critiques, William Jones was focused primarily on the black theologians' theological position of God at it relates to black suffering. To me, it appears that he uses his critique of Major Jones as a whip to directly lash out at God. My rationale is that before becoming a humanist, William Jones' theistic view may have been like Major Jones' theological position. It could be that in reading Major Jones, William Jones encompassed his past as a glorified preacher and pastor.

J. Deotis Roberts

The theological premise and theodicy of J. Deotis Roberts as presented by Jones begins with the presupposition of God's inherent altruism and then compartmentalizes the experience of black suffering and oppression. For example:

> A black theology must somehow maintain trust in the absolute goodness and omnipotence of God notwithstanding the fact of moral evil…against which we must struggle. We must confront evil and find through the resources of our faith the wherewithal to stand up to life.[34]

To complete the discussion, Jones offers Roberts' eschatological posture. 'Eschatology for blacks', Robert affirms, 'must be both realized and unrealized.'[35] The

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[33] Ibid., 139.

[34] Ibid., 153.

[35] Ibid., 160.

'realized' would be products and benefits such as greater employment, education, recreation, social, and political opportunities that foster a higher quality of life for the oppressed. The 'unrealized' is futuristic and accounts for God's plan of action. For humanity, the future is a state of uncertainty because one has no 'realized' idea of what the future holds. Black Christian theism exclaims for one to put trust in God because God's sovereignty includes and encapsulates the future.

Jones' criticism of Roberts is similar to his critique of Washington and Major Jones: 1. Implicit insinuation of divine racism, 2. No definitive exaltation-liberation event, and 3. Insufficient refutation of theodicy of deserved punishment.

In his theological bullying, Jones asks Roberts, "Why bypass the issue of divine racism?"[36] The strength of Roberts' position is in the intrinsic nature of God that embodies God's goodness. Therefore, the notion of divine racism is nonexistent. For Jones, Robert's theological affirmation of a benevolent God thwarts any attempt to discuss and account for black suffering. In the theodicy of deserved punishment, Roberts strikes a nerve with Jones because based on his theology it can be easily surmised that Roberts believes that black suffering is not divinely warranted, but in same breath, does not place blame on God.

A weakness of Roberts' eschatological posture is not mentioning a definitive exaltation-liberation event. With black suffering in contrast to non-white suffering, it is virtually impossible to recognize any event that remotely shows that God cares for blacks. Unless something is discovered in the present, it would be needless to offer a

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[36] Ibid., 152.

discourse for unrealized eschatology when God's benevolence is unrecognized in the present.

Thus far, I presented Jones' idea of racism as practiced in the United States of America as a divinely inspired activity. The disproportionate amount of suffering endured by blacks is sufficient to accuse God of being white and racist. As a measure to add texture, the Negro Spiritual "Lord, How Come Me Here?" was used to show that Jones may not have been the first to address the notion of theodicy as it relates to black suffering in the United States of America.

Then a brief description and evaluation was given on the two theological models designed by William Jones. The first model, the *virus vaccine* is a biologically inspired prototype that uncovers as much information as possible, and then comes up with a resolution. The second model, humanocentric theism recognizes the sovereignty of God but bestows an exalted status of all humankind as a co-determinate in the political, social, spiritual, and economic affairs of the world.

Then a summary is provided that discusses the theological content of each theologian's published contribution along with Jones' critique of each contribution upon the presumptions of an implicit allusion of divine racism in each presentation, the deliberate absence or negation of an exaltation-liberation event to support each position, and an inadequate refutation of the theodicy of deserved punishment in each contribution.

As mentioned earlier, one of the aims in writing *Is God A White Racist?* was to inspire an intra-dialogue amongst he and other noted black theologians to ensure that theodicy be considered one of the monoliths of black liberation theology. A Negro Spiritual that accomplishes this intra-dialogue is "Sometimes I Feel a Motherless Chile:"

Sometimes I feel like a motherless chile
A long way from home

Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone.
A long ways from home**.**

This song raises some serious issues with God. When a community has suffered in a similar manner of blacks in the United States of America, it would be natural to question Gods' goodness and power in the active presence of evil. If God is concerned with those who suffer and wants a better life for them, why does God allow the continuation of human misery?[37]

On the surface, this song expresses utter grief and shock of a child being separated from his/her mother or family at the auction block. Systematic Theologian, David E. Goatley in his book *Were You There? Godforsakeness in Slave Religion* in quoting Christa K. Dixon from *Negro Spirituals: From Bible to Folk Song* provides unique outlook:

> The phrase, 'I feel like a motherless chile,' replaced the African idiom 'my father is dead' as the identity of slaves evolved from and African orientation toward a more American consciousness. 'My father is dead' was an expression born of African patriarchal society, where the father provided the necessities of life. Thus, the saying indicates an existential crisis of living without the one's father needed not be physically dead for the phrase to have had currency. With the forced termination of paternal relationships among slave families through the slave trade, mothers became the dominant source of provision and security, and motherhood evolved as the dominant symbol for security and survival.[38]

The father was forced to be a dead-beat parent while the mother worked hard to keep her family together as she would in the fields. To make matters worse, slave women had gone from being mothers to professional breeders and concubines. They

[37]Pinn, *Moral Evil and Redemptive Suffering,* 224.

[38] David E. Goatley, *Were You There? Godforsakeness in Slave Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 62.

were forcibly matched, made to hatch, and babies were dispatched. They could be repeatedly raped by slaveholders and overseers, tortured for refusing to comply with the sexual demands of their oppressors, and victimized by enraged mistresses who vented their anger and frustration by punishing the exploited slave women.[39] The slave women were constantly at the mercy of the lust and rapacity of the master himself, while the slave husband or father was powerless to intervene.[40]

The symbol of the motherless child was an apt representation of feelings about a wide variety of abuse, including rape of slave women, the extreme physical abuse of women and men (sometimes reaching the point of murder), the disregard of all intimate relationships, and the extreme injustice accompanying the very fact of lifelong involuntary servitude.[41] Each slave was seen and treated like proprietary booty by the overseers and slave masters.

At the auction block, not only were families separated, but also the Africans were forcibly detached from their indigenous traditions, beliefs, values, customs, cultures, religions, and norms. The auction block served as the symbol of moral death.

Before the auction block, the Africans came from many areas in Africa, representing vast social, religious, and cultural experiences. Albert Raboteau explains:

> Among the Africans who became slaves in the Americas were those, such as the Wolof, Serer, Mandinka, Bambara, Fulani, and Hausa, who were Muslim or at least had been influenced by Islam. The ancient kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay had been centers of Muslim influence in the western Sudan. South of the Sahara, along the coasts of 'Guinea', and through inland kingdoms, people

[39] Ibid., 34.

[40] Thurman, *Deep River and The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death*, 36.

[41] Jones, *Wade in the Water*, 21.

> had been exposed to Islam through trade with North African Muslims, through conquest, through colonization, and through conversion.[42]

At the auction block, the African was hung like a piece of dead game and literally had their lives stripped and ripped open. And now they became a bland assembly of workers in the slave market.

Also, the mother in the song is Africa. The major function of slavery was to totally disengage and disorient the slaves by distorting the slaves' historical context. The auction block told the slaves that their status was now just below the family pet; thereby destroying their historical, spiritual, and cultural, ties to their mother (Africa) where they had established a sophisticated way of life.

In addition, they were given American names and had to exchange their native languages for English. They were forced to forfeit their religions, families, traditions, and cultures on the slave ship. The auction block was more than saying good-bye to mommy, but also, the death of one's identity, personality, culture, pride and history.

Underneath the surface, this song wrestles with theodicy. Theodicy is an issue for those believers who accept the existence of God and who must reconcile the existence of a benevolent, unlimited, powerful God, and therefore, justice with the co-existence of evil.[43] The theodicy issue in this song illumines the limitation of God's power

When one wrestles with the eschatological questions regarding the apparent absence/silence of God, one is challenged to reassess the purpose of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection in relation to Negro suffering. William Jones contends:

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[42] Raboteau, *Slave Religion,* 5.

[43] Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, *Exorcizing Evil,* 38.

> In point of fact, does not the continued suffering of blacks after the resurrection raise the essential question all over again: Is God for blacks? We must not forget that black misery, slavery, and oppression—the very facts that make black liberation necessary—are all post-Resurrection events.[44]

According to Jones, the resurrection of Christ is a weak resolution for Negro suffering. It is only at the moment of death that the experiences of freedom, justice, and equality in a place called heaven are realized. In understanding Negro suffering, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is important symbolically, but impotent existentially.

This song empathizes with William Jones' notion of divine misanthropy. Whether God participates or watches, God is still responsible for the potent, viral spread of suffering by a dominant group on a more oppressed group.

As his fellow compatriots, the song also exudes an eternal optimism. The hope lives in the word 'sometimes.' It provides a ray of hope for those suffering under oppression that the situation is not permanent or finite. It keeps the window open for an exaltation-liberation event, and a refutation of theodicy of deserved punishment. Also, the word 'sometimes' does not deny if God cares or exist. If the word 'sometimes' were omitted, then it would be valid to question God's care for blacks in the United States of America and if God is powerless against their suffering.

In closing, I would like to share some personal reflections and conclusions drawn from reading *Is God a White Racist?* concerning the role of theodicy, its impact on me as a pastor in my current context.

In discussing the role of theodicy, I agree with Jones that black humanistic thought deserves consideration as a keynote black liberation theology. Even more, I contend that black humanistic thought fits even better in the context of dealing with the

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[44] Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 19.

vicissitudes of pastoring a church. For example, I have been pastoring at my present location for twelve years. In those twelve years, much of it has felt like I was serving time as opposed to serving God. Since accepting God's mandate to become the pastor, church membership and church finances have dropped significantly. In less than year of serving as pastor, I had to lay off the maintenance crew, voluntarily take a pay cut, and cut the pay of staff. At one point, I had to go to my minister of music and notify him that the church was in such bad financial shape that the church could no longer pay him. And going into that conversation, I knew he depended on the money to buy his medicine. If the church were able to give me every dime I am owed, I could pay off my house! On two occasions, I was threatened with foreclosure.

As a result, I suffered with depression for years. For me, the depression was deeply embedded in my anger against God. In this anachronistic space, I lashed out at God because I felt that was God punishing me. In a similar fashion as Psalm 13:1-2, I asked

> How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face? How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

After some time, God responded to my prayers of pain and protest. In God's response, I was assured that God understood my situation. The reason for God putting me in that situation was to better understand God's overall situation. The pain, challenges, issues, and experiences over that last twelve years is a mere microcosm of what God deals with on a regular basis.

For example, a member of my church challenged me about my dedication and faithfulness to the church. As I was explaining some of the heroic acts of benevolence,

the member responded, “That’s your job.” Of all the situations of conflict, this one cut me the deepest because I felt my value was disregarded.

This one situation captures the essence of that conversation with me and God. The attitude reflected by the member of the church captures a perception of how many view and treat God. The heroism of God is what people expect and not revere. The same would be true for most pastors. We are expected to be superheroes whose superpower is sacrifice.

In the conclusion of the conversation, God helped me see that with all that has happened in those twelve years, I still had clothes to wear for the seasons, food on the table, and a roof over my head. In the struggle, I have been able to pay all of my bills, pay off a car, and continue my education. After many years of being single, I consummated my life with my soulmate and her children. On October 21, 2017, my wife told me that she was expecting! God willing, soon I will have the chance to hold, kiss, and smell my own child.

As a result, theodicy has been a springboard that has helped improve and strengthen my relationship with God. It is comforting to know that I am able to ask God hard questions and give God a hard critique. Even now I am struggling with the escalation of police brutality, the climbing unemployment rate, mounting terrorist attacks, increase in human trafficking, the shootings happening in schools and churches, the privation of the penitentiary system, and the disproportionate number of people of color across the world living in poverty.

Even more disturbing is watching the current President of the United States of America, Donald Trump, enact policies to privatize the healthcare system which will

make it more affordable for those who can already afford healthcare. His idea of tax reform will give more breaks to those who do not need breaks. Moreover, his ideology on immigration is to build a wall dividing the United States of America and Mexico, and to institute a merit-based system as the new criteria for letting people come into the country.

Based on my experience of God, I do not think God is white or racist. Like James Cone, the color God is irrelevant. If pushed to give God a color, I would say that God's color is GOOD because goodness is inherent in all humanity. When it comes to racism, it is a form of evil that is learned. Therefore, racism is not divine.

Since I believe that theodicy deserves a place at the roundtable of black liberation theology, I wanted to extend that same invitation to theodicy within the confines of pastoring a church. On Easter Sunday, I used the Negro Spiritual "Lord, How Me Here?" as the centerpiece for worship. In worship, what does it look like when the focus is questioning the goodness of God as opposed to highlighting the goodness of God? How will this work during Easter when the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is intensified? In conjunction with the message of the Negro Spiritual, Jesus' words as recorded by Matthew 27:46 states, "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?" As the author of the unknown spiritual, Jesus dealt with theodicy. Since theodicy is part of the resurrection story of Jesus Christ, it has earned its seat at the roundtable of worship.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT REPORT AND EVALUATION

Over the course of three weeks, a Negro Spiritual was selected to serve as the centerpiece each Sunday from April 2 through April 16, 2017 at United Cornerstone Missionary Baptist Church. The three-week period of the project happened during the Lenten season. In Christianity, the Lenten season is a special time set aside to reflect and commemorate God's vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ by atoning for the world's sin.

In addition to the Lenten Season, April 2 was Holy Communion Sunday, April 9 was Palm Sunday, and April 16 was Easter Sunday. Each worship component that comprised the order of worship was purposed to reflect and incorporate thoughts, messages, themes, or words from the Negro Spirituals and presented in a way that primarily resonates with young adult blacks, ages 21-38. Also, the intent was to make sure members past age 38 felt connected and included in the worship service. On top of appeasing the target audiences, it was paramount to select a spiritual that could be used to give honor and appreciation to each special occasion and not draw attention away from the Lenten season. As a result, the Negro Spirituals selected were:

- Sunday, April 2: *His Name is So Sweet*

- Sunday, April 9: *Go Down Moses*
- Sunday, April 16: *Lord, How Come Me Here?*

Equally important was carefully selecting a group of people who could design, execute, and evaluate the project. This group is known as the Lay Advisory Committee.

Composition of the Lay Advisory Committee

The members chosen for the Lay Advisory Committee were selected by me, the pastor. In composing the committee, it was intentional to ensure majority representation of the demographic highlighted by the project (ages 21-38).

Of the six members from the church, four fell within the age category. These four were responsible for helping design and execute the project. Their responsibilities included:

- Use music and sing songs that coincided with a word(s), theme(s), thought(s) or message(s) of the Negro Spirituals that highlight Lenten Season and give honor to each occasion represented for that particular Sunday
- Officiate Worship Services
- Take a modern song and connect it to a word, theme, thought, or message of the selected Negro Spiritual for that Sunday and create a liturgical dance
- Measure how effective the services created resonance and affection for Negro Spirituals among Young Adults ages 21-38 by asking and summarizing the desired age group’s thoughts and feelings regarding the worship services

The next two members selected were passed the age of 38. There responsibilities were to:

- Engage members of the congregation and share feedback
- Measure if the services were considerate and inclusive friendly for members that are past age 38

The next two members selected were At-Large Members. They were instrumental in:

- Evaluating the prospectus
- Evaluating the project
- Coming and evaluating one of the services as a visitor

United Cornerstone Missionary Baptist Church

A Brief Historical Layout of UCMBC

United Cornerstone Missionary Baptist Church is a 50-member congregation located on the Southeast side of Winston Salem, NC. United Cornerstone happened was founded during the fall of 1990. Formerly known as United Christian Fellowship, initial consultation, Bible study, and worship was held in the home of Darryl and Janice Wright-Prince. After securing a loan, members went on a search for a suitable location to form and grow a church. In a quick span, a purchase was placed on a property (2745 Patria St, Winston Salem, N.C. 27127) that used to be a church called First Alliance Church. Equally as negotiations were made to formally finalize the sale of the church, a search had gone forth to call a pastor. On November 20, 1990, United Antioch Missionary Baptist Church, as it was called then, called Dr. Jay R. Butler to become its founding pastor. While experiencing growth, the church's name was changed to United

Cornerstone Missionary Baptist Church. After 15 years of tireless and faithful service, God summoned Dr. Butler to eternal rest on July 19, 2005.

I first arrived at United Cornerstone on December 25, 2005. I was asked to preach that Sunday before Christmas and the first Sunday of the New Year. Then I was asked if I could provide pulpit supply for the month of January so they could put together a search committee. Altogether, I ended up supplying for 16 months; and consequently, accepted their invitation and God's mandate to become the next pastor.

Explanation of the Order of Service

At United Cornerstone, worship commences with a brief devotional period to set the ambience for God's entrance in the worship space. Following is the Call to Worship, a space where the worship leader summons and calls congregants for gathering and centering in preparation for worship. Afterwards, the worship leader gives an *Invocation,* which is a special invitation asking God to come, participate, and take control of the worship service.

The second phase of worship begins with a Congregational Hymn. For the hymn, people are asked to stand and sing along with the choir. The hymn would be akin to stretching before one begins a workout. The participation in singing the hymn helps loosen up the congregation. Following the hymn, a member will read the scriptures for the day.

Starting the next worship phase is a song of praise. A song of praise is purposed to glorify God with honor, affection, and reverence for what God does and who God is. In continuance of honoring God, devotional prayer is a sacred moment in worship used to

give thanks, utter laments, and offer petitions unto God. In devotional prayer, it is stressed to the congregation that a prayer is never finished until God responds.

The next phase of the worship service focuses on hospitality. In welcoming of guest, it is very important the guests in our church feel the joy, generosity, and the warmth in the church's welcome. In the pastor's brief, more emphasis is placed on affirming the humility of seeing guests choosing to worship God in our facility. And during the tithe and offertory period, members are escorted to bring his/her tithes and offerings and present at the altar. The other reason for escorting people to come before the altar is because members can more formally greet and welcome our guests.

In starting the last phase of worship, a song of worship is offered. A song of worship is about drawing people's attention unto God. In getting worshipers' attention, an opportunity is given to introduce and explain the nature of God. The preached word, in a deeper and more expansive form continues the introduction into the nature of God but also explains why it would behoove one to choose God's son Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Following the sermon is an invitation to discipleship. It offers people an opportunity to dedicate and rededicate his/her life to Jesus Christ and make United Cornerstone his/her church home. Finally, the benediction otherwise known as a 'blessing' is imparted to members and guest prior to departure.

Worship Itinerary of United Cornerstone Missionary Baptist Church

- Devotion
- Call to Worship
- Invocation
- Congregational Hymn
- Scriptural Reading
- Song of Praise
- Devotional Prayer
- Welcoming of Guest

- Pastoral Brief
- Tithe and Offertory Period
- Song of Worship
- The Preached Word
- Invitation to Discipleship
- Benediction

April 2, 2017

The project began the first Sunday in the month of April known as Holy Communion Sunday. At United Cornerstone Missionary Baptist Church, Holy Communion is a special ceremony done every first Sunday of each month that commemorates God's vicarious sacrifice of God's self in the form of Jesus Christ as recompense for the sins of the world. It relives the Last Supper of Christ and the disciples. As Jesus feeds the disciples, he prophesies his betrayal by one of the disciples that would lead to him being arrested, tried, beaten, and hung on a cross. Eventually, Jesus would die on the cross and be buried with borrowed clothes and in a borrowed tomb. Three days later, God reaches down and pulls Jesus Christ out of the grave with all power in heaven and earth in his hands. During Holy Communion, a special supper is prepared where unleavened bread representing Christ's broken body is eaten and grape juice/wine representing Christ's shed blood is drunk by members of the congregation. This ceremony reminds one the extent of God's love for humanity but calls one to summon others to experience the love of Jesus Christ.

The Negro Spiritual chosen for Holy Communion on Sunday, April 2, 2017 was "His Name is So Sweet." This song is a testimonial reflection where the unknown author had a sacred encounter with Jesus Christ at a fountain and comes away falling in love with him. In expressing the love of Jesus, the author exhorts others to come and experience a love unlike any love.

The theme for that Sunday was "Experiencing the Love and Joy of Meeting Christ at the Fountain*."* Common words highlighted by elements comprising the worship service were love, joy, water, sweet, and fountain. For the sermon, the scripture was John 4:7-15 that recounts an encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well/fountain of Jacob. This story mirrors the story of the Negro Spiritual. The unknown author of the Negro Spiritual and the Samaritan woman are people Jesus would be forbidden to associate and converse with due to their unclean nature. Despite their background and appearance, Jesus detected great potential in them becoming fountains of living water.

SUNDAY, APRIL 2, 2017…HOLY COMMUNION SUNDAY

Negro Spiritual….."His Name is So Sweet"

I just come from the fountain
I just come from the fountain river
I just come from the fountain and his name's so sweet

Tell me, do you love Jesus
Yes, Yes, I do love Jesus
Tell me, do you love Jesus
His name is so sweet

Devotion
Call to Worship
Invocation
Congregational Hymn "Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus" Louisa Stead (1868)
Scriptural Reading
Song of Praise "There's Power in the Blood" Writer Unknown
Devotional Prayer Song "He's Sweet I Know" A. Jackson (1977)
Welcoming of Guests
Pastoral Brief
Offertory Songs "I'm so Glad I Belong to Jesus"
Song of Worship "Total Praise" by Richard Smallwood

Song for Communion	"It Will Never Run Dry" …...*SUNG IN COMMON METER*
Sermonic Scripture	John 4:7-15, "Woman at the Well"
Sermon Title	*A Spiritual Makeover*
Invitation to Discipleship	
Benediction	

In the sermon *A Spiritual Makeover*, the Samaritan woman went to haul and fetch water from the well of Jacob during the heat of the afternoon. Unbeknown to her, Jesus was at the well waiting for the disciples to return with food. When seeing her, Jesus ask for some water and she reminds him about the unlawfulness for Samaritans and Jews to associate.

Then Jesus offers her a brand of water that forever quenches her thirst. It was a such potent brand of water that it transformed her into a fountain of water. After her encounter with Christ, she goes back into her community recounting her sweet experience with Christ at the fountain of Jacob. In feeding off her fountain experience, members of the community felt inspired to meet and fellowship with Jesus at the fountain.

The point of emphasis was to not settle for fetching water when Christ has called you to be a fountain to tell others about Christ's love.

April 9, 2017

The second Sunday was known as Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday captures the story of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. As he processed into the city, people adorn him with palms as he rode on a donkey to his eventual arrest, trial, beating and crucifixion. Some would argue that a more appropriate Negro Spiritual would have been *"Ride on King Jesus."* The lyrics to "Ride on King Jesus" are:

> Ride on King Jesus,
> No man can a-hinder thee.

Ride on King Jesus,
No man can a-hinder thee.

In that greatness of morning
Fair thee well, fair thee well.
In that greatness of morning
Fair thee well, fair thee well.

When I get to heaven gonna' wear a robe,
(No man can a-hinder thee.)
Gonna' walk all over those streets of gold.
(No man can a-hinder thee.)
When King Jesus sittin' on the throne,
(No man can a-hinder thee.)
Joy to a man when the devil goes.
(No man can a-hinder thee.)

The Negro Spiritual chosen for Sunday, April 9, 2017 was "Go Down Moses." The spiritual details the dialogue between God and Moses. God heard the cries of the Israelites and has summoned Moses to go back to Egypt to free the Israelites. Now, this spiritual was very challenging because it does not have any direct ties to the meaning and significance of Palm Sunday. Secondly, there are not any common words found in the Negro Spiritual that connect to Palm Sunday.

The theme for that Sunday was Let My People Go. The reason for choosing *Go Down Moses* was due to the similarities between Moses' processional into Egypt and Jesus' processional into Jerusalem and the purpose behind each procession. Both were called and commissioned to save and deliver a people subjugated to bondage. For Moses it was to free the Israelites from slavery, and for Jesus it was to free the people from sin. Although Moses may not fit into the Palm Sunday, his procession into Egypt belongs to Palm Sunday.

As members of the Christian body, we too belong in the Palm Sunday story. The scripture used to compliment the Negro Spiritual was Exodus 4:18-20 where Moses asks

his father-in-law Jethro for permission and his blessing to return to Egypt to help free the Israelites from bondage. As Moses and Jesus, we must prepare to take our journey and process into the lands, cities, towns, and countries to help set people in the world free.

SUNDAY, APRIL 9, 2017…PALM SUNDAY
Negro Spiritual…... "Go Down Moses"

When Israel was in Egypt's Land
Let my people go

Oppressed to hard, they could not stand
Let my people go

Go Down Moses,
Way down in Egypt Land
Tell Ole Pharaoh
Let My People Go

Devotion
Call to Worship
Invocation
Congregational Hymn #162 "Pass Me Not. Frances Crosby (1868)
Scriptural Reading Exodus 3:11-12
Song of Praise "You Brought Me Through This"
Devotional Prayer Song "I'm Free"
Welcoming of Guests
Pastor's Brief
Offertory Songs "I'm so Glad I Belong to Jesus"
Song of Worship "Grace and Mercy"
Sermon Title *Go Down Moses*
Invitation to Discipleship
Benediction

In the sermon *Go Down Moses,* Moses is living high in the mountains in a little town called Midian. While there, he gets married and settles in a space of content as a shepherd. While tending to the sheep, he catches sight of a burning bush. The burning bush was a telepathic portal God used to let Moses know about the sonorous cries of

freedom from the Israelites. He has been chosen to go down into Egypt and tell Pharaoh to set the Israelites free.

Centuries later, God still hearing the cries of freedom from the people, summoned Christ to be transported by the Holy Spirit from the hallowed halls of heaven into the innocent womb of teenager named Mary of Nazareth. As Moses, God summoned Christ to set the people of the world free.

Even still, God has not stopped calling people to *go down* to fight for freedom, advocate for justice, and speak about equity on behalf of the poor and oppressed in the world.

April 16, 2017

The third Sunday in April was Easter Sunday. Easter Sunday is a special time where Christians all over the world commemorate and celebrate the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus was betrayed by the disciple Judas, arrested by the Romans in the Garden of Gethsemane, tried the first time by Sanhedrin Council, tried again and found innocent by Pontius Pilate, beaten and brutalized by professional mercenaries, lent a purple a robe, bejeweled with a crown made out of thorns with a cross placed over his back, and then made to walk around the old city of Jerusalem up to Golgotha's Hill. Upon arrival, he was stretched, nailed, and hung high from the cross. In a matter of hours, he dies, but three days later, God raises him from the grave and bequeaths Jesus with all power of heaven and earth in his hands.

The Negro Spiritual chosen for Sunday, April 16, 2017 was "Lord, How Come Me Here?" This spiritual is a very poignant and sad song. In addition to wanting to know "Why am I Here?" the author also asks God, "How Come Me Black?"

The theme was The Pain of Feeling Forsaken. There are no common words that connect the spiritual to Easter. The connection between the spiritual and the experience of Jesus Christ is found in the arena of theodicy. If God is all-powerful and good, then why is evil so prevalent in the world? In Matthew 27:46, Jesus asks God a question the author of the spiritual can relate to, "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?" And both are in dire straits waiting to hear an answer from God. The intent was to solely focus on the pain experienced by Christ and not waiver into the joy of Christ's resurrection on Sunday morning.

SUNDAY, APRIL 16, 2017…EASTER SUNDAY
Negro Spiritual…. *Lord How my Here?*

Lord how come me here? (3x)
I wish I was never was born (2x)

Lord, how come me black? (3x)
I wish I never born (2x)

Devotion	
Call to Worship	
Invocation	
Congregational Hymn	"Farther Along" W. A. Fletcher (1911)
Scriptural Reading	Matthew 27:32-46
Song of Praise	"The Blood Still Works"
Devotional Prayer	"Precious Lord" Thomas Dorsey
Welcoming of Guests	
Pastor's Brief	
Offertory Songs	"Celebrate, Jesus Celebrate"
SPECIAL DANCE	"MY WORLD NEEDS YOU" Kirk Franklin
Song of Worship	"Because He Lives" Gloria Gaither (1911)
Sermon Title	*The Hell Before Friday*
Invitation to Discipleship	
Benediction	

The sermon, *The Hell Before Friday* explores the impact of all the events leading to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. If God is omnipotent and good, why standby while

Christ gets arrested, goes on trial, endures the merciless beating of the mercenaries, is adorned with a crown of thorns, a purple robe, a cross, and walks the through the city of Jerusalem to Golgotha's Hill to be hung high, and stretched wide with nails driven his hands and feet.

Even Christ asks, "My God, My God, why has thou forsaken me?" in Matthew 27:46. Hauntingly, God gives no answer and Jesus breathes his last breath.

Similarly, the Negro Spiritual asks, "Lord, How Come Me Here?" And, "How come me black?" Fittingly, the author is waiting for God to answer.

In conducting worship, pain is a part of praise. Our tears of lament are equal to our tears of joy. Give equal time and consideration to the events of the week that led to the glory of that weekend.

Evaluation of Project by the Congregation

Prior to implementing the project, I made sure to introduce the project to the congregation to notify them about the modifications being made to the worship service. For a span of three weeks from April 2 through April 16, 2017, a Negro Spiritual was going to serve as the centerpiece for each worship service. Each component of the worship service is intended to connect to word, theme, thought, or message exuded in the Negro Spiritual. The purpose of the modifications was to help foster resonance and affection for Negro Spirituals in worship among young adult blacks, ages 21-38. The intent driving the purpose of the project was show the ubiquity of Negro Spirituals. The Negro Spirituals can used effectively during worship in ways outside of singing arrangements to attain resonance and affection among young adult blacks, ages 21-38.

After introducing the project to the church, the members were receptive. However, a member of the Lay Advisory Committee suggested I focus on young adults, ages 21-38 to the exclusion of members exceeding age 38.

After completing the three-week series, I along with the Lay Advisory Committee asked members of the church to share their thoughts about how worship was conducted over the three-week period and if the modifications helped foster resonance and affection for Negro Spirituals among our young adult members, ages 21-38 and members past the age of 38.

From the response, members felt that making the Negro Spirituals the centerpieces of each service brought some attention to the Negro Spiritual. Being able to acquire the attention increases the likelihood of resonance and affection.

However, some members expressed that better attention could have been raised if the church bulletin printed the theme and added a visual on the front cover for each service spanning those three weeks. One of the at-large members of the Lay Advisory Committee told the group that she did not see any reflection of the project in the design of the bulletin. The program looked very basic and generic. Along with the design, the words to each Negro Spiritual should have been printed above the worship itinerary so people could better see and measure how each component of the worship service connected to a word, theme, thought, or message from the Negro Spiritual.

Moreover, there were interesting observations made about the Negro Spiritual "It Will Never Run Dry" that was sung in common meter that commenced Holy Communion on April 2, 2017. Prior to the song, I explained how common meter evolved as a musical style in black protestant churches. The common meter is a call and response style where

the leader of the song literally calls out a line and the choir/congregation will join in singing the line. In common meter, the singing is done in acapella.

Since I have a member who knows how to sing in that style, I asked her to lead the song. As she was leading us into the song, no one was singing with her except me. From the pulpit, I could see people's strange expressions and wrinkled foreheads. Although the song fit perfectly with the theme, the style in which the song was sung appeared discomforting to the whole congregation. In consultation with members of the congregation, most knew the song and were familiar with common meter singing. Most of the young adults, ages 21-38 knew the song. However, the reason for not joining in to help sing the song was due to the difficulty in effectively following the leader. As was said by a member, "She sang arrhythmically."

After the service, I saw a distraught look on my member's face after leading the song. I made sure to reach out to her after service to glean her thoughts and feelings about the lack of support and participation from the congregation. She was clear that her feelings were bruised. I did ask if she would consider leading a common meter in the future because it is very important we keep the tradition alive and vibrant.

During the three-week period, I decided to sing each spiritual in classical voice. I am a classically trained bass/baritone opera singer. To pay homage to my slave ancestors, I sang each spiritual without accompaniment. Singing without accompaniment was the original way these slave songs were sung. Also, singing without accompaniment provided me an opportunity to create my own interpretation of the song, and singing in a classical voice showed in part the ubiquity of the Negro Spirituals.

After singing the Negro Spirituals during the worship services, I was adorned with a raucous applause accompanied by loud chants of amen. Because I rarely sang Negro Spirituals during worship, many of the members were not aware that I was a trained singer. I was given the ultimate compliment when I was told that I sounded like the late singer and actor Paul Robeson.

One element that received great acclaim from all the members was the inspirational liturgical dance that was performed on Easter Sunday, April 16, 2017. In composing the dance, the dancer was asked to read and reflect on the Negro Spiritual "Lord, How Come Me Here?" What words, thoughts, themes, or messages resonate with you? After listening to the song, what resonated most with her was the intensity underscoring the questions 1. *How Come Me Here?,* and 2. *How Come Be Black*? To her, the unknown author was seeking something far more significant than answers to these questions. For her, the questions were really a cry for divine help. In her resonance of the song, she felt she could better articulate the message of the Negro Spiritual by choosing a modern gospel song entitled "My World Needs You Right Now" by Kirk Franklin. In sum, "My World Needs You Right Now" is a passionate cry for God to come and turn the world around. Outside of what was a masterful dance, she stayed faithful to the spiritual by using a modern song that highlights a similar feeling of the unknown author of the spiritual.

Other observations centered on the use of the Negro Spiritual entitled, "Lord, How Come Me Here" on Easter Sunday. In talking with the young adult members of the Lay Advisory Committee, they enjoyed the service because it provided a unique twist for Easter with the focus primarily on the pain experienced by Christ during the week.

However, some of the members exceeding the age of 38 asked and challenged me on why I chose such a painful spiritual for Easter. First, I explained to them that the joy of the weekend is not possible without the pain experienced by Christ during the week. Usually, I have Jesus coming out of the grave on Easter Sunday; but not this time. This Negro Spiritual would not let me get past Friday.

As suggested from some members exceeding the age of 38, a more fitting Negro Spiritual for Easter would have been "Were You There*:*"

> Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
> Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
> Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
> Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
>
> Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?
> Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?
> Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
> Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?
>
> Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?
> Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?
> Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
> Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?
>
> Were you there when He rose up from the grave?
> Were you there when He rose up from the grave?
> Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
> Were you there when He rose up from the grave?
> Were you there when He rose up from the grave?

As the Negro Spiritual "Lord How Come Me Here," this spiritual carries a high level of poignancy. Unlike "Lord How Come Me Here," it carries hope. Some of the members past age 38 expressed that the sermon was too harsh and punitive for Easter.

In designing the project, a member of my Lay Advisor Committee informed me that she had not heard of Negro Spirituals. This young adult lay advisor member was the church music director! Once the songs were decided, she told me that she had heard one

of the songs “Go Down Moses.” After a brief introduction and orientation on the history and nature of the Negro Spirituals to the Lay Advisory Committee, she realized that she had heard quite a few of these types of songs but was unaware of the term Negro Spiritual. Like her, two other young adult members of the Lay Advisory Committee heard Negro Spirituals but did not know that the term Negro Spiritual was classified as a musical genre. Imagine the number of people who have heard Negro Spirituals but are unaware of what they are listening to.

As a result, the project took on a whole new meaning. In creating the resonance and affection for Negro Spirituals among young adult blacks, ages 21-38 during a worship service, a church must take extra measures to ensure the preservation of the Negro Spiritual by educating congregations about her origin, history, and nature. If churches, especially black ones, do not incorporate Negro Spirituals as a centerpiece of worship, then the churches are losing more than just songs but are also its historical cultural identity.

In sum, the measures taken to ensure resonance and affection for Negro Spirituals among young adult blacks ages 21-38 were:

- Choosing three Negro Spirituals over the course three weeks that honored Lenten Season and complimented each occasion falling within Lenten Season: 1. *Holy Communion*, April 2nd, 2. *Palm Sunday*, April 9th, and 3. *Easter*, April 16th.
- Ensure that each component of the worship service incorporated or connected to a word, theme, thought, or message exuding from the Negro Spiritual.
- Singing of each Negro Spiritual in a classical voice

- Adding two more elements during the worship: 1. *It will Never Run Dry* sung in common meter on *Holy Communion Sunday,* and 2. *Liturgical Dance on Easter Sunday*

Based on the feedback received from the congregation overall, using the Negro Spirituals as the centerpiece over the course of three weeks to help foster resonance and affection primarily among young adult blacks ages, 21-38 was successful. Two areas that were given the highest acclaim from young adults were the liturgical dance and the singing of Negro Spirituals in classical voice.

However, more resonance could have resulted in a better design of the bulletin and use of spoken word. Also, it was suggested to me from one of the at-large members of the Lay Advisory Committee that if I do the project again, I must keep the worship service within a one hour and 15-minute time-frame. Time is as important as content when it comes to fostering resonance and affection among young adult blacks ages, 21-38 in worship.

Evaluation of the Project from the Lay Advisory Committee

Like the congregation, the key factors to assess were: 1. Did modifying the service help foster resonance and affection for Negro Spirituals among Young Adult members ages 21-38? and 2. Did modifying the service still appeal to the more seasoned members? According to the Lay Advisory Committee, both factors were accomplished with great distinction.

Also, the Lay Advisory Committee was asked to give insight on other observations made over the course of time leading up to completing the project. Positive observations were:

- The passion exhibited from the pastor showed great care for the Negro Spirituals, and desire to share the stories of the Negro Spirituals with young adults.
- Vast knowledge of the subject matter and ability to teach, and present Negro Spirituals.
- In preaching, using the text of the Negro Spiritual as the scripture and the Bible as a secondary resource.
- Hearing the pastor sing the Negro Spirituals in classical voice.
- The liturgical dance on Easter Sunday.

Areas of improvement were:

- Coordinate more dialogue sessions with the Lay Advisory Committee together so everyone is more aware of each person's role, and give time for more collaboration as an entire group.

- Make sure church programs provide visual representation that connects more with project.
- Have a drama/dramatic presentation inspired by the Negro Spirituals
- If appealing to young adults, keep the worship within a one-hour time frame.
- Consider having a reception or gathering with the Lay Advisory Committee and the congregation after the project continued dialogue

Personal Evaluation

In self-evaluating the project, I start with same premise issued to the congregation and the Lay Advisory Committee. Did the modifications to the worship service help foster resonance and affection for Negro Spirituals among the young adult black members ages, 21-38 and did it garner appeal to members past age 38? In accordance with the sentiments shared by the congregations and Lay Advisory Committee, the goal was reached.

The modifications to the worship were intended to primarily appeal to the young adult black members, ages 21-38. The resonance and affection for members past 38 stemmed from feeling included in the process of modifying the worship service. They wanted to have the testimony of feeling they were directly consulted and involved with modifying the worship service. This was especially important because many of those members were a part of the original charter that founded the church. The original worship itinerary was their creation. Therefore, it was important to appeal and seek counsel on how to modify the service in a way to increase the level of resonance and affection of Negro Spirituals among young adult members, ages 21-38.

In modifying the worship service, I had heavy participation from the young adults. In addition to helping design the project, the young adults officiated each worship service, performed the liturgical dance, and led other musical renditions. In addition, each Negro Spiritual selected was chosen during a very significant occasion in the Christian calendar. Special pride was taken to make sure the Negro Spirituals did not overpower original intent behind each service. The project shows how a Negro Spiritual can complement special occasions.

Also, the project provided me an opportunity to exercise my passion for singing by singing "His Name is So Sweet," "Go Down Moses," and "Lord, How Come Me Here?" in a classical style. Oftentimes, I struggle with how I can align my passion for singing with my call to ministry.

This project carries a special meaning to me because of my last voice teacher Richard Heard. While working with him, I talked to him about the project and asked him if he would consider being a resource for me. Not long thereafter, he was stricken with cancer, and I watched him transition. While singing, I was thinking of him and the hundreds of lessons we had over the years.

In reflecting on measures to improve the project, I totally agree with the Lay Advisory Council, especially with respect to coordination. I could have done a better job coordinating meeting times that worked for everyone for more collaboration. It was suggested that I learn how to set up conference calls and create live chat rooms since it was so difficult to get everyone together in a specific location at a set time.

Equally, I feel the worship programs should have had greater visual appeal to foster resonance and affection of Negro Spirituals for young adult black members, ages 21-38. This suggestion was pointed out to me by one of little brothers in the ministry, Kedrick Clark, who at the time, worked directly with young adults at another church. When working with young adults he said, "One must capture their eyes before one gets their ears." A good, relevant design on the program is most imperative.

In addition, having a drama/dramatic presentation would have been a critical element to better achieve the goal. A perfect type of presentation that young adults enjoy is spoken word. Spoken Word is a beautiful and unique oral art form that focuses as

much on intonation and rhythm as it does choices of words and phrases. To me, spoken word syncretizes the qualities of rap and preaching into one oral art form. Usually, spoken word is a brief speech with rich content that provides great mental stimulation. Using the content of a Negro Spiritual in a spoken word context would have been powerful.

At my church, I have just six young adult members. Initially, the plan was to include other churches. More specifically, I had selected churches of other denominations with predominantly black congregations. Also, I reached out to a local nondenominational church with mostly white members who had a strong contingent of black members and a black music director.

While completing the project, there were a few roadblocks. The black music director resigned from the church he was serving. One pastor fired the minister of music he delegated to work with me. Another pastor was reassigned to another church, and one declined to be a part of the project due to time constraints.

NEXT STEPS

The first step would be to take the suggestions of improvement from the Lay Advisory Committee, congregation, and from my own personal evaluation in modifying the worship service at United Cornerstone. In coming up with a new set of Negro Spirituals, the church bulletin would be reformatted, along with a drama/dramatic presentation of spoken word. Also, the deacon's ministry, worship committee, and the ministerial team would take on the role of the Lay Advisory Committee to help design, execute, and evaluate the worship service.

From there, I would share my project with other pastors from my denomination. I would be curious to know the level of frequency that Negro Spirituals are being sung in their churches. In addition, it would be important to know the percentage of members in the church that fall in the ages, of 21-38. Also, I would ask the pastor if they are familiar with and carry an affinity for Negro Spirituals.

Then I would share my project with pastors of other denominations and non-denominational churches. Like pastors in my denomination, I want to know if Negro Spirituals are sung in their churches, the percentage of members in their churches that fall in the target age range, and more importantly, if the pastors have an affinity for Negro Spirituals. If they do not like the Negro Spirituals, then it would be important to know the reason.

In talking with my member who led the song in common meter "It Will Never Run Dry," she mentioned other churches in the area that still have choirs who sing in that style. In our next conversation I would like for her to identify and recruit those churches. Then I would ask her to help form a committee to design and coordinate a metered hymn service that could be hosted at United Cornerstone Missionary Baptist Church.

While working on the project, I was talking to a friend who served as a minister of music for twenty-one years before transitioning as a college music professor. As I was telling him about the project, I shared with him how rarely I hear Negro Spirituals being sung in worship except during Black History month in February. Even then, it sounds to me that the choir sings in a manner of paying respects to the deceased.

Like me, he agrees on how rarely he hears Negro Spirituals being sung in worship services. In addition, the other problem he noticed was poor choral execution. For him,

the problem is twofold, 1. High level of infrequency, and 2. Poor choral execution. After running the project for three weeks, I would hope to share with other ministers of music to see their ideas on what modifications they would recommend to increase the likelihood of resonance and affection for Negro Spirituals among young adult blacks ages, 21-38.

Summary

From the beginning to the completion of the project, the lesson learned that was most impactful was that "the project is finished but the work is still to be continued." Therefore, the project is just the beginning of the work. With the help of the Lay Advisory Committee, and the blessing of the congregation, the project fulfilled its obligation by modifying the worship service at United Cornerstone to help foster resonance and affection for Negro Spirituals among young adult blacks, ages 21-38 and keeping the members past age 38 engaged. Also, the project still gave honor to the Lenten Season and recognition to each special occasion represented on each Sunday.

In designing the project, the work was revealed. The work is to try and have the Negro Spirituals incorporated as an active element in executing worship services. As the project showed, Negro Spirituals do not have to be sung exclusively to foster resonance and affection among young adult blacks, ages 21-38 and members past the age of 38. As shown, even if a Negro Spiritual is sung, it is not circumscribed to a certain style. Therefore, a Negro Spiritual can be sung in many different styles and used in many ways in a worship service to foster resonance and affection for young adult blacks, ages 21-38 and even those past the age of 38.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In the antebellum period, the Negro Spirituals were the backbone of the enslaved African's religious, political, and social experience. The Negro Spirituals were the only possession that the people of the African diaspora have linking their origin back to Africa. The Negro Spirituals were the first storytellers that share and trace the history of Africans brought to the United States of America via the Atlantic Slave Trade. The Negro Spirituals were the original civil rights movement calling for freedom, justice, peace, and equity. Moreover, the Negro Spirituals gave birth to Black Religion and founded the institution known as the Black Church.

The Negro Spirituals must remain alive and not become historical archives incarcerated in the musical museum of one's memory. Instead, the Negro Spirituals need to reside in our hearts. Arthur Jones makes a strong case as to why the Negro Spirituals should be in our hearts:

> However, in contrast to the larger culture, which instructs us that understanding begins with though and logic and flows eventually into values and emotions, the spiritual song (as well as all of the African American cultural norms evolved from it) functions in the opposite way; it begins with feeling and emotion an eventually utilizes that channel to provide direction concerning issues of logic and intellect.[1]

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[1] Jones, *Wade in the Water,* 15.

If the Negro Spirituals become obsolete, not only is America losing one of its most original genres of musical expression, but also, the historiography of a people. The Negro Spirituals are the umbilical cord that connects African Americans to Africa. The Negro Spirituals celebrate the retention of transplanted African socio-cultural richness in the lives of Black men and women in their preservation of life within the narrative Black aesthetic.[1] The Negro Spirituals reflect a central core of African American culture, upon whose foundations almost all other aspects of our psychological and social history have been built. [2] They provided the energy and inspiration to fight against slavery, racism, Jim Crow, and segregation. Just as slavery was the heart that pumped blood to the arteries of nations during the Middle Passage, the Negro Spirituals were the seed planted into the heart of the slave that brought forth fruitful songs of hope, revolution, transformation, liberation, justice, and equality.

A great example to support the potent impact of the Negro Spiritual is the evolution of the young adult Fisk Jubilee Singers. The Fisk Jubilee singers came on the scene at very crucial moment in history. Melva Costen explains:

> There was a brief period of demise immediately following emancipation as African Americans assumed a new status as freed people. A recovery of interest occurred following the popularization of Spirituals by the Fisk Jubilee choir in the last nineteenth century.[3]

Wyatt Tee Walker echoes similar sentiments:

> So sharp was the decline in the use of Negro Spirituals in formal worship services

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[1] Townes, *A Troubling in My Soul,* 155.

[2] Jones, *Wade in the Water,* xiv.

[3] Melva Costen, *African American Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 97.

> that the great body of them might have become extinct had it not been for their popularization through the national and international tours of the Fisk Jubilee singers that began around 1875.[4]

When Fisk University was in financial trouble it was Professor George L. White, "a musician and treasurer of the school, came up with the idea of forming a small touring choir of Fisk students who could raise money on concert tours."[5] Many of the students of Fisk had been slaves and were raised on the Negro Spirituals. Initially, due to lack of support and racism the group did not enjoy much success. The Fisk Jubilee Singers signature moment occurred in Oberlin, Ohio at a religious conference. After singing at the conference in Oberlin, Ohio, the group toured parts of the United States that included a stop at the White House. They also performed in Europe. Their songs conquered until they sang across the land and across the sea, before Queen and Kaiser, in Scotland and Ireland, Holland and Switzerland.[6] By then, the Jubilee Singers had attained almost unprecedented gain throughout America, Britain, and Europe, performing in churches and cathedrals and palaces for such luminaries as Ulysses S. Grant, Queen Victoria, William Gladstone, and the emperor of Germany.[7] By the end of their European tour, the Fisk Jubilee Singers had earned $150,000, ensuring a future for Fisk as one of the most important of the universities providing first-rate education for African-American students.[8] Why was Fisk so successful? Walker explains:

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[4] Walker, *Somebody's Calling My Name*, 84.

[5] Jones, *Wade in the Water,* 123.

[6] Ibid., 156.

[7] Andrew Ward, *Dark Midnight When I Rise: The Story of the Jubilee Singers Who Introduced the World to the Music of Black America.* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), xiii.

[8] Jones, *Wade in the Water*, 126. Jones pulls this quote from John Lovell's, *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame,* 402-408.

> However, the manner in which the Fisk singers presented the antebellum songs of faith was a far cry from their original rendering in the praise house and the cotton fields of the South. The domestic and international tour audiences were treated to what can be called a 'concertized' form of the Spirituals in order that ears trained to the disciple on European Music would not find the inherent repetitive quality boring.[9]

Using the Fisk Jubilee Singers as an example, the Negro Spirituals carried a malleable quality that allowed room for adjustment for those outside of the African-American experience to listen and relate to their specific locality. For most white Americans, the music of the Jubilee Singers was their first lesson in African American culture, the promise of emancipation, and the meaning of the Civil War.[10] As a result, it transformed those with indifferent attitudes to people ready and willing to join in the cause of full equality, freedom, and justice.

For a brief stint of my young adult life, I was in pursuit of becoming an opera singer. After graduating from college, I spent an entire summer in Cortona, Italy studying and performing opera. Along with me, there were several young adult African Americans that were a part of the group. In preparing to perform the opera, the director, the late Talmage Fauntleroy, asked if we would do a small concert and perform Negro Spirituals.

Before each selection, Talmage Fauntleroy introduced and explained each song in Italian which helped foster attention that led to resonance and affection for Negro Spirituals among primarily an Italian audience. It was moving to watch a group of people in tears who perhaps did not understand the words of the song but grasp the emotional

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[9] Walker, *Somebody's Calling My Name,* 62.

[10] Ward, *Dark Midnight When I Rise,* xvi.

nature embodied in the songs. This musical encounter was the first time I experienced such transparency. For me, I felt like I was singing at home to my own people.

The examples of the Fisk Jubilee Singers and my personal experience, highlight the ubiquity of the Negro Spirituals. The Fisk Jubilee Singers were able to transport the stories and songs of the Negro Spirituals and raise money to alleviate the financial strain levied on the university. In the small, archaic town of Cortona, Italy, I was given an opportunity to sing an unfamiliar song in a musical style (classical) common to the area. The other similarity shared between the Fisk Jubilee Singers and my personal experience is that each was done in concert form. Is it possible to create the ubiquity in a worship service in this common era that opens space for young adult blacks ages, 21-38 to connect and resonate with the Negro Spirituals?

As established earlier, the Fisk Jubilee Singers repopularized the Negro Spirituals during of period of apathy and derision after the end of the Civil War in 1865. The cause sparking interest and affection was rearranging the Negro Spirituals unique to the original rendition as Walker calls "concertized," to make space for Europeans to develop affection for the Negro Spirituals. With a similar goal, the project's intent was to use a Negro Spiritual in a creative way to spark attention, resonance, and affection for a certain audience potentially unfamiliar with Negro Spirituals. Unlike Fisk University, the project did not involve rearranging Negro Spirituals. Although each Negro Spiritual was sung, the project only modified the worship itinerary at United Cornerstone Missionary Baptist Church in Winston Salem, NC to help foster resonance and affection for Negro Spirituals among young adults, ages 21-38.

For a three-week period, a Negro Spiritual was featured as central foci of the service. There was no changing the worship itinerary. In retaining the worship itinerary, each element from the devotional period to the benediction had to connect with a theme, thought, message, or word from the Negro Spiritual in a way to primarily resonate and connect with young adults ages, 21-38. The intent was to show that a Negro Spiritual can be utilized outside of singing to attain the resonance and affection for young adult blacks ages 21-38.

As a pastor, I carry a strong affection for young adults. As a classically trained vocalist, I have a strong passion for singing Negro Spirituals. At my church, young adults make up a very small percentage of church membership, and the Negro Spirituals are sung on rare occasions. The project is a humble attempt at using the Negro Spirituals as a tool to attract young adult blacks, ages 21-38 to the church.

Another way to imagine the project is to think of a puzzle. In completing a puzzle, one aligns, connects, and fits all the pieces together that results in a picture. Each element of the worship service from the devotion to the benediction is a piece of the puzzle. When all the pieces are put together, the result is a picture of the featured Negro Spiritual. With three songs, me and Lay Advisory Committee worked on designing worship puzzles that gave a clear picture of the Negro Spirituals. Now we have just a few thousand more worship puzzles to go.

In closing, David Simms provides a thematic picture of Negro Spirituals that served as the litmus test for the project:

> The Negro Spirituals consistently hold to the view that every human being is a child of God and that all men are therefore brothers—brothers in their common joys, their sorrows, and, ultimately, in their death and resurrection. This is the great theme of the Negro Spirituals. That such a theme found its roots in the

> product of a people who confronted the deprivation of their very humanity is at once a witness to the power of religion in human life and a vindication of the human spirit.[11]

The only issue with this mission statement is the omission of women as part of the picture. Still in the 21st century, the arms of Negro Spirituals are long and strong enough to include brothers and sisters of all backgrounds, nationalities, colors, and faiths. Also, the Negro Spirituals have a heart of comfort that bring solace and strength to the oppressed and give love to those responsible for oppression.

To me, Simms hits right at the core of what Negro Spirituals are and what they are purposed to do. Hopefully this project will be a springboard to inspire churches to become a welcome table for all of God's children.

"Now that the project has ended, the work now begins."

[11] Simms, "The Negro Spiritual," 41.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE OF INVOCATIONS

April 2, 2017 *HOLY COMMUNION*

His name is so sweet
Most gracious and all wise God
We come before you calling on your name
For we know that there is no name on heaven and earth that is above yours
This morning Lord, we ask that you dwell among us
Let us feel your ever presence in the midst of this ever changing and challenging world
Move by your Spirit today, Oh Lord
Touch the man servant who come and deliver your word
Let the words fall no good ground and grow
Lord, we will forever call upon your name. AMEN

(Composed by Sophia Russell)

April 9, 2017 PALM SUNDAY

To the omnipotent, and omniscient God our Heavenly Father and Divine Mother, we give you all glory, honor, and praise. Although scathed and scarred, we are grateful that you have allowed us to endure the perils of another week and be able to come into your house of worship. As we reflect on Palm Sunday, we remember the heralded procession into Jerusalem. In a similar vein, your servant Moses heeded to your divine mandate to go back to Egypt and to tell Pharaoh to let your people go. On today, we ask that you and your spirit come down from heaven and reign down on us. We need your power and Christ's blood to set us ablaze and help renew our minds, bodies, and spirits as we process down into our communities, streets, and cities carrying the cross of Christ as we (through him) look to set the captives free. It's in your name, through your son, and with the Holy Spirit we pray, AMEN.

(Composed by C. Anthony Jones, Jr)

April 16, 2017 EASTER SUNDAY

Oh, most Gracious and Heavenly Father, we come to your feet at this moment in time extending all the glory, honor, and praise that you so rightfully deserve. Additionally, we give you thanks for waking up your servants for another day and helping us arrive safely to be in your house once more. We ask that you allow safe traveling mercies for those making their way here this morning as well as cover those who are unable to be with us today. As our service begins, we request that your presence be felt, and your spirit move within each and every person present. Not only that, but speak life unto your people through the preacher of the hour and the shepherd of this house for he has a word from you. Bless the voices of the choir as they help us sing sweet melodies unto you. Furthermore, God assist us while we step into the shoes of our ancestors and reminisce upon one of their songs that illustrated the pain and suffering brought to them by their oppressors. A Negro Spiritual that asked the question: *"Lord, How Come Me Here?"* A question that we even ask ourselves today! We wonder what is the reasoning behind our existence. I know as our ancestors were being forced to work in unbearable conditions, beaten until their skin began to peel off, and then they were torn apart from their families, they start to speak another verse from the song: *"I Wish I Never Was Born."* As a superior ethnic group began to progress and bask in the privilege of freedom, our ancestors shouted unto the *Lord: How Come Me Black, I Wish I Was Never Born."* Lord, I pray that we allow these words to roam our minds throughout the service and thank you that we don't have to question our existence no longer and we can appreciate the color of our skin that we are in. For you have a purpose for our lives and the lives of our people even when our past made the future look impossible. All this we ask in your name Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen.

(Composed by Paul Chambers)

APPENDIX B

COMMENTS FROM LAY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- Prior to the project, I had very limited knowledge on negro spirituals at all. I only knew of them from the perspective of what I may have been told were "slave songs" but didn't really understand how many other songs are considered negro spirituals. I think modern church does not know how to relate the struggle behind the songs to current day and therefore does not know how to draw the connections. But, the project helped to identify how to tie not only the songs to modern day but also to scripture.

- The overall impact this project is having on our pastor is significant. Introducing to some and reminding others by incorporating Negro Spirituals, has opened up dialogue among members about the struggles, hardships and victories of the slave experience. Young people are asking why we should sing "those" songs.

- This diversity of music offers our committee and the congregation variety and greater interest in hearing the preached word as it relates to the Negro Spiritual. This genre of song reminds us of a difficult life which some continue to endure, while finding comfort and solace in telling a story through song often ending in victory.

- It is too soon to fully recognize any profound effects on the service or our members. i.e., attendance, participation, appreciation. However, the interest seems to be there.

- My overall evaluation of the project is that the candidate has researched the topic extensively and has a strong passion. I am sure the candidate has been greatly impacted by his research. The congregation received the various Negro spiritual and were emotional moved.

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE SURVEY

Grace and peace be unto you!!! My name is C. Anthony Jones, Jr. and I am a Doctoral Student at Drew University Divinity School. My research examines the attitudes of young African-Americans ages 22-36 when they hear Negro Spirituals being sung in a worship service.

The Negro Spirituals compose a myriad of stories accompanied by a musical melody by unknown authors that articulate a 200-year history of Africans forced in a life of slavery in America. Melvin Costen, retired Helmar Emile Neilson Professor of Liturgy and Worship at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta says, "Properly understood, the Negro Spirituals are the ageless psalms of a people in exile who poured out their praise, prayers, thanksgiving, and lament to God, in the midst of harsh struggles."[1]

In closing, your feedback is crucial and much appreciated. The survey is not long and should not take any time at all to complete. Thank you.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PROJECT

How long have you attended United Cornerstone Missionary Baptist Church?

Are you a member of United Cornerstone Missionary Baptist Church? If yes, how long have been a member?

How often you attend worship at United Cornerstone?

A. Once A Month
B. Twice A Month
C. Three A Month
D. Four or More a Month

When attending, what do you enjoy the most about the worship service?

What church were you a member prior to joining United Cornerstone Missionary Baptist Church?

Has your faith denomination always been Baptist? If not, which denomination have you experienced?

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[1] Melva Costen, *African-American Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 98.

Can you recall where you first heard a Negro Spiritual?
Concert, Worship Service, Recording, Production

When you attend United Cornerstone, how often do you hear Negro Spirituals being sung in church?

When hearing Negro Spirituals, what images come to mind?

When hearing Negro Spirituals, what are you feeling?

DEMOGRAPHICS

What year were you born?

Where were you born?

What is your gender?

Identify your national origin

United States of America
Canada
Caribbean
South America
Continent of Africa – Which country?
Other

What topics do you find interesting?

Social Justice
Education
Health Care
Gender Equality
Religious Freedom
Women's Rights
Human Rights
OTHER:

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