DIS/LOCATING DIASPORA:

READING HEBREWS AND FIRST PETER WITH THE

AFRICAN AMERICAN GREAT MIGRATION

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Division of Religion

Drew University in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree,

Doctor of Philosophy

Jennifer T. Kaalund

Drew University

Madison, New Jersey

May 2015

ABSTRACT

Dis/locating Diaspora:
Reading Hebrews and 1 Peter with the
African American Great Migration

Ph.D. Dissertation by

Jennifer T. Kaalund

Graduate Division of Religion
Drew Theological School May 2015

This dissertation examines the constructed and contested Christian-Jewish identities in Hebrews and 1 Peter through the lens of the "New Negro," a diasporic identity similarly constructed and contested during the Great Migration in the early 20th century. Like the identity "Christian," the New Negro emerged in a context marked by instability, creativity, and the need for a sense of permanence in a hostile political environment. My investigation into these constructs highlights both their coherence and complex internal diversity, as well as the ways that the rhetoric of place, race, and gender were integral to this process of inventing a way of being in the world that was seemingly not reliant on one's physical space.

Methodologically, this project develops a diasporic and dialogical imagination based in diaspora theory and African American, postcolonial, and feminist hermeneutics. I assert that the texts of Hebrews and 1 Peter construct their audiences as dis/placed, that is, both in place and out of place. I argue that recognizing the spatial-ethnic reasoning of these texts does not fix identity so much as it invents a flexible but also bounded identity that can be responsive to its political, social, and ethical context while making a space in which to resist it. Thinking with New Negro

discourses also brings a broader view of Christian identity negotiation around the letters into focus and allows for thinking beyond the letters' authors to an imagined and diverse audience.

As a dialogical cultural study, this project contributes to Hebrews and 1 Peter scholarship by extending the social scientific studies of the construction of the audience's identity beyond the Gentile/Jew divide and asserting that a diasporic identity, both Christian and African American, is constantly shifting between resistance and acculturation. Moreover, for Africana biblical hermeneutics and African American biblical scholarship specifically, this project demonstrates how diasporic identity is a fertile and fruitful area of investigation. It provides a starting point, other than slavery, to explore the diversity and complexity of African American identity. This project identifies the ways in which such a construction makes resistant identity possible but often requires the subordination of difference and diversity within the community to produce a coherent, if always unstable, collective identity.

Contents

Acknowledgements

"It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end." Ernest Hemingway

This journey has been nothing short of amazing. Many able hands guided me along this path. I am deeply grateful to have had amazing teachers who have both fueled and fed my intellectual curiosity. Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre has served as a gracious guide. My respect and admiration for you and your gifting cannot be put into words. I will always be most appreciative for the ways you amplified my voice and reminded me of the importance of my contributions. Without your generous spirit, guidance, and commitment this would not have been possible. Stephen Moore and Althea Spencer-Miller have not only been invaluable readers, but over the past several years you both have also challenged, stimulated, and encouraged me by bringing to light new questions and areas of reflection for my work. Dr. Lillie Edwards, you were not only an engaging and thought-provoking conversation partner, but you also amiably gave your time and talent as a reader of my Great Migration chapter. It is significantly better because of you.

I am thankful to my family and friends for all their love, support, and encouragement. Rev. Miller, thank you for often "calling those things that were not as though they were." You were understanding and present throughout this process. To my friends who often reminded me to smell the roses and the coffee, to those who believed in me when it became difficult for me to believe in myself, I am most grateful. I am especially indebted to my sisters – Kimberly, Sonja, and Crystal. You are always there for me in your own unique ways. You each make my life fuller, richer, and better. To my parents, my first teachers, who are responsible for fostering my curiosity, allowing me to

ask questions, and nourishing my soul with unconditional love, I say thank you. Sekou, you have been a partner whose unwavering support manifested itself in great and small gestures. You are still the one whom my soul loves. Lastly, to my daily reminders of all things that are good and perfect – Caleb, Mikah, and Hannah. I love you all. You are the reasons I will always fight for a better tomorrow.

INTRODUCTION

DIASPORIC SPACE AND DIS/PLACED IDENTITIES[1]

Taken in all of its usages, 'diaspora' is like the god Janus: It looks both to the past and to the future. It allows dispersion to be thought of either as a state of incompleteness or a state of completeness. The issue of origin arises in both cases.

Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas*

Interpretation is always contextual, so it seems appropriate for me to begin with my context. As an African American woman I have a complicated relationship to place—I have attempted to find safe spaces, been "put in my place," and been told that this is no place for my kind—these are all the ways in which African American identity, my identity, has been constructed in relation to space and place.[2] In many ways, place

[1] Writing dis/place(ment) as such signifies the relationship between place and power. Who defines what is out of place? After all, isn't displacement simply placement?

[2] Henri Lefebvre asserts that "all societies which exemplify the general concept – produce a space, its own space" (Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Donald Nicholson-Smith, trans. [Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996], 333). Following Lefebvre, I suggest the space is produced and the production of space is concerned not only with mapping, but is imbricated with issues of power. Jonathan Z. Smith writes, "Human beings are not placed, they bring place into being…. Place is best understood as a locus of meaning" (Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* [Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987], 28). Paul Christopher Johnson similarly surmises, "Place is space plus meaning, that is, space that signifies and locates a person within a web of relations" (Paul Christopher Johnson, *Diaspora Conversion: Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa* [Berkley: University of California Press, 2007], 253). Philip Sheldrake writes, "Place is space which has historical meanings, where some things have happened which are now remembered and which provided continuity and identity across generations. Place is space in which important words have been spoken which have established identity, defined vocation and envisioned destiny. Place is space in which vows have been exchanged, promises have been made, and demands have been issued…whereas pursuit of space may be a flight from history, a yearning for place is a decision to enter history with an identifiable people in an identifiable pilgrimage" (Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity* [Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001], 7). I will employ these understandings of place and space throughout this dissertation.

establishes (ethnic, racial, gendered, religious) identity. Identity, a constructed and contested notion, is a way of being in the world that is, at times, rooted or "placed" in a geographical, or perhaps more accurately a geo-political, space. Identity, in this project, is defined generally as the ways a people conceive of themselves and their place in the world.[3] One of the ways in which a people make meaning is by how they understand their spatial orientation. In the introduction to *True to Our Native Land*, an African American New Testament commentary, the editors underscore the significance of space, specifically, sociocultural space. They write, "Space is not a value-free concept. Social space has implications. The space we inhabit, where we live, has an impact on how we think, even what we think…. Space always has societal and political values."[4] Exploring the relationship between identity and space elucidates how migration or changing place(s) disrupts the notion of unified, rooted, and therefore stable identities.

This dissertation examines the constructed and contested Christian-Jewish identities in Hebrews and 1 Peter through the lens of the "New Negro," a diasporic identity similarly constructed and contested during the Great Migration in the early 20th century. Like the ancient identity "Christian," the New Negro emerged in a context marked by instability, creativity, and the need for a sense of permanence in a hostile political environment. Upon examination, both identities show complex internal diversity and debate that challenge any simple articulation of an identity as purely resistant or

---

[3] This definition follows that offered by Judith Lieu in *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 12.

[4] Brian Blount, Cain Hope Felder, Clarice J. Martin, and Emerson B. Powery, "Introduction" in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 3-4.

accommodating to its hegemonic environment. My exploration of the construction of the New Negro highlights this multiplicity and contends that the rhetoric of place, race, and gender are integral to this process of inventing a way of being in the world that is seemingly not reliant on one's physical location. Put into dialogue with Hebrews and 1 Peter, texts rich in the language of space, belonging, and peoplehood; the result is analogous. That is, one can see the way these texts are forming an identity that I call the "new" (Christian) Jew. This nascent identity similarly engages the rhetoric of place and race and thus also promotes a sense of durability while remaining responsive to its environment.

The books of Hebrews and 1 Peter construct their audiences as dis/placed. Hebrews exhorts its audience to imitate its ancestors who were "strangers and foreigners on the earth" (11:13-16) and calls them to go "outside of the camp" and "look for the city that is to come" (13:13-16). 1 Peter names its addressees the "chosen exiles of the dispersion" (1:1-2) and describes them as "aliens and strangers" (1:11). These designations, as many scholars argue, echo Hebrew Bible narratives; yet it is also common for Hebrews to be examined and interpreted as Jewish-Christian while 1 Peter is approached as a Gentile-Christian text. Recently, however, scholars of early Christianity and Judaism have highlighted the ambiguity and creativity of the spaces between "Jews," "Gentiles," and "Christians." Building on this work, this project underscores the significance of these in-between spaces and examines the formation of Christian identity in these two texts in expressly spatial and ethno-racial terms. I argue that more attention be paid to locating their rhetorical constructions of group identity in the late first century Roman imperial context, given that both texts refer to Rome and the Jerusalem Temple,

seek to make a place for Christians as a people, and to interpret their current suffering. I will draw on an analysis of the production of African American identity across spatial distances in the time of the Great Migration (1910-1930) in order to elucidate the "ethnic reasoning" by which these texts create a diasporic and dis/placed Christian identity.[5]

In this chapter, I will first explore discourses of place and displacement in modern African American biblical interpretation. Next, I will consider theoretical approaches to diaspora and diasporic identity, particularly as it relates to religion and race/ethnicity. These understandings of diaspora serve as the framework for my analysis throughout this dissertation. I will then define dialogical imagination, the methodology I employ that allows the biblical text to interact with contemporary contexts and enables the engagement of these texts as sites of debate concerning identity. Finally, I will examine the New Negro trope and the emerging Christian identity as diasporic identities: fertile ground for studying the diversity and internal debates of racial/ethnic identity production. Putting texts from the Great Migration into conversation with the biblical texts elucidates strategies in both for making a coherent identity in the context of conflict and sheds light on the stakes, erasures, and differences that may otherwise go unnoticed.

Reading Dis/placed Identities

African American Biblical Interpretation and Dis/placement

The significance of place in African American biblical hermeneutics has primarily been through an emphasis on self-location; that is one's own social location. "Reading

[5] Denise Kimber Buell defines ethnic reasoning as: "uses of ethnoracial concepts to make universalizing claims constitute a kind of rhetorical practice that I call *ethnic reasoning*" 432-3. Denise Kimber Buell, "Race and Universalism in Early Christianity," in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10:4 (2002), 429-68.

from this place" is one of many ways to perform contextual hermeneutics.[6] While this project stands in this tradition of African American biblical interpretation, I do not simply read the biblical texts *from* my context as an African American woman. I read the biblical text *through* an African American experience of displacement.[7] Moreover, African American biblical hermeneutics' emphasis on African American space tends to construct origins as an essential identity marker of African American identity. This search for a time and place in which to "root" African American identity is most evident in the use of slavery as a starting point, or as the main entry point, into the biblical text. This point of departure most often leads to interpretations of the text that are concerned with oppression and liberation. Such a focus on origins occludes a multitude of additionally enlightening contexts from which to approach the biblical text.[8]

---

[6] Reading from one's place is a reference to the seminal work of Fernando Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds., *Reading from this Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*. vol 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995). Contributors to this volume explored the various roles social location plays in biblical interpretation challenging and disrupting notions of distant and objective readings of the biblical text.

[7] Randall C. Bailey, Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, Maipoane Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) and Rodney S. Sadler, "African and African Diasporan Hermeneutics," in *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel's Scriptures From Africa and the African Diaspora,* Hugh Page, ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 19. They conclude: "African and African Diasporan experiences affect how people read, hear, interpret, and engage the Hebrew Bible, cognizant of the impact of cultural context, gender, race, and class" (19). While I agree with this assertion and the attempt to center Africana experiences and to place African American experience in this context, the volume is limited to the Hebrew Bible. This project expands this work into the New Testament.

[8] More recently African American biblical hermeneutics has problematized readings of biblical texts that point solely to the liberation of its reader and resistance to hegemony. For example, Shanell T. Smith's postcolonial womanist reading employs Homi Bhabha's ambivalence and W.E.B. DuBois' veil in order to explicate the ways in which black women both participate in and seek to resist empire. See: *The Woman Babylon and the*

Vincent Wimbush's theoretical method of reading darkness or darkly provides an alternative way to center African American experiences for biblical interpretation. He defines this approach as "a particular orientation, a sensibility, a way of being in and seeing the world. It is viewing and experiencing the world in emergency mode, as through the individual and collective experience of trauma."[9] Wimbush goes on to suggest the effects of employing this method. He writes: "A reading of darkness as psychosocial reorientation, as self-possession and critical point of departure, as a higher critical gaze, can reorient and redefine the agenda of interpretation…The African American experience with the Bible suggests that the Bible is viewed as a reflection or reading of this darkness, this 'black (w)hole.'"[10] This kind of engagement with the text, Wimbush purports, creates an "openness to beginning the study of the Bible (as it were) in a different key—*in a different time*, which means from a different site of interpretation and enunciation, with the necessarily correlative *different presuppositions, orientations and agenda*."[11] While reading darkly centers African American experiences, it is not attentive to ways in which place informs African American identity.

---

*Marks of Empire: Reading Revelation with a Postcolonial Womanist Hermeneutics of Ambi*veil*ence* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

[9] Vincent Wimbush, "Introduction," in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, Vincent Wimbush, ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 21. Wimbush makes it clear that reading darkness/darkly is not limited to African American interpreters. He writes: "Anyone can read darkness. Darkness is here to be equated neither with a simple negative nor with any one people or class…Such viewing and experience is not the unique experience of any one people in any one place or period in history."

[10] Ibid., 21.

[11] Wimbush, 9.

The Great Migration, and more specifically, the trope of the New Negro identity, offers a different point of engagement for African American biblical hermeneutics. It engages both race and place and more specifically dis/placement. Dis/placement is an indication of one's place; in particular it distinguishes one as away or apart from a particular place. Diaspora and disaporic space are examples of dis/placement. Considered in tandem with terms such as exodus and exile, diaspora and displacement and related terms that participate in this semantic field, not only denote spatiality, they rely on a sense of distance or alterity. As such, a study of dis/placed or diasporic identity is in fact an investigation into the construction of alterity or an alternate way of being. This project seeks to contribute to African American hermeneutics by bringing together reading darkly and reading spatially, identifying fertile and diverse ways to approach biblical interpretation in an African American key.

Methodologically, this project develops a diasporic and dialogical imagination based in diaspora theory and African American, postcolonial, and feminist hermeneutics. This theoretical framing enables me to put African American discourse and experience during the Great Migration into conversation with other discourses of dis/placement. I assert that the texts of Hebrews and 1 Peter construct their audiences as dis/placed. While this results in efforts to define the authors and audiences as Jew or Gentile, or assimilated or resistant, I argue that recognizing the spatial-ethnic reasoning of these texts does not fix identity so much as it invents a flexible but also bounded identity that can be responsive to its political and social context while also making a space in which to resist it. This project seeks to demonstrate that the constant identity negotiation that occurs in

diaspora should be considered in light of both its dominant context and the context of internal communal differences. Thinking with the ways that the Great Migration and New Negro discourses reflected and responded to external pressures *as well as* how they were characterized by internal difference and contestation can bring a broader view of Christian identity negotiation around the letters. It also allows for thinking beyond the authors, bringing an imagined and diverse audience more clearly into view.

Biblical Interpretation and Christian Identity

To understand the formation of Christian identity, biblical interpreters have often turned to earlier texts, such as the Pauline epistles or the Gospels. Like African American biblical hermeneutics, this focus on what comes first frames origins as essential to Christian identity and thusly runs into the trouble of attempting to distinguish a thing called "Christian" when it is fully imbricated within "Jewishness." Even Hebrews and 1 Peter, which are later texts, create dis/placed identity in the space between Jew and Gentile. As such, the identities in Hebrews and 1 Peter should not be considered "Christian" wholly apart from either.

In the last decade, scholars of early Christianity have explored the various ways in which Christian identity is constructed in relation to religion, race/ethnicity, and empire. Challenging the "parting of the ways" model, some scholars propose that the boundaries between Judaism and Christianity are not clear until at least the rise of the Christian empire.[12] For example, Daniel Boyarin argues that the borders that divided Christianity

[12] See, for example,: Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds. *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*.

and Judaism in the first few centuries of the Common Era are "as constructed and imposed, as artificial and political as any of the borders on earth" and continues by stating: "Religious ideas, practices and innovations permeated that border crossing in both directions."[13] Denise Buell's study concerning ethnic reasoning attends to the discursive ways by which Christians conceive of their identity employing a vocabulary of peoplehood that allows for the fixed, but also fluid nature of early Christian borders.[14] Underscoring the flexibility of early Christian identity is particularly important given its imperial context. In fact, Benjamin Dunning points to the multifaceted nature of early Christian identity in relation to Roman citizenship by exploring the motif of sojourners and aliens in canonical and non-canonical texts.[15] His examination of the book of Hebrews in particular purports that the audience is exhorted to embrace alterity while concomitantly promoting Roman social values, which can potentially be understood as an act of resistance. Dunning writes: "In laying claim to a valorized space of marginality, this strategy of differentiation does enact a resistance of sorts, seeking to choose the terms on which others recognize the place of Christians within the field of ancient

---

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007. pp. 1-129; Judith M. Lieu. *Neither Jew Nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2002); and James D.G. Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways* (London: SCM, 2006).

[13] Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 1.

[14] Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

[15] Benjamin Dunning, *Aliens and Sojourners: Self As Other in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 63.

identities."[16] Therefore, Christians used this alien motif (a spatially inflected identity) diversely in order to adapt to changing circumstances. That is, Christians negotiated what it meant to be Christians and at times resisted the imperial power in doing so. I will build on this work, emphasizing the ways in which the spatial and the ethnoracial figure prominently in these identity negotiations in the texts of Hebrews and 1 Peter.

Attending to the imperial context amplifies the dangers of the in-between and marginal spaces that the implied audiences of Hebrews and 1 Peter occupy. The pervasive power and violence in an imperial context functions as a motivating factor for complex identity negotiations. This project contributes to Hebrews and 1 Peter scholarship by extending the social scientific studies of the construction of the audience's identity beyond the Gentile/Jew divide and asserting that as a diasporic identity, "Christian" is constantly shifting between resistance and acculturation. In fact, this "Christian" identity, I purport, can best be understood as a "New (Christian) Jew," borrowing from the language of the Great Migration's diasporic identity, the New Negro. This project identifies the ways in which such a construction makes resistant identity possible but often requires the subordination of difference and diversity within the community to produce a coherent, if always unstable, collective identity.

Thinking with Diasporic Identity

Theories of Diaspora

Diaspora provides the theoretical framework for this dissertation. Perhaps in its simplest form, *diaspora* is a term used to describe people who live away from their

---

[16] Ibid.

homeland.[17] However, there is nothing simple about this highly contested term. Joseph Modrzejewski purports, "it would seem that any people, deprived of the land it deemed its own, a people strewn over the face of the earth, corresponds to the dictionary definition of a diaspora—with priority for the Jews."[18] Yet, this definition presents its own problems, one of which is privileging one experience over another and thus defining all diasporas in relation to this experience. Paul Christopher Johnson suggests, "At the very least, analytical attempts to define diasporas refer to three issues: a group's dislocation, the incomplete assimilation of that group in a host society such that it retains a sense of its own separateness, and the ongoing relations of the group with a place and people left behind."[19] While acknowledging these aspects, postmodern theories concerning diaspora "question the rigidities of identity itself—religious, ethnic, gendered, national; yet this diasporic movement marks not a postmodern turn from history, but a nomadic turn in which the very parameters of specific historical moments are embodied

---

[17] Diaspora is a compound Greek word consisting of *speiro* (σπειρω) which means to sow or to scatter and *dia*-, means from one end to the other.

[18] Joseph Meleze Modrzejewski, "How to be a Jew in Hellenistic Egypt?" in *Diasporas in Antiquity,* Shaye J.D. Cohen and Ernest S. Frerichs, eds. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 66.

[19] Paul Christopher Johnson, *Diaspora Conversion: Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2007),10. Moreover, Johnson enumerates a consensus of several traits that constitute diasporas. They include: "The dispersion of a present group or of past ancestors from an original center to two or more new sites; some retained collective memory about the homeland; the maintenance of relations with the departed homeland, at least as an imagined community, which defines in significant ways the contemporary experience of the hostland; institutional infrastructures that make and sustain diasporic sentiments; the group remains at least partly separate, distinct, or alienated from the mainstream society in the host country; and finally, the nostalgic idealization of the homeland and ancestral time, which may or may not be linked with the desire for actual permanent return" (33).

and —as diaspora itself suggests—are scattered and regrouped into new points of becoming."[20] As such, diaspora encompasses not only a coming and a going, but also all of the spaces in between. In this sense, diaspora articulates and creates difference and concomitantly creates place.

Diaspora is a term with its own history; it is also a historical social experience. However, its analytical value as a term gained traction in the 1980s cultural studies movement. Postcolonial, subalterns, and/or subcultures studies developed "a vision of 'diaspora' that was radically different from both the open and categorical definitions. Where those definitions stress reference to a point of departure and maintenance of an identity in spite of dispersion, postmodern thought instead gives pride of place to paradoxical identity, the noncenter, and hybridity."[21] This study will be attentive to such paradoxes, emphasizing, for example, how the New Negro is both Northern and Southern and highlighting the hybridity of the "New (Christian) Jew." This postmodern understanding of diaspora theorizes what was previously studied as a historical experience solely.

Stéphane Dufoix's monograph *Diasporas* highlights the diverse theoretical approaches to diaspora studies. He points to three theorists writing in English who have a

---

[20] Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, "Nation, Migration, Globalization: Points of Contention in Diaspora Studies," in *Theorizing Diaspora* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 3.

[21] Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas*, William Rodarmor, trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 23-4.

significant influence on a postmodern understanding of diaspora: Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and James Clifford.[22] Hall writes:

> I use this term metaphorically, not literally: diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other people into the sea. This is the old, imperalising, hegemonizing, form of "ethnicity."…The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of "identity" which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*.[23]

For these postmodern thinkers, the archetype of diaspora shifts from the Jewish model to the "black diaspora."[24] Paul Gilroy's insistence on the plurality of diaspora underscores the postmodern vision that challenges notions of purity and essence. Gilroy contends "the 'diasporic idea' allows one to go beyond the simplistic view of certain oppositions (continuity/rupture, center/periphery) to grasp the complex, that is, the joint presence of the same and the other, the local and the global." [25] Further challenging the concept of static nations/national identities and the nostalgic longing associated with diaspora, James Clifford identifies what he calls people living in a state of "border" versus diaspora. Clifford notes the "difficulty of maintaining exclusivist paradigms in our attempts to account for transnational identity formation." He elaborates, "decentered, lateral connections may be as important as those formed around a teleology of origin/return. And a shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance may

---

[22] Ibid., 24.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 24-5.

be as important as the projection of a specific origin."[26] In this study, I suggest the omnipresence of empire facilitates the negotiation of diasporic identities.

In order to distinguish diaspora as a theoretical concept from the historical experiences of diaspora, Avtar Brah recommends the analytical concept of diaspora space.[27] Brah defines it as follows: "Diaspora space is the point at which borders of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of 'us' and 'them,' are contested…[T]he concept of diaspora space (as opposed to that of diaspora) included the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put.'"[28] This entanglement, however, results in slippage between the historical and the theoretical in discourses of displacement. The interconnectedness of the historical and theoretical enables an acknowledgement of the material implications of migration. Brah's feminist postcolonial analysis of diasporic identity offers an alternative way of reading diasporic space and the formation of diasporic identities that stress how "power relations are embedded within discourses, institutions, and practices."[29] In fact, a "multi-axial performative conception of power" is necessary for any study of diasporas.[30] Furthermore, postcolonial theory provides analytical tools for exploring issues of identity, power, ambivalence, and place. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin suggest,

---

[26] James Clifford, "Diasporas," in *Cultural Anthropology* 9:3 (1994): 304, 306.

[27] Avtar Brah, "Diaspora, Border, and Transnational Identities," in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 614.

[28] Ibid., 632.

[29] Ibid., 616.

[30] Ibid.

"The concepts of place and displacement demonstrate the very complex interaction of language, history, and environment in the experience of colonized peoples and the importance of space and location in the process of identity formation."[31] Such a multidimensional analysis of power reveals the myriad of factors that influence the making of diasporas and the impact that these factors have on identity; some of the factors at play include race/ethnicity, economics, and religion.

Religion and Diaspora

Religion is often utilized to give meaning to the creation of diasporas. Dufoix makes the connection when he writes, "In creating a geography without physical territory, dispersion is never so unified as when the local is able to give meaning to the global, and vice versa. Two elements of collective life are fundamental in this process: religion and economics."[32] Both are important considerations for the study of diaspora. I will, however, focus on religion. In fact, Paul Christopher Johnson contends: "diasporas *make* religions."[33] Johnson defines diasporic religion thusly:

> Diasporic religion is composed on the one hand of memories about space – about places of origins, about the distances traveled from them, and physical or

---

[31] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 161.

[32] Dufoix, 75.

[33] Johnson, 27. The example he offers is Judaism. "Martin Baumann points out diaspora was an ambivalent term for Jews…The Jewish dispersion therefore was not merely a loss but also a great source of vitality"(42). He also points to Jonathan Z. Smith who articulates how "the destruction of the Temple brought forth of necessity a more portable, transmissible style of Judaism, one based not on the temple ritual but rather on religious law and its interpretation, the Mishnah" (42).

> ritual returns imagined, already undertaken, or aspired to. And on the other hand it is about how those memories arise in space, out of a given repertoire of the available and the thinkable. Memories are summoned from a position, a place of emigration, a destination. Diasporic religious agents recollect the past through particular territorial and temporal "ways of seeing" and from particular places.[34]

One of the "ways of seeing" is to explore a change in perspective concerning migration; that is, migration can be explored not from a place of loss, but from a place of abundance. Johnson elaborates, "Emigrants' religious practice is not merely stunted by being dislocated from its homeland or indigenous sites of performance, but also transformed and invigorated. Emigrants critically reevaluate, and revalue, the question of origins."[35] Moreover, Johnson observes, "diasporic religions may appear everywhere oppressed and always in a state of malaise…Still, the view recapitulates the old fetishism of purity and bounded cultural units in the study of religion. New insights can be gained by viewing diasporic religions as products of superabundance rather than deficiency."[36] Johnson concludes that diasporic religions are "memory performances"[37] furthering underscoring the significance of space and memory in diasporic discourse. Johnson explains:

> Space and memory are the twin anchors of any discussion of diasporas, as diasporic sentiments of affinity for a distant place require spatial memories and their intentional evocation – the recognition of a present absence of a place that must be recalled, if not in physical then in symbolic forms…The idea of performing memory by giving it material form in space mean that diasporic memory performances are themselves 'positional', in at least three senses:

---

[34] Ibid., 2.

[35] Ibid., 6.

[36] Ibid., 11.

[37] Ibid.

> memories are carried by emigrants through space, they are reinscribed in space (at least if they are to be maintained over time), and they are about space.[38]

Once again, the significance of space is underscored. Here, it is expressed in its relation to memory.

Johnson suggests yet another way in which diasporic religion is a "re-membered" religion. He writes: "Disaporic religions are assembled memories of the self in space that can be transmitted sufficiently well to attract a following, become a collective memory, and be sustained over time…Even as memory carries its own landmarks everywhere, it must be constantly reattached to the current space the group occupies, to objects that revivify remembrances."[39] These memories are often inventions of their authors. For example, Hebrews' roll call of the faithful in Hebrews 11 is the author's account of the past, the memories he deems significant. The notion of collective memory and its transmission through space and time are important considerations for this study of nascent identities. The ways in which re/membering creates identity are explored in the context of the both the New Negro and New (Christian) Jew identities.

In his book, *Crossing and Dwelling*, Thomas Tweed similarly proposes a theory of religion particularly attentive to spatiality. He defines religion as follows: "confluences of organic-culture flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human

---

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., 46. Here Johnson engages Maurice Halbwachs' classic text *On Collective Memory* and its presentation of collective memory. Maurice Halbwachs proposed the idea of memory as a social construct. He suggests, "What makes recent memories hang together is not that they are contiguous in time: it is rather that they are a part of a totality of thoughts common to a group, the group of people with whom we have a relation at this moment" (52). *On Collective Memory*, Lewis A. Cosner, ed, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

and suprahuman forces to *make homes and cross boundaries*."[40] Tweed's theory of crossing and dwelling will prove instructive for studying a diasporic religion. These organic-culture flows are, as he explains them, "historical as well as geographical. They change over time and move across space."[41] The overlapping processes of "mapping, building, and inhabiting"[42] enable individuals and groups to orient themselves "in space and time, transform the natural environment, and allow devotees to inhabit the worlds they construct."[43] Tweed suggests four types of spaces to describe the ways in which "spatial and temporal orientations intertwine… the body, the home, the homeland, and the cosmos."[44] These *chronotopes* are variously represented in diasporic religions.

Tweed's theory makes clear the tenuous relationship between place and identity by underscoring the way in which the body/bodies signifies identity. Bodies are not solely about individual identity; they also, as Tweed observes, "signal collective identity…and bodies situate individuals in national space by affirming – or rejecting – the homeland."[45] Bodies travel; dis/placing bodies in nebulous or otherworldly elsewheres, as religion often does, not only interrupts the notion of home, it also creates strangers. This understanding of the body will be employed in chapter 3 as the author of Hebrews

---

[40] Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 54. Emphasis mine.

[41] Ibid., 64.

[42] Ibid., 82.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., 101.

utilizes the body in order to affirm the audience's identity. It was this movement, inflected with religious meaning, that enables the negotiation of identity.

Ethnicity/Race and Diaspora

Race/ethnicity also play a significant role in constructing fixed, translocal, and transtemporal identities. In the first century Mediterranean world there were multiple social constructions vying for position in an expanding imperial context. In her book, *Roman Imperial Identities in the Early Christian Era*, Judith Perkins describes the context in which early Christian identity is negotiated. Perkins writes: "As heterogeneous groups negotiated their places and interests in the imperial realignments of power and access, they accommodated their actions and claims to the larger arena of empire. In this context, both the trans-empire elite and the Christian cultural identities emerging in the same period and in overlapping geography could be expected to share related modalities."[46] These shared modalities necessitated differentiation. One way to assert difference was to employ the language of race and ethnicity. Perkins states, "From early on, Christians utilized the language of race and ethnicity to define and differentiate themselves from other groupings in their social world with whom they intersected and overlapped – Jews, Greeks, and Romans." It is in this context that the authors of Hebrews and 1 Peter negotiate identity. They, too, use the language of race and ethnicity in order to form identity.

---

[46] Judith Perkins, *Roman Imperial Identities in the Early Christian Era* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 28.

Constellations of Identities: Romanness, Greekness, Jewishness

In antiquity, Roman citizenship was one of many options for self-definition. In particular, Roman citizenship was explicitly an imperial identity, an ideal identity, *civis romanus sum.*[47] This identity was representative of how delicate and complex identity was in the Roman imperial context and highlights the inherent stakes of what it means to be "other." Judith Perkins explains the disguise in which Romanness appeared. She writes: "From earliest times, Rome showed a willingness to incorporate deserving outsiders into its polity. By defining *Romanitas* as an expression of *humanitas*, Rome provided a cultural identity that was open to any who could meet this standard."[48] These requirements significantly limited participation.[49] As such, what *appears* to be an

[47] I am a Roman citizen. This subtitle comes from the essay by Janet Huskinson, "Elite Culture and the Identity of Empire" in *Experiencing Rome: Culture Identity and Power in the Roman Empire,* (New York: Routledge, 2000). What it means to be "Roman" is a discussion that extends far beyond the boundaries of this paper. Richard Hingley, in his book, *Globalizing Roman Culture: Unity, Diversity and Empire* observes: "Despite such attempts to decentre the idea of Roman identity the term 'Roman' for the constellation that formed the empire is justified by the fact these highly variable individual cultures were incorporated into an entity that called itself by this term." (Richard Hingley, *Globalizing Roman Culture: Unity, Diversity and Empire* [Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2005], 56). I will use Roman/Romanness in this sense.

[48] Perkins, 27. Quoting Aulus Gellius, Perkins defines *humanitas*, as what the "Greeks call paidia, and we call education and instruction in the liberal arts. This very form of the word *humanitas* demonstrates that people who pursue such learning are the most highly humanized of all human persons (*maxime humanissimi*)"

[49] Perkins describes "Cultural identities defined by common geographical borders or blood were ceding ground to those based on shared education, cultural practices, and perspectives. The emphasis on education and *paideia* and *humanitas*, that inscribed the cultural identities of both elite Romans and Greeks, contributed to the formation of a trans-empire alliance, a cosmopolitan elite identity that incorporated the leading people across the empire." Perkins, 27.

identity option open to all was, in fact, a privileged status; privileges associated with Roman citizenship included: "the vote, eligibility for (not necessarily actual receipt of) the corn dole. Under Roman law, a citizen could only be ejected from the city as part of the punishment for being guilty of a crime; exclusion from Rome or Italy was a recognized legal penalty."[50]For the elite, in antiquity, as well as in the more contemporary context, there was a fear of the loss of status, in particular, citizenship and all of its associated benefits. This is not unlike the New Negro identity that is strongly influenced by its elite males, and yet, it is also contested.

Citizenship was a privilege that could be taken away. Political exile was the antithesis of citizenship, but there were other ways of belonging or not belonging. As Janet Huskinson observes in her essay, "Elite culture and the identity of Empire": "The free non-citizens, or *peregrini*, of the empire were in legal terms disadvantaged compared with Roman citizen."[51] The *peregrini* represented an in-between status; they were not citizens and they were not slaves. Though free, they did not enjoy the privileges of citizenship. In fact, the *peregrini* would have faced difficulty in obtaining Roman citizenship.[52] It is likely that the majority of immigrants or descendants of immigrants in

---

[50] David Noy, *Foreigners at Rome: Citizens and Strangers* (London: Duckworth, 2000), 22.

[51] Janet Huskinson, "Elite culture and the identity of Empire" in *Experiencing Rome: Culture Identity and Power in the Roman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 130. Some of the privileges that Huskinson goes on to discuss include: the ability to hold administrative positions, serve in legions, and private law concessions.

[52] Noy further explicates: "It also appears to have been much harder for a *peregrinus* than for a slave to obtain citizenship; the chances of a *peregrinus* making some contribution to society which was felt to deserve citizenship, or of bribing an appropriate official (which

Rome would likely have been *peregrini*.[53] The audiences of Hebrews and 1 Peter may have occupied this third space, as they are identified as strangers and exiles. Richard Hingley describes the complexity of Roman identity thusly:

> Roman identity, was, therefore, not a matter of a person's ethnicity, nation, linguistic group or descent, but a status that had been inherited, achieved or awarded. It became fashionable to suggest that "Roman" elite identity was created within the context of empire as a part of an imperial ideology that provides only a partial and distorted view of the complexity of societies and social relations. In other words, the idea of an integrated Roman identity is, in itself, a colonizing image that masks deeper and more complex realities.[54]

Once such reality is that not all citizens were equal. There were a number of factors to consider: "Wealth, connections, gender, knowledge, and the past history of a family influenced the position of an individual within the power structure."[55] To be sure, the benefits of Roman citizenship would have been known and desired and would have served as one of the motivating factors for immigrants to move to Rome.[56] Roman

---

was apparently the usual route) were much less than the changes of a slave being manumitted" (24).

[53] Noy points to the *Constitutio Antoniniana* of AD 212 as having given to citizenship to "nearly all *peregrini,* and after that only people from outside the Empire would have come into that category." In this way, *peregrini* represents the outsiders who are inside until this point in the third century.

[54] Richard Hingley, *Globalizing Roman Culture: Unity, Diversity and Empire* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge 2005), 56.

[55] Ibid.

[56] See David Noy, 26.

citizenship was merely one way to explain one's relationship to the imperial structure. It indicates one's "proper" name among the many options for self-understanding.[57]

Exile is another way of describing one's relationship, or lack thereof, to the imperial power. It is an explicit severing of this relationship. Joe-Marie Claassen's study of ancient literature that addresses exile exposes the connection between exile and power. He begins by acknowledging that "exile in the ancient world was, as today, a major political tool and as such it was often employed by the powerful to reduce the power of their most feared opponents."[58] Therefore, a discourse of exile is rooted in social and political struggle. Claassen further defines exile, particularly during the time of the late Republic and early Empire in terms of citizenship, "in Roman law as *ciuitatis amissio* (loss of citizenship)."[59] The literature of exile is a political discourse that suggests one of the ways in which a discourse of displacement can be understood is as a power discourse. The use of the terminology of exile in the letter of 1 Peter may be best understood in this

---

[57] Here, I invoke Roland Barthes and his discourse on proper names in his work S/Z: An Essay. Barthes writes, "The proper name enables the person to exist outside the semes, whose sum nonetheless constitutes its entirety. As soon as a Name exists (even a pronoun) to flow toward and fasten onto, the semes becomes predicates, inductors of truth, and the Name becomes a subject. We say that what is proper to narrative is not action, but the character as Proper Name. (Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, translated by Richard Miller [New York: Hill and Wang, 1974], 191.) The "proper" name ascribes difference; yet it is the difference of all these parts (the "Jews", the "Greeks", the "Egyptians" and the "Romans") that make the whole that is the Roman Empire. At the same time, all individual "Jews" make up the whole, different individually and at the same time having attributes that are the same enabling participation in this group. It is this concurrent feature of naming to which I wish to call to attention.

[58] Joe-Marie Claassen, *Displaced Person: The Literature of Exile from Cicero to Boethius* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 9.

[59] Ibid.

context. In addition to exile, the letter, like Hebrews, is replete with the theme of suffering.

By highlighting the political aspect of exile, Claassen also underscores the rhetoric of fear and violence that accompanies the discourse. He observes: "Central to the horror of exile is the horror of isolation, often portrayed as loss of speech."[60] I suggest this portrayal of the loss of speech is directly related to one's proximity to the center of power. Exile results in the inability to be heard, even if one is speaking, because he/she is so far away from the center.[61] In the contemporary example of the Great Migration in the United States, disenfranchisement is expressed as a loss of voice.[62] Then, as now, a loss of speech/voice/vote indicates a lack of power. As such, it is not only important to consider who can speak and who is spoken for. In other words, just as the discourse of displacement is shaped in the context of hegemony, it is at the same time written by those who exist on the margins of society. However, homilies and letters, like Hebrews and 1 Peter, can render the audience silent. It is my intention, through the lens of the Great Migration and the use of dialogical imagination, to give the audience a voice. Such a

---

[60] Ibid., 252.

[61] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak makes this point in her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988: 271-313.

[62] Voting and voice are strongly correlated in American politics and is characteristic of a democracy. In her article, "'Virago' from Lift Every Voice," Lani Guinier writes: It was not enough to vote, although universal suffrage was a precondition…But in addition to the vote they also needed a voice. A vote and a voice that mattered." Lani Guinier, "'Virago' from Lift Every Voice," *Voices of Historical and Contemporary Black American Pioneers* vol. 2 (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012), 152.

voice can challenge or acquiesce to those who seek to shape their identity; it can also communicate diversity to those outside of a seemingly unified communal identity.

The power to communicate is also the power to articulate social identity. In her article, "Translation, Migration and Communication in the Roman Empire," Claudia Moatti identifies the relationship between communication and migration. She does so by investigating the rise in the written and visual forms of communication concomitant to the rise of the Roman Empire and views communication as a way of asserting the power of the emperor. The increase in the number of decrees, pogroms, and monumentalization represent efforts to demonstrate the empire's power. Moatti observes: "The development of writing was linked to the centralization of the empire and the capitalization of Rome…In the beginning of the third century Herodian wrote that where the emperor was, here was Rome."[63] That is, the emperor (and his images) embodied Rome. Transporting or dis/placing "Rome" throughout the empire not only demonstrates the attempt to present its power as ubiquitous, it simultaneously undermines such a (re)presentation because the reality is neither Rome nor the emperor could be everywhere. An omnipresent emperor was both a reminder of his power and status over the conquered nations and also served to re/locate or dis/place local elite power. Paradoxically, it is the local elite who propagated monumentalization as an attempt to assert their power and affirm their "place" in the imperial structure.[64] Monumentalization in antiquity is not

---

[63] Claudi Moatti, "Translation, Migration, and Communication in the Roman Empire: Three Aspects of Movement in History," *Classical Antiquity* vol. 52, no. 1 (April 2006), 133.

[64] Beard, North and Price similarly observe: "Members of the elite in Rome and the provinces were keen to make a display of *religio*." They go on to say *religio* "regularly

unrelated to the proliferation of publications (as well as the recording and distribution of sermons) in the early twentieth century in the United States. In both cases, communication facilitates migration and serves as a vehicle for asserting a social identity. Moreover, for local elites this identity is particularly precarious as their status and power depend upon it.

Migration during the Roman period facilitated the expansion of the empire, while simultaneously diluting its power. In order to have a discourse of displacement, there must be movement. The ability for people to move about the empire had the undesired effect of the imperial powers not being able to completely control its people. Moatti elaborates as follows:

> In fact, mobility transformed the relation between man and space. It explains in part the emergence in law, at the end of the republic, of these new categories (*origo, domicilium, incolatus, qui commorantur)*, which did not aim to fix people to a place, as has often been said, but to localize better the people who in that period moved very much, to control them better, and to define more precisely their identity.[65]

While movement across the empire is apparent, Philip Harland cautions: "We must be careful not to overemphasize the amount of displacement and the degree to which there was an accompanying sense of rootlessness among those who migrated during the Hellenistic and Roman periods…Nevertheless, it is true that people could migrate and settle with some level of permanency in a new area for a variety of reasons, some

---

refers to the traditional honours paid to the gods." "*Religio* was regularly an aspect of a Roman's self description." Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religion in Rome: Vol. 1 A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 217.

[65] Moatti, 123.

voluntary and others involuntary."[66] What is important to note here is that in antiquity people could and did move, and in some cases, they were forced to move. These migrations had various effects on identity. One effect is a change in one's status in relation to the empire; one could become an outsider, a stranger in one's own land. I will analyze an example of this kind of imperial displacement in Philo's *In Flaccum* in chapter 3.

Diasporic Identity as Fixed and Fluid, Coherent and Contested

In her book, *Why This New Race?,* Denise Buell defines ethnic reasoning as "the modes of persuasion that…legitimize various forms of Christianness as the universal, most authentic manifestation of humanity, and it offered Christians both a way to define themselves relative to 'outsiders' and to compete with other 'insiders' to assert the superiority of their varying visions of Christianness."[67] Ethnic reasoning is a strategic positioning of Christian self-definition. Using the tools available to them in their cultural milieu, early Christians employ language that illustrates that they conceived of themselves as an ethnic/racial group. As she suggests, the environment in which this identity is being negotiated is an "imperial landscape."[68] Buell explains, "As formulations of those not in power, pre-Constantinian Christian texts that employ ethnic reasoning can

---

[66] Philip A. Harland, "Pausing at the Intersection of Religion and Travel," in *Travel and Religion in Antiquity* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2011), 5. Harland continues: "These reasons included war (in relation to both prisoners of war who were enslaved and fighting soldiers), government policies of settlement, pursuit of an occupation, and other factors that remain less clear."

[67] Buell, 3.

[68] Ibid.

be read as attempts to consolidate and mobilize geographically, theologically, and organizationally disparate groups under one banner—figured as a people, 'the Christians.'"[69] In order to figure themselves not only as Christians, but moreover, as a people, they utilized an ethnoracial discourse.[70] I suggest that disaporic discourses can, too, be characterized as a type of ethnoracial discourse. Therefore, exploring the rhetorical maneuvers of diasporic discourses may further reveal some of the reasons, meanings, and implications for engaging in such ethnic reasoning.

Buell outlines four strategic uses of ethnic reasoning. First, she expresses that ethnic reasoning is "produced and indicated by religious practices."[71] Secondly, building on the work on anthropologist, Ann Stoler, Buell emphasizes the contradictory (perhaps complimentary) nature of race/ethnicity being both fixed and fluid.[72] She continues:

> Third, this juxtaposition of fluidity and fixity enabled early Christians to use ethnic reasoning to make universalizing claims, arguing that everyone can, and thus ought to become a Christian. By conceptualizing race as both mutable and 'real,' early Christians could define Christianness both as a distinct category in contrast to other peoples (including Jews, Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, etc.) and

---

[69] Ibid., 4.

[70] Buell further explains: "Ethnicity/race could be defined in a broad range of ways in antiquity... Ethnoracial discourses are dynamic. I have established the presence of religion in a number of instances of ethnoracial definitions and discussions, showing that religion is discursively relevant to ethnicity in many ancient texts, Christian and non-Christian."(49)

[71] Buell, 2-3.

[72] Buell expresses how "Early Christians capitalized on this dynamic character of ethnicity/race as being both fixed and fluid in a range of ways. The common description of conversion as rebirth illustrates one central way in which Christians depicted Christianness simultaneously in terms of 'essence' and transformation"(3). The idea of rebirth, for example, is expressed numerous times in 1 Peter.

> also is inclusive, since it is a category formed out of individuals from a range of different races. [73]

Lastly, Buell indicates that ethnic reasoning is used "polemically," illustrating how early Christians vied for the "true" definition of "Christianness."[74] These uses of ethnic reasoning by early Christians demonstrate the need for Christians to develop a "rhetorically shaped 'usable social identity,'"[75] one that could adapt to their environment.

There are ways in which discourses of displacement generally, and diasporic discourses specifically, are informed by ethnic reasoning. For example, both reveal a hegemonic tendency to render power invisible and therefore, benign. Engaging in a power analysis of diasporas, past and present, enables us to expose the unethical underpinnings of hegemonic systems that often force migrations. To explore diaspora solely as a desire for a homeland would eclipse these realities. Furthermore, Buell observes: "Our interpretative models should seek not an original essence of Christianity, but rather highlight the processes and strategies of negotiation and persuasion that permeate the very creation of Christianness."[76] Like ethnic reasoning, discourses of displacement are concerned with origins. However, by focusing on the in-between discursive spaces, I attempt to demonstrate that the identities in the texts are constructed and continuously negotiated. Buell finds that, "By means of historical narratives and

---

[73] Buell, 3.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Benjamin Dunning, *Aliens and Sojourners*, 63.

[76] Buell, 29. Buell goes on to argue such models should not "rely on either a genealogical or teleological framework."

cosmological narratives, early Christians sought to offer compelling stories of who they are (their 'essence') by speaking about their collective origin and the transmission of truth."[77] Similarly, it is the appeal to a common past that connects those who live in diaspora with a (mythic or real) home or past. The affinities between ethnic reasoning and discourses of displacement demonstrate the many ways in which identities are constructed and contested. In the chapters that follow, I will demonstrate how the New Negro trope and the texts of Hebrews and 1 Peter engage in ethnic reasoning in order to render their identity constructions as fixed and fluid.

The problem with thinking of these identities as simply coherent and fixed is that we then risk missing their inherent diversity. For example, the role of women during the Great Migration and the religious pluralism that developed as a result of people moving may be overlooked when examining the New Negro as a static and unified identity. Likewise, 1 Peter is expressly written to "exiles of the dispersion" living in the Roman provinces of Asia Minor who are presented as literally or metaphorically marginalized.[78] Given the large geographical area and the collective language, the recipients are sure to represent a diverse group of outsiders with a variety of experiences with Jewish traditions and nascent Christianity. Furthermore, the delineation of the roles of leaders, servants, slaves, and wives not only attempts to organize their presence in the community, but it also demonstrates that those across these various social categories are part of this

---

[77] Ibid., 93.

[78] The letter is written to those in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (see 1 Peter 1:1).

community.[79] In this way, a dialogical imagination acknowledges biblical narratives as multifaceted.

Dialogical Imagination as Method

In New Testament studies, Fernando F. Segovia proposes a hermeneutic of diaspora. This approach to the biblical text highlights the experiences of alterity. Diaspora as an experience of otherness is a fertile site from which to engage in biblical interpretation. He describes it thus:

> It is a framework that I refer to as a hermeneutics of the diaspora, a Hispanic-American hermeneutics of otherness and engagement, whose fundamental purpose is to read the biblical text as an other – not be overwhelmed or overridden, but acknowledged, respected, and engaged in its very otherness. It is a framework that is ultimately grounded in a theology of the diaspora (a Hispanic-American theology of otherness and mixture) and that gives rise to a specific methodological approach – the reading strategy of intercultural criticism.[80]

Intercultural criticism that engages the African American experience is an example of reading darkly. As such, I expand this hermeneutic of diaspora to embrace other diasporas, other ethnicities, and their similar (though not the same) experiences of otherness and diversity. However, I suggest reading the text as *an* other and not as other. Moreover, it is not enough to read the text as an other without dialogue. A dialogue entails one speaking (or reading) and also listening.

---

[79] 1 Peter 2, 3.

[80] Fernando F. Segovia, "Toward a Hermeneutics of Diaspora: A Hermeneutics of Otherness and Engagement," in *Reading from this Place vol 1: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*, Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 58-9.

For such a dialogue, the method that I will employ is that of dialogical and diasporic imagination. Kwok Pui-lan defines dialogical imagination as "attempts to bridge the gaps of time and space, to create new horizons, and to connect the disparate elements of our lives into a meaningful whole."[81] However, making such connections is difficult. Critiquing her own method, Kwok writes: "My hope to bring the biblical and Asian traditions together through dialogical imagination may have underestimated the fact that an Asian reads the Bible from a situation of great alienation. And I did not sufficiently problematize how the 'Asian story,' which is so diverse and complex, could be brought into a mutually illuminating relationship with the equally multifaceted 'biblical' story."[82] The black American experience is also diverse and complex. This will be clearly demonstrated through my examination of the construction of the New Negro. Dialogical imagination enables me to construct historical analogy while at the same time imagining the voice of the implied audiences of the biblical text. Giving these audiences a voice enables them to "speak back," not only within their context, but also forward across time.

Employing dialogical and diasporic imagination allows me to transverse time and contexts in meaningful and productive ways. Reading these diasporic identities as occupying "in-between" spaces, I suggest that they transcend binaries and offer a way of thinking about the ways groups resist and/or accommodate in the context of hostility not only to their outside worlds, but also within their individual and unique communities.

---

[81] Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 39-42.

[82] Ibid, 42.

Discourses of displacement and their resultant identities are sites of debate and diversity. Kwok identifies diasporic discourses as "a fluid and challenging site to raise questions about the construction of the center and the periphery, the negotiation of multiple loyalties and identities, the relationship between the 'home' and the 'world,' the political and theoretical *implications of border crossing*, and the identity of the dislocated female subject."[83] Kwok further develops the concept of dialogical imagination in relation to diasporic imagination. She concludes: "Diasporic imagination recognizes the diversity of diasporas and honors the different histories and memories."[84] Diasporic imagination also calls into question what are considered the cultural norms of Christianity.[85] These cultural norms call into question the use of "imagination" for biblical interpretation.

It is important to note that the use of imagination does not distract from the historical work; in fact, it enhances this work. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that a "hermeneutic of imagination" in ethically-attuned, historical-interpretive work is directly associated with justice. She writes: "The *space of imagination* is that of freedom, a space in which boundaries are crossed, possibilities are explored and time becomes

---

[83] Ibid., 45-6.

[84] Ibid., 49.

[85] Ibid., 48-9. Kwok goes on to explain: "Diasporic imagination has to decenter and decompose the ubiquitous logic and 'common sense' that says that the cultural form and norm of Christianity is defined by the West. It resists a pre- determined and prescribed universalism and a colonial mode of thinking, by insisting on reterritorization of the West and by tracing how the so-called center and periphery of Christianity have always been doubly inscribed and mutually constituted" (49).

relativized."[86] By employing a dialogical hermeneutic in this project, it is my intention to make apparent the imaginative, complex, and socially located and locative work of biblical interpretation and Christian identity formation.

Postcolonial Feminist/Womanist Hermeneutic

Inherent to these concepts of dialogical and diasporic imagination is a postcolonial feminist/womanist hermeneutic. Kwok's method calls into question the "identity of the dislocated female subject" and in doing so challenges patriarchal approaches to experiences and theories of diaspora.[87] As we have seen concerning theories of diaspora, postcolonial feminist theorists also interrogate "multi-axial performative conceptions of power" and propose contesting borders that create dichotomies – us/them, inside/outsider - by acknowledging their entanglement. Dialogical imagination employs a postcolonial feminist/womanist hermeneutic that decenters and disrupts cultural norms and brings to the fore issues of power and resistance to power. Decolonizing feminist approaches to biblical interpretation exposes rather than conceals diversity.

Utilizing a decolonizing feminist approach to Paul and his letters, Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre and Laura Nasrallah suggest reading Paul's letters as "sites of debate, contestation, and resistance rather than articulations of one individual's vision and heroic

---

[86] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 188. Emphasis mine.

[87] Kwok, 45.

community building efforts."[88] They explicate the implications of this approach as follows: "By shifting the lens from Paul alone to Paul among others, we gain a better understanding of differences of opinion and perspective, thereby opening debates and productive collaborations both ancient and contemporary, rather than limiting our understanding of the political vision and practices of the Christ-assemblies to whatever Paul alone meant or means."[89] The decentering work that Johnson-DeBaufre and Nasrallah propose can be extended beyond Paul, his letters, and their audiences. This work expounds upon the recognition of the biblical texts as sites of debate and diversity and thereby aids in the engagement of the historical imagination.

Expanding our historical imagination to embrace multiplicity and contestation can also lead to shifts in perspectives for contemporary debates. Clarice Martin's womanist interpretation of the *Haustafeln,* as found in 1 Peter, addresses the "hermeneutical paradoxes, issues, and tensions in the slave-woman regulation."[90] She concludes, "If it is true that the regulations in the *Haustafeln* are provisional; if it is true that they are 'wineskins' and not 'wine,' if it is true that the codes should not be 'absolutized,' 'universalized,' or 'eternalized' either with regard to slaves or women, the African

---

[88] Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre and Laura S. Nasrallah, "Beyond the Heroic Paul: Toward a Feminist and Decolonizing Approach to the Letters of Paul," in *The Colonized Apostle: Paul Through Postcolonial Eyes*, Christopher D. Stanley, ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2011), 162.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Clarice J. Martin, "The *Haustafeln* (Household Codes) in African American Biblical Interpretation: 'Free Slaves' and 'Subordinate Women' in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1991), 228.

American believing communities need to assume a new and more profoundly integrative praxis that moves women 'from the margins' of the church and ecclesial structures 'to the center.'" This integrative praxis acknowledges complex cultural identities, past and present. Johnson-DeBaufre and Nasrallah similarly contend that such an approach allows for "an engagement with the present to revise our approach to the past and vice versa."[91] They surmise: "More importantly, if we place the assemblies at the center and hear Paul's letter as one voice among many, we can imaginatively reconstruct and reclaim a richer history of interpretation of Paul, a history populated with subjects struggling in different ways within the varied contexts of empire."[92] This project intends to foster this kind of engagement with the texts of Hebrews and 1 Peter through the lens of the New Negro.

Reading the "New Negro"

The Great Migration is an example of the creation of a diaspora. A mass movement of black people from the southern United States to the North and West in the early twentieth century, the Great Migration significantly influenced the ways African American and American peoplehood was (and is) conceived. If African American identity is construed as diasporic, it is considered so as a result of the transatlantic slave trade. This created an African diaspora. The "movement" and geographic dispersion of peoples of African descent inevitably presents a challenge to a sense of collective

---

[91] Johnson-DeBaufre and Nasrallah, 167-8.

[92] Ibid., 174. They further explicate the implications of such an approach. They continue: "Engaging the Pauline letters as rhetorical instruments that construct both Paul and his audience in various ways might leave us less certain about what Paul the individual thought or accomplished. But it will give us more clarity about how a particular construction of Paul serves to authorize, valorize, or erase particular agendas and voices."

identity. And yet the dispersion is a large part of the group identity. In this project, I suggest that the Great Migration created a black American diaspora. This movement produced an identity discourse in art and literature that illustrated the negotiation of what it meant to be black and American in the early twentieth century. The formation of the New Negro trope is a dynamic construction that responds to its environment. The guise of stability that it presents unmasks a people's desire for equality and a sense of belonging while concomitantly revealing ambivalence toward space and place. The New Negro is a diasporic identity whose creative attempts to overcome instability are undone in a context of suffering and violence. Nonetheless, the resiliency and hope of a people persist, making change possible.

Constructing the "New (Christian) Jew"

It is through the lens of the New Negro that a construction of a "New (Christian) Jew" becomes possible in the texts of Hebrews and 1 Peter. I contend that these texts negotiate an identity that is not yet recognizable as Christian. As we have seen and will see, Jewishness is negotiated in the context of a constellation of identities. In addition to these diverse options (Greekness, Romanness, Alexandrianness, etc.), there is a great deal of diversity within Jewishness. The diversity of Jewish identity in the first century is attested in the scholarship of early Christianity and Second Temple Judaism. Cynthia Baker contends: "Ancient writers recognized a world of ethnoracial diversity among the Jews of their era. Yet the notion of Jewish ethnic multiplicity remains foreign and virtually unexplored in popular and scholarly cultures that labor under the weight of racialized discourses of Jewish 'particularity' crafted as a counterpoint to narratives of

Christian 'universalism.'"[93] In her essay, Baker considers the writings of Philo as an example of the diversity of Jewishness. She considers "the ways in which ancient Jewish and non-Jewish writers do, indeed, depict Jews as a multiethnic or multiracial people whose individual members, from earliest antiquity, are imagined to embody multiple (often dual) lineages of birth, land, history, and culture. At the same time, these ancient writers, Jewish and non-Jewish alike employ a strong rhetoric of Jewish unity that has all but occluded Jewish diversity."[94] Shaye Cohen similarly attests to this multiplicity. He writes: "Judaism became like Hellenism, a citizenship and a way of life open to people of diverse origins…Thus, even as they were becoming more 'nationalistic' and 'particularistic,' the Judeans/Jews were becoming more 'universalistic.'"[95]As we will see in Hebrews and 1 Peter, the negotiation of Jewishness often includes the language of race, ethnicity, nation, and peoplehood in attempts to create a unified and stable identity.

Dialogue as Multi-voiced

Christianness is similarly constructed in diverse ways and across various contexts within the Roman Empire. A nascent Christian identity was not singularly negotiated by and with the authors of Hebrews and 1 Peter and their audiences; therefore,

---

[93] Cynthia M. Baker, "'From Every Nation under Heaven' Jewish Ethnicities in the Greco-Roman World," in *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies,* Laura Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 79.

[94] Ibid, 80.

[95] Shaye Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 138.

acknowledgment of a multi-voiced dialogue provides a richer understanding of what I contend is Jewishness in the New Testament. I will explore three examples.

First, Philo of Alexandria negotiates diaspora Jewish identity in the early first century. His writing represents the imbrications of Jewishness, Greekness, and Romanness. His political treatise, *In Flaccum*, is Philo's account of anti-semitic rioting in Alexandria, Egypt around 38 A.D. This treatise is also an ethno-spatial negotiation of a diasporic Jewish identity whose unrooted formation is under a constant threat of being undone. This identity construction and contestation will be examined in greater detail in chapter four.

The gospel of Matthew is considered the "most Jewish gospel" is yet another example of identity negotiation. Ulrich Luz defines Matthew as a "highly tradition-oriented author" and the Matthean community as "Jewish Christian."[96] The text contains tensions in the author's constructions of Jewishness and the nations (Gentiles). For instance, although Jesus is presented as fully Jewish, sent to save the Jewish nation, he also initiates a mission to the nations (Matt 24:14, 28: 19). Jewish identity is constructed over against religious leaders (Matt 23:34-39) and at the same time also seeks to distinguish itself from the nations who are seen as dogs (Matt 15:26) and swine (Matt 7:6). The strong polemic against religious leaders is perhaps best understood as still operating within the Jewish tradition. The gospel encourages the Torah practices of fasting, offering alms, and Sabbath observance (Matt 23:23, 24:20). It is not clear if the impetus for identity negotiation is Jesus' failure to save the Jewish people, or the

[96] Ulrich Lutz, Studies in Matthew (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 5, 9.

destruction of the temple. In either (or neither) case, the Matthean author and community engage in an internal debate about how to define Jewishness in their context.

Another example of Jewish identity negotiation that is contemporary to 1 Peter and Hebrews can be seen in the book of Revelation, which is addressed to a geographical region that overlaps the one addressed in 1 Peter.[97] However, the attitude of John, the author of Revelation, toward Rome is diametrically opposed to the one found in 1 Peter. The audience of Revelation is urged to avoid participation in Roman society and economics (Rev. 18:4). The echoes of John's message of moral depravity to the churches can be found in some of the sermons from the Great Migration. The sermons discourage congregants from moving North, criticizing the lust for riches and the desires to participate in an urban lifestyle, mainly watching movies and/or nightclubs. The ambiguity of the city figures prominently in these sermons and John's Revelation.[98] Nevertheless, John's critique of Rome stands in stark contrast to 1 Peter's exhortation to honor leaders, specifically the emperor (1 Peter 2:17). These additional voices contribute to the debate and negotiation.

---

[97] The book of Revelation was written around 95. See: David L. Barr's "Introduction: Reading Revelation Today: Consensus and Innovation," in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 1.

[98] Leonard L. Thompson, "Ordinary Lives: John and His First Readers," in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003). Thompson writes: "The cities of Asia were good places for Christians to live. They were large, diverse cultural centers in the Roman Empire…The cities were also rich in religious diversity…In most cities there was a large Jewish community" (Thompson, 38). Thompson continues: "Although the cities of Asia were some of the best places for Christians to live, they did not all experience the same freedom from fear and danger or from accusations of being Christian" (Thompson, 41).

Conclusion

In conclusion, in seeking to establish their audiences as dis/placed both the authors of Hebrews and 1 Peter participate in a founding act. Paul Christopher Johnson declares: "To announce a *diaspora* is not simply to express authentic origins but to actually press them into existence. Evoking distant origins by locating oneself 'in diaspora' is itself a kind of founding act."[99] I suggest that this act is the creation and maintenance of a "New (Christian) Jew." Diaspora, then, is a way of (re)presenting one's *place* in the world. To speak of diasporic space is to consider a "web of relations" that constructs one's identity as a particular place in the world. The web of relations consists not only of the communities' relationship to the imperial/ruling power, but also the communities' relationship to the authors of the sermon and letter. Diasporic identity offers a different way of thinking about early Christian and (African) American identity. As the epigraph indicates, diasporas look both to the past and to the future. Therefore, diasporic identity attempts to transcend both time and also space.

Employing the trope of the diasporic identity, the New Negro, this dissertation will explore the ways in which a sampling of sermons and letters from the Great Migration negotiate and construct both black American and American identity. Using this trope as a heuristic key, I will then analyze how the texts of Hebrews and 1 Peter, a sermon and letter, respectively, create an ethnic-geographical construction of alterity in an imperial context. That is, these texts exhort a different way of being in the world. I

---

[99] Paul Christopher Johnson, *Diaspora Conversions: Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa* (Berkley: University of California, 2007), 9. He continues: "Yet the act requires no actual physical encounter with the foundational site." This would be true of many African Americans who have had no physical encounter with Africa.

will argue that the spatial-ethnic reasoning of these texts employ three strategies: 1) a remembering or creation of a past; 2) instruction for maintaining their identity in their hostile environment; and 3) an utopic (and thus spatial) vision of the future in order to create a flexible, but also bounded, identity that can be responsive to its political, social, and ethical context while also making a space in which to resist it.

As a comparative cultural or intercultural study, this project contributes to Hebrews and 1 Peter scholarship by extending the social scientific studies of the construction of the audience's identity (beyond the Gentile/Jew divide) and asserting that this identity is able to oscillate between resistance and acculturation. Moreover, for Africana biblical hermeneutics and African American biblical scholarship specifically, this project demonstrates how diasporic identity is a fertile and fruitful area of investigation. It also provides a starting point, other than slavery, to explore the diversity and complexity of African American identity. Reading Christian identity in dialogue with this migratory experience of African Americans resists the attempts to represent both "Christians" and African Americans solely as an out-of-place persecuted minority group connected translocally as a spiritual and other-worldly community. This project identifies the ways in which such a construction makes resistant identity possible but often requires the subordination of difference and diversity within the community to produce a coherent, if always unstable, collective identity.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the historical context of the Great Migration. This is the context in which New Negro identity is constructed. I purport that the New Negro is a diasporic identity that is both fixed and flexible, a construction accompanied by violence. Chapter two reads the development of the New Negro trope in letters,

sermons, and essays written during the early twentieth century. The fluidity of the identity that develops makes clear the negotiations that range from accommodating to resisting, and yet the attempt to conceal the diversity of identity reveals its fragility. Chapter three examines the construction of Jewish identity in the context of empire. Exploring the cultural milieu of the first century Mediterranean world, I will use Philo of Alexandria's historical treatise *In Flaccum* as an example of negotiation Jewish identity in the Roman imperial context. Chapters four and five explore the texts of Hebrews and 1 Peter respectively as sites of debate and diversity for the formation of identity. This identity remains dependent on notions of Jewishness and yet attempts to distinguish itself. These texts are investigations into the formation of what will become Christian identity. By amplifying the many voices over the singular voice of the author, I intend to highlight the incongruous, contradictory, and often dangerous nature of diasporic identity. My goal is to reread and reimagine early Christians in ways that bring to the fore their deep complexities and contradictions as also experienced in the realities of African Americans.

CHAPTER 1

RUNNING OUR RACE: THE GREAT MIGRATION

An individual or collective movement across the surface of the globe is a geography in itself, a writing on the earth. Stèphane Dufoix, *Diasporas*

Migration is a defining feature of black American identity. The transatlantic slave trade violently created a diasporic people. This rupture from a place of origin marks the first of many displacements influencing the collective identity of black Americans. In his book *The Making of African Americans: The Four Great Migrations*, Ira Berlin writes: "The entire African American experience can best be read as a series of great migrations or *passages*, during which immigrants—at first forced and then free—transformed an *alien place into home*, becoming deeply rooted in a land that once was foreign, unwanted, and even despised. In the process, they created new understandings of the meaning of the African American experience and new definitions of blackness.[1]

The result of these movements, as the epigraph describes, is a writing on the earth, a black geography. This is particularly poignant for a people whose identity, particularly in the South, had become so strongly associated with the land. Leaving the South not only "uprooted" this identity formed on the premise that the Negro was made

[1] Ira Berlin, *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 9. Emphasis mine. The four migrations Berlin highlights are: (1) The Transatlantic Slave Trade, (2) Transporting of one million men and women from the Atlantic seaboard to Southern interior, (3) Fleeing the South for cities to the north, and (4) End of twenty-first century, people of African descent enter United States from all over the world (see pages 15–16).

to work the land, it also created a space to reimagine and refashion the Negro. The New Negro contained both the option to stay in the South and those who left it and as such is emblematic of both the connection between place and identity and also its malleability.

My interest in the Great Migration centers on the myriad influences that led to the formation of a new identity, an identity publicly formed and popularized in the early twentieth century that came to be known as the New Negro.[2] I will highlight the creativity, complexity, and diversity of this identity. This time period marked not only the mass movement of a people, it also ushered in a revolutionary approach to the distribution of information. It was during this time that local and regional newspapers and magazines flourished; their circulation throughout the country transformed the ways ideas

---

[2] Alain Locke is most often credited with coining the term "New Negro" based on his 1925 anthology, *The New Negro.* Locke describes its purpose thusly: "This volume aims to document the New Negro culturally and socially—to register the transformations of the inner and outer life of the Negro in America that have so significantly taken place in the last few years. There is ample evidence of a New Negro in the latest phases of social change and progress, but still more in the internal world of the Negro mind and spirit." Alain Locke, *The New Negro, An Interpretation* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925), iv.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. traces the trope in African American discourse as far back as 1895. His article, "The Trope of a New Negro," begins with an epigraph from the June 28, 1895 Cleveland Gazette. It reads: "A class of colored people, the 'New Negro'…have arisen since the War with education, refinement and money." Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black," *Representations* 24 (1988): 129-155.

A "class" of people was an appropriate description. I will demonstrate that socioeconomic status was a major factor in this trope. This is evident in the debate concerning who is credited with origin of the term New Negro. Discussing the development Alain Locke's anthology from a special edition of the magazine the *Survey Graphic*, Peter M. Rutkoff and William B. Scott write: "Locke included African American writers from throughout the United States and added a section that highlighted developments and accomplishments of what Locke called the 'New Negro,' a term first coined by labor leader and socialist A. Philip Randolph in the Messenger." Peter M. Rutkoff and William B. Scott, *Fly Away: The Great African American Cultural Migrations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 61.

were communicated. The proliferation of recording and distributing sermons also occurred for the first time in America's history. While progressive in some ways, post reconstruction America did not yield for black Americans the promises of full citizenship. Disenfranchisement, racial violence, and new economic opportunities were motivating factors for the migration. And yet, despite the allure to leave the South, many black Americans stayed. I will explore how both staying in and leaving the South created a diasporic identity defined as the New Negro, an identity that is both constructed and contested.

I identify three characteristics of the Great Migration that differentiate the New Negro from the (old) Negro identity as diasporic identities. First, the migration is voluntary; that is, people chose to move from one part of a nation to another, while others chose to stay.[3] Secondly, this migration involved the complex negotiation of an identity in relation to nation, class, gender, and ethnicity and was strongly inflected by religion.[4] Finally, this movement produced creative expressions, art, literature—sermons and letters—that illustrates the rhetorically imaginative ways in which a New Negro identity was conceived, maintained, and challenged. This is a study of a "socio-spatial event" that

---

[3] The notion of an unforced migration is posited in contrast to the forced transatlantic crossing. Unforced, however, does not preclude the violence that was a major factor for many who migrated.

[4] As we have seen the new "class" of people described in the 1895 article (see note 2) was indeed a reflection of various socioeconomic factors. Gates has referred to the myth of the New Negro as the "black intellectuals trope of themselves." Gates, "The Trope of the New Negro," 132. It was not only class that inflected this new identity, but religion did also. The Great Migration is often referred to in terms of an Exodus tradition. An example is Carter G. Woodson's 1918 essay, "The Exodus During the World War," and many examples will present later in this chapter.

facilitates a rethinking of the ways in which "subaltern lives are shaped" when their orientation in space is changed.[5] I posit that migration creates a space in which to (re)negotiate identity and thusly, the Great Migration of the early twentieth century in the United States made the New Negro possible. The creation of a seemingly coherent identity that both resists and accommodates its oppressive environment, however, is accompanied with internal debates and occlusions that not only challenge, but also actively participate in its formation.

In this chapter, I will explore the New Negro as a constructed and contested diasporic identity representative of instability, creativity, and the need for a sense of permanence in a hostile political environment. The rhetoric of space and race are integral to this process of inventing a way of being in the world that is not reliant on one's physical space.[6] I will begin this exploration by summarizing the historical context and

---

[5] Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, eds. *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007), 5. McKittrick specifically defines black geographies as "kinds of socio-spatial events…[that] provide a way in which we can start thinking about how the lives of subaltern subjects are shaped by, and are shaping, the imaginative, three-dimensional, social, and political contours of human geographies."

[6] This is one of the great paradoxes that I will explore in the construction of this identity. Forming an identity that is not reliant upon its physical location undermines any perception of a stable identity. An example of this is found in chapter 3 where Philo constructs a Jewish identity "rooted" in its motherland of Jerusalem, yet living in the fatherland of Egypt or more specifically Alexandria. Diasporic identities are simultaneously particular and at the same time universal. To underscore the significance of place to identity construction, particularly in a first century Mediterranean context, Roman and polis citizenships are poignant examples. Not only were there Roman citizen who never physically lived in Rome, polis citizenship, and specifically its varied religious expressions, exemplified the diversity of what it meant to be a Roman citizen and participate in its imperial cult. See e.g. Greg Woolf, " Polis-Religion and its Alternatives in Roman Provinces" in *Roman Religion*, Clifford Ando, ed. (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2003), 49–54.

the impetus of the New Negro, the Great Migration. The early twentieth century was a period of tremendous change in the United States and one that witnessed pronounced cultural creativity. This is the context in which this identity is (re)formed. I will then describe the New Negro as a signifier that rejects or recasts its past while concomitantly building upon it to present itself as "new" or different. The result is an unstable identity. It is also an elite identity that often masks its internal diversity with a perceived unity. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion of how this black American migratory experience and its resultant identity embody an ambivalence concerning issues of hope, belonging, and autonomy that attempt to transcend dichotomies, space, and time.

The Historical Context of the Great Migration

During the first few decades of the twentieth century, millions of black Americans moved west and north out of the southern United States. In fact, "By 1930, more than 1.3 million resided outside the South, nearly triple the number at the turn of the century."[7] This mass movement of people created a diaspora.[8] Diasporas, as Paul Christopher

---

[7] Ira Berlin, *The Making of African America*, 152. Berlin explains, "Between America's entry into the European war and the stock market crash of 1929, black men and women left the South at an average rate of 500 per day, or more than 15,000 per month. The evacuation of the black belt was particularly striking. In 1910, more than 300,000 black people resided in the Alabama black belt. Ten years later, their numbers had declined to 255,000 and would continue to fall in the years that followed. By the end of the third decade of the twentieth century, when a massive economic depression slowed the movement north, a half million black people had abandoned the region of their birth."

[8] Following James N. Gregory, I refer to this migration as a diaspora. In his book, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America*, he explains, "I invoke the diaspora concept in part because it calls attention to global contexts and encourages us to think about the relationship between internal and transnational migration. It also emphasizes the importance and dynamism of this subject…Diasporas have life and movement and power—exactly the qualities of

Johnson suggests, are "articulations across gaps that, like the articulations of hip or knee joints, allow for forward mobility. By naming a horizon of expectation, they provide solidarity, purpose, identity, and futurity."[9] This migration provided all of this for black Americans. The promises of freedom from the Civil War era were circumscribed and black Americans sought change and an escape.

A number of significant circumstances contributed to this mass movement of black people in the early twentieth century in the United States. One major factor was economic. There were natural disasters such as flooding and the boll weevil epidemic that destroyed crops and had a devastating effect on the Southern economy.[10] Additionally, as

---

moving southerners in twentieth-century America." (11–12). He reports that "over the course of the twentieth century, close to 8 million black southerners, nearly 20 million white southerners, and more than 1 million southern-born Latinos participated in the diaspora, some leaving the south permanently, others temporarily" (14). James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

[9] Johnson, *Diaspora Conversions*, 37.

[10] The impact of boll weevil epidemic is widely debated. However, historical and more contemporary analysis finds that there was significant cotton crops devastation. W. E. B. DuBois, editor of *Crisis*, the monthly journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), points to similar factors for the migration in June 1917. He writes, "There have been very few attempts to give a definite, coherent picture of the whole movement…As to reasons of the migration, undoubtedly, the immediate cause was economic, and the movement began because of floods in middle Alabama and Mississippi and because the latest devastation of the boll weevil came in these same districts" (63). W.E.B. DuBois, "The Migration of the Negroes," *The Crisis* (June 1917): 63-66.

In their article, "The Impact of the Boll Weevil, 1892-1932," Fabian Lange, Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode conclude, "We show that as the weevil traversed the American South, it seriously disrupted local economies, significantly reduced the value of land (at this time still the most important asset in the American South), and triggered substantial intraregional population movements" (687). More specifically, "real land values per acre declined on average by approximately ten percent after contact" (710).

a result of World War I, immigration from Europe ceased, creating new opportunities for immigrants to the North. The war not only created jobs—and thus, new economic opportunities for blacks—but it also contributed to an expansion of self-perception for many black Americans. For soldiers exposed to other parts of the world for the first time, they began to see themselves as part of a larger black community. This diasporic thinking was not limited to soldiers.

In fact, blacks considering themselves a part of the African diaspora dates back to the early nineteenth century.[11] Martin Delany, along with "several other African

---

"County-level estimates imply that the weevil was associated with a decline in total output of about 50 percent" (699). Fabian Lange, Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode, "The Impact of the Boll Weevil, 1892-1932," *The Journal of Economic History* 63 (September 2009): 685-718.

In *Boll Weevil Blues: Cotton, Myth, and Power in the American South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) James Giesen argues, "The weevil forced planters to tighten their grip on Delta society, meaning everything from ownership and control of farmland to the movement of people, credit, and even knowledge" (48). "Delta blues singer Charley Patton vocalized the frustration of the tenants. In 'Mississippi Bo Weevil Blues,' the boll weevil whispers to his wife, 'I believe I may go North, I won't tell nobody.' Written at the beginning of the Great Migration, the boll weevil blues made the threat of migration clear to all listeners" (97). Although Giesen proposes that the boll weevil was a myth, the reality of its impact and its association to the Great Migration are real and had material implications.

[11] Dufoix connects the concept of pan-Africanism with that of a black diaspora. Referring to diaspora, he writes: "Indeed, even before the word was used, the parallel was being drawn in the nineteenth century between the Jewish and black dispersions in the writings of the first thinkers of the 'pan-Africanist' cause, W. E. B. DuBois and Edward Blyden" (Dufoix, 10). Blyden is considered a leading PanAfricanism figure of the nineteenth century. Dufoix also raises an important connection between Jewish diaspora and the black diaspora, one to which we will return later.

In his article, DuBois, "The NAACP, and the Pan African Congress of 1919," Clarence Contee defines DuBois' place in the genealogy of Pan-Africanism. He writes, "One of the great contributions of W.E.B. DuBois to the growth of organized Pan-Africanism was the 'revival' of the movement, which seemed moribund, as his Pan African Congress convened in Paris in February 1919. Africanists and African nationalists who call DuBois the 'father' of organized Pan-Africanism trace his

Americans in South Carolina founded the Liberian Exodus Joint Stock Company in 1878 to establish a steamship line to transport African-American settlers to Liberia…it was the first of several African American emigration schemes over the next half century that aspired to a transatlantic *exodus* via steamship."[12] Though some black Americans sought to return "home" to Africa, others sought a home outside of the South, while continuing to maintain a connection to Africa.

In the early twentieth century, Edward Blyden and W.E.B. DuBois were two examples of Pan-Africanists who encouraged the "unity of people of African descent all over the world."[13] Marcus Garvey, founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914, was also a Pan-Africanist. The UNIA's rousing motto, "Up, you mighty race, you can accomplish what you will!" not only expressed a sense of mobility, but it also served as a motivational and unifying exhortation.[14] There were

---

leadership back to 1919. But the evidence of the career of DuBois shows that the concept remained alive since the Pan African conference of 1900 called by Trinidadian lawyer, Henry Sylvester Williams which DuBois attended." [Clarence G. Contee, "DuBois, The NAACP, and the Pan African Congress of 1919," *The Journal of Negro History* vol. 57 (Jan 1972), 13.]

[12] Allen Dwight Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 124. Emphasis mine. Callahan describes Delany as a "physician, novelist, explorer and ethnologist…[who] concluded that emigration was indispensible for the greater destiny of African Americans." Delany wrote *The Conditions, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* in 1852. The steamship went bankrupt after making only one voyage (124-5).

[13] Nell Irvin Painter, *Creating Black Americans: African American History and Its Meanings, 1619 to the Present*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 203.

[14] Painter, 203. Garvey referred to himself as the "'Provisional President-General of Africa.' [He] created the largest black national movement in American history…aim[ed] to transform racial segregation to the benefit of black people."

various approaches to unification. Garvey, a native of Jamaica and proponent of Africans in diaspora returning to their native land, espoused different political views from other prominent figures of the early twentieth century, like W.E.B. DuBois.[15] Nonetheless, Garvey's movement gained popularity and UNIA claimed over one million members by 1920.[16] Many blacks in America no longer viewed themselves as severed from their motherland but rather as part of an African diaspora.[17] Recognition of black Americans' kinship with other blacks in the world connected their problems of racial injustice with

[15] In his book *Negro with a Hat*, Colin Grant describes the conflict between W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey. This conflict highlights a number of internal contestations among black Americans. Grant writes, "…the African-American leader would accuse the Jamaican immigrant of misconstruing the relations between light-skinned high yallers (yellows), cinnamon-coloured and coal-black Negroes in America. Garvey was guilty charged his rival, of importing Jamaican concept of racial orientation which overstated the real but minimal tensions between the social classes of black Americans. There was a 'kernel of truth' in Garvey's observation but, as far as the black aristocrats were concerned, it was not only ill-mannered to advertise it but naïve and politically damaging playing right into the hands of the race's delighted white enemies." Grant continues to describe a 1921 speech Garvey delivered at Liberty Hall, "W.E.B. DuBois and His Escapades." Garvey "dismissed DuBois as 'the white-man Negro who has never done anything to benefit Negroes. DuBois was a friend to the 'upper tens' whilst he, Marcus Garvey, was along with the working class Negroes" (302). Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey and His Dream of Mother Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[16] Painter, 188.

[17] Painter purports: "During the First World War, black men distinguished themselves as soldiers and experienced themselves as members of an African Diaspora, an international community of people of African descent. Born free, this generation of African Americans believed they were entitled to the rights of American citizenship. But they enjoyed those rights only in part, for the first four decades of the 20th century remained a Jim Crow era" (189). Yet, it is important to note that this diasporic recognition was not new for black Americans.

colonialism in Africa and South America and underscored a persistent diasporic mentality.[18]

The unity this mentality expresses also exposes its diversity. The conflict between DuBois and Garvey revealed issues of classism and colorism within the black community.[19] Garvey was from the West Indies, while DuBois was from the United States. DuBois credits this as the rationale for the colorism issues that Garvey raised. Colorism was closely associated with class distinctions for black Americans. Employing the language of new and old, Berlin surmises: "If members of the old elite were losing ground, they did not yield their place at the top of black society easily. Their *pride of place*, sometimes reaching back to post-Revolutionary emancipation, rested upon the embrace of bourgeois ideals of self-improvement through education, religious orthodoxy—often Anglican and Presbyterian—and values of industry, frugality, and temperance. The new arrivals challenged the Old Settlers – not so much for their place atop black society; that would come later—but their seeming difference in lifestyle and

---

[18] The "back to Africa" movement in the nineteenth century is an example of a sustained connection to Africa for some black Americans. This movement is exemplified by the repatriation of African Americans in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Kenneth Barnes cites lynching and racial violence as fueling this movement. See: Kenneth C. Barnes, *Journey of Hope: The Back-to-Africa Movement in Arkansas in the Late 1800s.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 2. The Berlin Treaty of 1885, which formalized colonial hegemony in Africa, is similarly connected to racial violence and many political leaders of the early twentieth century began to the highlight the similitudes in the struggles of black peoples across the world.

[19] Colorism is discrimination based on skin color. In the African American community it is when lighter skinned people are treated more favorably than darker skinned. See: Ronald E. Hall, *Racism in the 21st Century: An Empirical Analysis of Skin Color* (New York: Springer Press, 2008). The essay "Skin Color and Latinos with Disabilities: Expanding What We Know About Colorism in the United States" by Keith B. Wilson and Julissa Senices, offers a brief historical perspective on colorism (171-192).

values."[20] The differences within the black community are mirrored in the Garvey/DuBois debate. While Garvey espoused a belief that disaporic Africans should return to Africa, DuBois felt that such a position distracted from what black Americans should be fighting for— mainly, the right to vote and racial equality in the United States. DuBois contended that focusing on differences within the black community distracted from more important social issues facing them. In order to win the fight American hegemony, black Americans needed to be a cohesive group. Nonetheless, these diverse points of view all contributed significantly to the formation of New Negro identity. Despite the differences, what these men held in common was the desire to uplift their race.

Disenfranchisement and racial injustice, particularly racial violence, also contributed significantly to the migration. Black men and women's inability to participate in the political system became codified, in many ways nullifying Southern blacks' citizenship. Painter writes: "Poll taxes, the white primary, literacy, and understanding clauses, and grandfather clauses made voting practically impossible for 90 percent of black men who lived in the South. They no longer lived in a democracy in which they could elect their representatives."[21] Polling sites were spaces of exclusion: they were places where black bodies did not belong. Poll taxes and other such restrictive practices presented a major defeat to perceived notions that freedom from slavery would equate to

---

[20] Berlin, 178-9. Emphasis mine.

[21] Painter, 178. The right to vote was also withheld from poor white men who were not able to meet these requirements. Alongside race, class plays a significant role in the creation of a national identity.

full citizenship. The reality for black Americans was that, in addition to a loss of opportunity (e.g. land ownership, better jobs, and education), there was also a loss of national pride.[22] In fact, black Americans perceived themselves as a nation within a nation. The desire to embrace full citizenship and express their complete humanity was inextricably linked to their ability to vote. As a result, the inability to participate in electing officials further exacerbated racial tensions. At times, these tensions escalated into violence.

Racial violence was also a significant factor for the Great Migration. Lynching, occurring mostly, but not solely, in the South, was an act of gruesome violence and included beatings, hangings, tortures, and mutilations. The resurgence of the Klu Klux Klan also occurred during this time period. The summer of 1919, also referred to as the Red Summer, marks a period of time when race riots occurred throughout the country, attesting to ways in which the North (and West) could be construed as both the land of opportunity *and* a place of violent erasure.[23] Painter explains that lynchings "were staged

---

[22] Painter explains, "Between 1889 and 1910, all the Southern states enacted legislation that used one or more of these techniques to impede black men's and poor white men's voting" (179). These actions coincide with segregation and what became known as "Jim Crow" laws. The Reverend Henry McNeal Turner described this time as such: "I used to love what I thought was the grand old flag, and sing with ecstasy about the Stars and Stripes, but to the Negro in this country the American flag is a dirty and contemptible rag…Without multiplying words, I wish to say that hell is an improvement on the United States where the Negro is concerned" (180). The irony of black soldiers who could fight for the country, but return to a country that would not fight for them and their rights was not lost on black Americans.

[23] In *Race Riots and Resistance: The Red Summer of 1919* Jan Voogd examines the riots and the context that precipitates them. Voogd writes: "During the early decades of the twentieth century, and particularly the Red Summer of 1919, race riots were most often events in which white mobs inflicted violence on a group of black people or on a black community as a whole…The riots of the Red Summer were not new, innovative, or even

to entertain spectators and intimidate black people."[24] These atrocities projected the past cruelty of slavery into the present. Riots, which often resulted in black bodies hanging from trees, served as a constant reminder of the expendability of black bodies and the pervasiveness of the danger living in America posed to black Americans.[25]

---

surprising. In fact, even with all their variation, they each echoed some riot that had come before. The sad distinction of the Red Summer riots remains the fact that so many riots occurred in so short a span of time" (13,18). Jan Voogd, *Race Riots and Resistance: The Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008). Voogd cites the first major riot in May 1919 in Charleston, SC and goes on to explain that historians generally agree that "at least 25 riots occurred that year, of which 7 were 'major': Chicago (Illinois), Elaine (Arkansas), Knoxville (Tennessee), Charleston (South Carolina), (Washington) D.C., Longview (Texas), and Omaha (Nebraska).

The violence continued beyond 1919. In 1921, the riot in the Greenwood section of Tulsa, Oklahoma destroyed a vibrant and prosperous black community. For a detailed analysis see: Alfred L. Brophy, *Reconstructing the Dreamland: The Tulsa Riot of 1921 – Race, Reparations, Reconciliation* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[24] Ibid., 181.

[25] Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck*, A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 1992. There are "2805 [documented] victims of lynch mobs killed between 1882 and 1930 in ten southern states. Although mobs murdered almost 300 white men and women, the vast majority of almost 2,500 of lynch victims were African-American. Of these black victims, 94 percent died in the hands of white lynch mobs. The scale of this carnage means that, on the average, a black man, woman, or child was murdered nearly once a week, every week, between 1882 and 1930 by a hate-driven white mob" (ix). Tolnay and Beck continue, "Although lynchings and mob killings occurred before 1880, notably during early Reconstruction when blacks were enfranchised, radical racism and mob violence peaked during the 1890s in a surge of terrorism that did not dissipate until well into the twentieth century" (17).

Billie Holliday's 1937 rendition of "Strange Fruit" is an artistic expression of the atrocity of lynching. The first verse of this song reads: "Southern trees bear strange fruit, Blood on the leaves and blood at the root, Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze, Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees." Liberation theologian James H. Cone provides a theological meditation on the relationship between the cross and the lynching tree in his most recent book. The book serves as a provocation for Christians to avoid compliancy in the face of violence. James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis), 2011. As crosses were often burned at lynching, I argue that the

It is this context of violence, unfulfilled promises, unrealized hope, and economic deprivation that people moved. These factors precipitated the Great Migration. In 1917, an article in the *African Methodist American Church Review* aptly summarized the reasons for the exodus:

> Neither character, the accumulation of property, the fostering of the Church, the schools and a better and higher standard of the home had made a difference in the status of black southerners. Confidence in the sense of justice, humanity and fair play of the white south is gone... One migrant articulated the same mood in verse: "An' let one race have all de South—here color lines are drawn—For 'Hagar's child' done [stem] de tide—Farewell—we're good and gone."[26]

And yet, not all of "Hagar's children" fled the South.[27] Many black Americans chose to stay in the South. In his book *American Civilization and the Negro* (1916), Dr. Charles Victor Roman argues two reasons that blacks would not leave the South. He writes, "In the first place *this is his home*, and in the second place *there is nowhere to go*. He is not going back to Africa any more than the white man is going back to Europe or the Jew is going back to Palestine…The slave-trade was the diaspora of the African, and the children of this alienation have become a permanent part of the citizenry of the

---

connection between religion and Christianity specifically and violence against black bodies are intertwined.

[26] Joe William Trotter, Jr. "The Great Migration," in *Organization of American Historians (OAH) Magazine of History* 17:1 (October 2002), 31.

[27] Berlin reminds, "The flow of black migrants that began with the Great Migration slowed in the 1930s. Three of four black Americans stayed in the South, with most remaining in the countryside…In 1940, still less than one-quarter of black Americans resided outside the South; that proportion would double by 1970, as the northward rush emptied portions of the rural South…The three million black men and women who exited the South between 1940 and 1960 almost doubled the number who left between 1910 and 1930" (155).

American republic."[28] Booker T. Washington held a similar position, at least publicly disapproving of the migration to the North. "'The Negro,' he thought, was at 'his best' in the South."[29] Washington's language demonstrates that place and movement are important aspects of the discourse of defining the New Negro. The south was both a home and a place from which to flee. The use of "Hagar's child" by the *Church Review* is an indication that religion also played a role in defining this people. Citizenship and social status also contributed to establishing a nation within a nation and creating a southern diaspora. The options to stay in the South or leave it are both necessary considerations for a fuller understanding of the Great Migration. Both options participate equally in the construction of a new Negro identity and influence the ways in which America and Americans were changed as a result of the migration.

Southern blacks and their perceived relationship to the land that they lived and worked on further illuminate the constructedness of both place and identity. Ira Berlin explains the contradictory nature between black Southerners and the land as follows:

> If legal ownership eluded most black Southerners, they had nonetheless made the land their own, so much so that the black belt originally named for the color of the soil had become identified with the color of the people who worked it. To many outsider observers, and to a generation of scholars, these black Southerners seemed a peasantry, *tied to the land* and governed by the timeless verities of soil and season that had endured since slave time. Their language, families, religion, music, and much else drew strength from the

---

[28] Dufoix, *Diasporas*, 12.

[29] Painter, 180. Painter continues: "In public utterance, Washington accepted segregation. But behind the scenes he departed from this accommodation to Southern white supremacy in the early 20th century. Working in secret, he underwrote campaigns against disfranchisement. His effort proved to be too little too late. Anti-black violence became more prevalent than black civil rights."

> connections with the land. The sense of permanence was tangible. Then, amid seemingly endless commentaries on the immutability of African American life in the rural South, everything changed.[30]

The change Berlin refers to is the Great Migration. The New Negro demonstrates how what seems immutable becomes negotiable. A tangible sense of permanence was merely an illusion; it was not the land that made the people but rather the people who made the land (and perhaps more precisely they participated in the making of each other). Given this notion of belonging to the land, it seemed impossible that black people would leave it. And yet they did. Crossing the Mason-Dixon line that purportedly separates the "North" from the "South," black migrants demonstrated the impermanent and dynamic character of both identity and place as they brought the South to the North in tangible ways. Lines drawn on a map, contours etched into a landscape, were challenged by the migration.

The Great Migration, a movement without a leader, transformed not only black Americans but also America itself. Joe William Trotter, Jr. surmises that the migration "not only reflected the African Americans' quest for freedom, jobs, and social justice, but also the emergence of new patterns of race, class, and ethnic relations in American culture, society, and politics."[31] The inextricable connectedness of race, class, ethnicity, and gender and their relationship to place and the making of the New Negro will be further interrogated in this chapter. Just as significant as the ability to negotiate a (new) identity is the ability to have an impact on the very environment that actively participates

---

[30] Berlin, 153. Emphasis mine.

[31] Trotter, 31.

in the negotiation. What I wish to underscore is that migration is filled with transformative potential.

In order for change to occur, communication needed to take place. The exchange of information ——jobs and housing availability, transportation, information, places of worship, etc.—was necessary to make the migration a reality. Communication was an important influence on the Great Migration and the changes that would come about as a result of it. I will now consider the role of the press (newspapers and magazines) and sermons during the Great Migration.

The Great Migration and Public Discourse

The proliferation of publishing in the early twentieth century gave rise to the expansion of newspaper and magazine audiences. In a contemporary context, letters are generally considered private correspondence between the addressed and addressee. However, this was not the case in the early twentieth century. Letters were often published in newspapers, not only interrupting any distinction between private and public but also, in many instances, giving public voice to those who had been rendered voiceless. As James Gregory attests, "The early stages of the Southern Diaspora unfolded during decades when publishing was king, when newspapers and magazines exerted enormous force in public life…That was part of how the Great Migration came to be Great. The mass movement of African Americans out of the South would have been noteworthy in any age, but in the newspaper-centered early twentieth century, this population relocation triggered a set of very big stories."[32] Newspapers published letters

[32] Gregory, 45.

that provided access to many firsthand accounts of the sentiments that surrounded the Great Migration. These letters and other articles provided insight into the construction of a new identity for a people and a nation.

Black and white presses alike told the story of the Great Migration; however, the narrative differed depending on the narrator and his/her location (north or south). For example, southern black presses contained two main themes: "one of them a biblical reference, the other a warning story directed at the white South."[33] The biblical theme was that of the Exodus and this was a familiar one in African American history. However, the theme took on even greater significance given the literal mass movement of a people. On May 15, 1917, Robert S. Abbot, the publisher of the *Chicago Defender*, a newspaper widely read in both the north and the South, commenced "The Great Northern Drive."[34] The drive's objective is described thusly: "to exhort Southern blacks to come to Chicago, in order to make money and live under the legal benefits of citizenship."[35] In his book, *The Promised Land*, Nicholas Lemann describes Abbott's "invented slogans ('The Flight Out of Egypt') and promoted songs ('Bound for the Promised Land,' 'Going Into Canaan') that pounded home a comparison to the events described in the Book of Exodus for his audience of extremely religious children of slaves."[36] The propaganda found in Abbott's and other newspapers created a narrative for the migration based on

---

[33] Ibid., 47.

[34] Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 16.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

Exodus and was part of a larger tradition of using this motif. Referring to a transcontinental move as opposed to "back to Africa" emigration, those who moved to Kansas during the late nineteenth century were called "Exodusters." Callahan writes: "After the January 1879 anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, black masses left southern Louisiana for Kansas…Benjamin 'Pap' Singleton was recognized as a Moses who called black people to migrate to Kansas by the thousands….Those who followed Singleton's vision of milk and honey in the Midwest came to be called 'Exodusters.'"[37] This use of a religious theme, the Exodus, imparted the migration with meaning beyond the temporal and material ideas of jobs, education, and opportunity. It conveyed divine providence, as well as a connection to a past (both the distant past—that is, the biblical account and the recent past—mainly, freedom from slavery).

The second major theme of Southern black presses was the warning that the loss of a labor force was directly connected to the treatment of the people.[38] The unfair

---

[37] Callahan, 124.

[38] See for example Appendix B7. James Grossman elucidates how labor shortages in the South were one of the effects of the Great Migration. He writes, "With black tenants renting over one-fifth of its farmland in 1910 and black wage laborers working thousands of acres more, Georgia could ill afford massive emigration; by 1923, its bankers were describing the exodus as comparable to Sherman's march to the sea in its damage to agriculture in the state…Mass migration threatened to strip the South of this labor force. 'If the Negroes go,' warned the Montgomery *Advertiser*, 'Where shall we get labor to take their place?' The South had faced this prospect before. In the aftermath of the Civil War, some whites, certain that the freedmen would refuse to work, advocated encouraging immigrants to settle in the region…. 'Black labor is the best labor the South can get,' concluded the Columbia, South Carolina *State* in response to the Great Migration. 'No other would work long under the same conditions.'" James R. Grossman, "Black Labor is the Best Labor: Southern White Reactions, to the Great Migration," in *Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South*, Alferdteen Harrison, ed., 52-3.

treatment of Southern blacks was a major impetus for the migration. The boldness of these warnings varied, as there were often ramifications for such audacious claims and actions. As such, public support of migrating met resistance. Some papers, such as *The Savannah Tribune* and the *Norfolk Journal and Guide* were "two of the region's more stable black-run newspapers. Both cautioned against migration. The fact that the *Tribune*'s business manager was arrested after he helped a group of college students leave Savannah for summer jobs in Connecticut no doubt contributed to that paper's careful editorial policy."[39] Other newspapers—northern African American presses, in particular—used this medium to appeal to the elite whites' conscience in their call for social justice. In both cases, the message was simple: the South risked its own ruin if it did not change.

In the "Promised Land" of the North, white newspapers developed the migration story in various ways, but overwhelmingly, the portrayals were negative. Although some newspapers were sympathetic to the plight of black Americans, the majority portrayed the migration as problematic. Headlines such as "Negro Influx" and "Negro Problem" are examples. Lemann surmises that "The migrants were a health menace; they were responsible for crime waves and vice problems, they would upset labor relations and the political balance of power; they would move into a neighborhoods where they were not wanted and exacerbate racial tensions."[40] While the African American presses' tendency was to highlight the positive attributes of living outside of the South, many white presses represented the migration as a race problem and one that needed to be solved; the

---

[39] Ibid., 46.

[40] Ibid., 47.

resolution was the termination of the influx of blacks into the North. In other words, blacks were not welcomed in the North. Moreover, despite the fact that southern whites moved in large numbers during the Great Migration, the movement is framed as a black event. As such the "race problem," once mostly contained in the South, moves as the Negro moves.

Despite the competing images and often-contradictory stories, the press, and I would suggest the public exchange of information, shaped the narrative of the migration, and its impact should not be underestimated. Gregory surmises that the media and its various strategies, in fact, made the migration momentous. He writes: "The stories helped shape the social atmosphere surrounding the migrants, creating incentives, resources, and challenges that would not have accompanied a less-publicized migration. Together the various sets of newspapers turned the war-era black southern out-migration into a major media spectacle, an event that instantly gained historical import."[41] The media did not simply facilitate the exchange of information, it actively participated in shaping the various ways the migration was portrayed and understood.

During the Great Migration, just as publications proliferated, for the first time, sermons were recorded and distributed throughout the country.[42] The rhetorical prowess

---

[41] Ibid., 53–54.

[42] According to Dolan Hubbard, "The Great Migration coincided with the emerging cultural industry in the United States. 'Race Records' were located at the juncture between black transition from peasant to denizens of the city with its emergent jazz aesthetics…One of the foremost preaching stars of the 'race records' was the Reverend J.M. Gates whose sermon records in the 1920s were exceed in the 'race record' market only by Bessie Smith's blues." "Sermons and Preaching," in *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*, 2nd ed. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005),727. Paul Harvey

characteristic of sermons has long been recognized for its role in shaping Christian identity. Homilies reveal features of the preacher as well as the congregation: their respective worldviews, their ideas, and their concerns. The sermon also participates in social formation. From ethical directives and encouragement to social justice and practical application, sermons are reflections of their time. These principles hold true for sermons delivered during the Great Migration. The homily itself, then, is a site of identity production, specifically Christian identity.

In the United States, where nation and peoplehood are inextricably linked to religion and religious motifs, the sermon contributes significantly to the ways in which people make meaning. In his book *A City Upon a Hill, How Sermons Changed America*, Larry Whitman suggests that "public and historical sermons have erected the temple of civil religion….They have been central participants in the nation's great moral debates."[43] As such, sermons are fertile ground on which to explore Christian identity formation and, in this case, (African) American identity as well.

Sermons have been crucial to black religious identity formation. African American preaching has played a key role in the social and political lives of black

---

similarly observes: "In the 1920s and subsequent decades, talented ministers in both the South and North discovered the art of recording their sermons and then selling them to the black community." Paul Harvey, *Through the Storm, Through the Night: A History of African American Christianity* (Lantham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), 106.

[43] Larry Witham, *A City Upon a Hill: How Sermons Changed the Course of American History* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 2.

Americans.[44] The editors of *Preaching with Sacred Fire* summarize the role of black preaching as follows: "Black preaching has sustained and liberated black people in the sweltering heat of servitude and American oppression."[45] Sermons were more than instructive. In fact, Peter Gomes, theologian and renowned preacher, refers to theme as "an art form." While the sermon addresses "such fundamental human themes as identity, anxiety, desire, fear, greed, love, and death," it also speaks to specific situation of its audience.[46] The homily, then, is interactive in nature, organic, and dynamic.

This rhetorical art form has the potential to act as either a form of resistance or accommodation. In his article "The Sermon as 'Art' of Resistance," Darryl L. Jones explores sermons from slavery alongside the book of Hebrews. He writes that a sermon is "a rhetorical art that has been effectively employed to enable certain subordinate groups to engage in low-profile forms of resistance."[47] In particular, Jones suggests that the slave preacher's use of stories from the Old Testament to illustrate "God's ability to intervene into their condition of slavery and bring about their liberation" can be a helpful

---

[44] Hubbard summarizes the significance of the contribution of black sermons to black identity formation. He writes, "The black sermon is the mother's milk of African American discourse." Hubbard, "Sermons and Preaching," 728.

[45] Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, eds. *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to Present* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010), 1.

[46] Peter J. Gomes, *Strength for the Journey: Biblical Wisdom for Daily Living* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), xiv.

[47] Darryl L. Jones, "The Sermon as 'Art' of Resistance: A Comparative Analysis of the Rhetorics of the African-American Slave Preacher and the Preacher to the Hebrews," *Semeia* 79 (1997), 12.

hermeneutic for understanding how the preacher in the biblical text of Hebrews similarly instructs his audience to preserve in the face of suffering.[48]

The use of the exodus theme that persisted from slavery through the Great Migration demonstrates both the need for liberation and for a past built on the hope that the ancient precedent would continue to deliver. The biblical text was and continues to be used to make meaning in the lives of black Americans. The impact that the sermon has had throughout African American history is clear. The early twentieth century marked the first time sermons that once reached only a local congregation now had the potential to be heard by hundreds of people across the country. During the Great Migration, the circulation of the sermon beyond the church walls transformed many homilies into public correspondence. Heard and read by hundreds, homilies had the potential to shape black religious identity in the early twentieth century; with themes of movement, religion and ways meaning making, and perseverance through suffering, these sermons informed the identity of a people.

Sermons and Letters from the Great Migration

Some of the literature generated during the Great Migration—particularly sermons and letters—illustrate the rhetorically productive ways in which a New Negro identity was conceived and maintained.[49] I use three categories of analysis for this

---

[48] Ibid., 14.

[49] I am interested in the genres of letters and sermons because of my study of Hebrews (a sermon) and 1 Peter (a letter). The criteria that I used for selecting my sampling of letters and sermons were: (1) the use spatial and/or ethnic/racial language or imagery, (2) reference to a context of violence and/or suffering, and (3) attempts to rhetorically construct peoplehood or a national identity. As such, the letters and sermons found in the

literature: (1) religion as a way of making meaning of one's circumstances and/or for interpreting one's place in the world, (2) themes of suffering in a context of violence, and (3) the use of images of spatiality, place and specifically changing spaces or movement. These categories are resonant with themes prominent in Hebrews and 1 Peter, making clear the ways in which diasporic identities are necessarily flexible. For the formation of the New Negro, religion is invoked to negotiate movement, particularly movement to urban spaces. This religious framing also elucidates spatial ambivalences. Moreover, the New Negro identity is created as a response to a context of violence and suffering. Exploring a sampling of the sermons, letters, and essays written during the Great Migration, I suggest that the New Negro motif not only responds to its environment, it also facilitates the creation of a space for change and creativity.[50]

Religion

Significant events in African American history are often explained by utilizing biblical narratives. The theme of exodus was a prominent theme in black American newspapers during the Great Migration; it was also a persistent theme in sermons. In early American history, Puritans and Africans depended heavily on the Exodus narrative to tell their own stories, making religion an inseparable part of the national identity that both groups participated in creating. Black slaves (like the Puritans) envisioned themselves as God's chosen people. Despite their situation, the Exodus narrative provided for slaves a vision of the *possibilities* of the future of freedom. As Albert Raboteau observes, "By appropriating the story of Exodus as their own story, black

---

appendix are not an exhaustive list, but representative of particular ways in which the New Negro identity was constructed from 1900-1930.

Christians articulated their own sense of peoplehood. Exodus symbolized their common history and common destiny."[51] The African slaves were a nation within a nation.

> Nation language emerged in African American political discourse as a synonym for peoplehood, a way of grounding solidaristic efforts in an understanding of America's racial, hegemonic order. From about 1800 to the early 1840s blacks generally understood nation language in these terms: the sense of peoplehood that emerged as persons drew on biblical typology, particularly the Exodus story, to make sense of and to struggle against the racist practices of white America.[52]

In the nineteenth century, exodus motifs were used in a myriad of ways. As the cultural climate in the country changed, African American self-understanding through exodus motifs evolved as well. The end of the nineteenth century gave way to the ideas of a literal exodus. Some African Americans were petitioning their fellow Africans to return to Africa, while others suggesting geographically relocating within the United States.

The Exodus narrative was employed to describe freedom and movement, and perhaps more importantly, to express resistance to American hegemony. In *Exodus and Revolution*, Michael Walzer interprets the Exodus story as "a paradigm of revolutionary politics."[53] Walzer suggests: "The Exodus is a story, a big story one that became part of the cultural consciousness of the West—so that a range of political events (different events, but a particular range) have been located and understood within the narrative

---

[51] Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 33.

[52] Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. *Exodus! Religion, Race and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 54-55.

[53] Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 7.

frame that it provides. This story made it possible to tell other stories."[54] The Exodus story provides the model for a once-and-for-all struggle, a confrontation that, in the end, leads to the transformation of the world. Revolutionary politics, as defined by Walzer, "in its full sense, begins only after the collapse or near collapse of state power. But we cannot conclude from this that men and women have nothing at all to do with their own liberation."[55] Walzer claims: "Without the new ideas of oppression and corruption, without the sense of injustice, without moral revulsion, neither Exodus nor revolution would be possible."[56] Walzer explains how the Exodus narrative's use mobilizes people for change. A people needed to have a sense of both a past and a future, a story to tell, and a means for accomplishing this—the Exodus narrative provided the means to do so.

The Great Migration was frequently referred to as an exodus; portrayed as a journey out of Egypt into a Promised Land.[57] In his book, *The Second Exodus*, The Revered C. M. Tanner of Allen Temple AME Church in Atlanta, predicted that more than one million African Americans would leave the South by the summer of 1917. Of the

---

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., 49.

[56] Ibid., 40.

[57] Additional examples of the Great Migration being referred to as an exodus include: "Exodus Costing State $27,000,000," Journal of the American Bankers Association 16 no 1 (July 1923): 53; Carter G. Woodson's 1918 essay entitled "The Exodus During the World War;" and in 1923 a clergyman in the Methodist Episcopal Church wrote: "my observation and experience lead me to state that the exodus is still on and will no doubt continue gradually toward the North and West for some years…Many churches have depleted memberships because of the exodus." Milton Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*: *African American Religion and The Great Migration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 76.

migration, he proclaimed: "I cannot believe that it is other than one of God's ways to solve the vexed problem of race adjustment."[58] He continued, "The scripture is being fulfilled every day in our very sight, and it is certainly the intention of divine providence to make our people in this movement profit by it."[59] His attempt to "invest the Great Migration with transhistorical meaning points us to the religious dimension of the exodus."[60] The exodus narrative connects the past and the present. As such, the divine protection and provision that are associated with past exoduses would be available to this new chosen people, to these migrants. Exodus, past and present, was as much about the formation of peoplehood as it was about revolt and revolution. By appropriating the language of the Exodus, the meaning of the migration incorporated ideas of economics and politics. Milton Sernett describes: "the exodus from the South during the Great Migration was tantamount to a religious pilgrimage out of the wilderness into the Promised Land." Preachers and lay people alike utilized the Bible to interpret the migration. For many, the North and West represented a "promised land" or a "land of hope" following the Exodus narrative motifs. In this way, the Exodus configures both origin and destination. An exodus creates a diaspora, a divinely ordered diaspora.

More than a leader, an exodus needs divine providence. In fact, given that the Great Migration did not have a leader, a Moses if you will, the Exodus was often

---

[58] Milton Sernett, "Re-Readings: The Great Migration and the Bible" in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, Vincent Wimbush, ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 449. Sernett notes that the book was unpublished.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

portrayed as divinely appointed. Divine intervention was necessary to effect change – to improve the conditions of God's (chosen) people. In the August 11, 1917 edition of the *Dallas Express*, a writer expresses such an opinion. This is an appeal to Christian values as the reason for equal treatment of black Christians, particularly by white Christians (see Appendix B 12). The writers states: "Who knows, then, what the providence of God is in this exodus…Therefore, let this country, the South in particular, reform its customs, practices and habits of race prejudice and give the Negro a square deal and conform to the Christian religion in its dealings with the Negro."[61] The petition for the country to "reform" its treat of black Americans and "conform to the Christian religion" makes an appeal to a common tradition. The writer constructs the Negro as an American and a Christian. The writer continues, "Many of the Negroes who are betaking their abode to the North and the West immediately assimilate their new conditions and demean themselves as good citizens such that will reflect creditably upon the great mass of Negroes who will indefinitely remain in the South."[62] The new Negro was more than a reflection (positive or negative) on southern Negroes; they were indelibly connected. Black Americans in the North, South and West were all citizens. Despite their various locations, they remained connected. It was clearly understood that the fate of those who remained in the South were connected to those who had moved. However, religion did more than give the migrants and the movement a vocabulary and narrative, it also enabled migrants to appeal to a higher moral standard in constructing the New Negro as a

---

[61] Malaika Adero, ed. *Up South: Stories, Studies, and Letters of This Century's Black Migrations* (New York: The New Press, 1993), xviii-xix.

[62] Ibid.

citizen and equal to white Americans (Christians). And yet not all Americans are Christians, and moreover, not all Christianity is similarly expressed. As such, the Great Migration created a space for creation of new religious expressions. These diverse religious expressions contested a New Negro identity that was seemingly Christian.

One of the products of the Great Migration was the diversity of religious expressions that developed. Immigrants practiced Christian and non-Christian religions. The North witnessed the creation of "the Moorish Science Temple, the Lost-Found Nation of Islam, the International Peace Mission Movement, and the All Nations Pentecostal Church. Some were Christian or quasi-Christian; others were outside the Christian tradition but nonetheless attracted black churchgoers."[63] The creation of new religions is also an example of creative new ways of being, particularly in urban spaces, that occurred during the Great Migration. For example, the Moorish Science Temple, an Islamic sect that incorporates Christian and Buddhist thought in its practices, is an example of how the "new" remains reliant upon old and other in its formation. This religious expression brought together various traditions. Northern immigrants, who in many ways epitomized the New Negro, chose to leave Christianity altogether. Others left mainline denomination for various forms of Christianity.

In the North, "storefront" churches and "religious entrepreneurs" presented yet another an alternative to traditional Christianity. These so-called "sanctified churches" emphasized the significance of the Holy Spirit. Holiness was a fundamental characteristic of this religious movement. The Holiness/Pentecostal churches emerged from this

---

[63] Harvey, *Through the Storm, Through the Night,* 88.

movement of "spiritual renewal and transformation in the early twentieth century [which] emphasized being 'filled with the spirit' after conversion and expressing their rapture through bodily trances, speaking in tongues, enthusiastic music."[64] William Joseph Seymour's sermon "Receive Ye the Holy Ghost"[65] is an example of the important tenets of this movement. In addition to highlighting the "brotherhood" those who are holy have with Jesus, Seymour simultaneously affirms equality among those who are baptized with the Holy Spirit. He asserts, "But, praise our God, He is now given and being poured out upon all flesh. All races, nations and tongues are receiving the baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire, according to the prophecy of Joel"[66](see Appendix A 3). Many sanctified churches had women leaders.[67] Still, Spirit-filled churches were criticized for encouraging "emotional enthusiasm that 'compensated' for the lack of any real social power in the world. Black religion, they charged, had been depoliticized."[68] These charges came from traditional/mainline black churches against whom similar charges

---

[64] Ibid.

[65] Simmons and Thomas note that this sermon resulted in Seymour's disassociation with the Los Angeles Holiness Church. It was also a "source of inspiration for C. H. Mason and many others for the powerful Pentecostal and Holiness movements that have developed within African American culture" (Simmons and Thomas, 375).

[66] Ibid., 376.

[67] See: Deidre Helen Crumbley, *Saved and Sanctified: The Rise of a Storefront Church in Great Migration Philadelphia* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2012). In this book Crumbly profiles the founder of The Church, Mother Brown, as well as other leaders, such as Elder Hannah Nichols. Also, Anthea D. Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). Butler explores how women in this denomination created spaces for leadership even when none were afforded to them.

[68] Ibid., 101.

were levied.[69] The sanctified churches represented diversity of within Christianity. Religion in the North differed from that in the South. With new religious options, non-Christian options, migration created a space for a variety of beliefs and diverse expression of these beliefs. So was the New Negro, a Christian and if so, what kind of Christian? The trope was flexible enough to contain these diversities.

The differences between the mainline and sanctified churches underscored the socio-economic disparities within the African American community that haunted the New Negro. Harvey observes the following about the Pentecostal churches: "These churches were largely composed of working-class African Americans who were alienated by the perceived stuffiness of the middle-class worshippers who dominated the established churches…alternative religious traditions-especially storefront and Sanctified congregations—attracted growing numbers of working-class and migrant churchgoers who sought out places where spiritual enthusiasm could be expressed freely."[70] The

---

[69] Accusations of the church having the wrong focus were applied to churches in the North and the South alike. Concerning churches in the north, in 1907, Richard R. Wright, Jr. "concluded that only a few congregations had 'attacked the problem of real city Negroes' and that large churches in urban areas had grown 'not because of social work, but almost invariably because of the personality of the pastors and their peculiar method of preaching.'"

Writing about rural churches, "*The Negro's Church* by Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph William Nicholson is another example of the post-Great Migration application of the instrumentalist understanding of the church as the benchmark of practical Christianity. Mays could not excuse the overemphasis on individual salvation and damnation that dominated the eschatological orientation of rural black preaching. 'The country preacher,' he wrote, 'runs along lines of the magical and other-worldliness with scarcely a dissenting voice.' By contrast one could find clergy in the cities who were attempting to show that 'religion has also real practical value here in this world.' 'In the country,' Mays concluded, 'religion is more of an opiate and an escape from life'" (Sernett, 454, 457).

[70] Ibid., 102.

diversity of religious expression illumines the creative expression of migrants who found new ways of making meaning of their lives, as well as highlights the complexity of this New Negro identity and exposes its united facade.

Diversity and freedom in religious expression changed the face of religion in the United States. While some places of worship focused on the future and emphasized "other worldly" spaces, there were others who supported the migration by providing guidance and practical assistance to the migrants. For some religious leaders, the Great Migration proliferated unstable and uncertain circumstances. Sernett observes: "Their people were being scattered across the land like a 'wandering Zion'…Many black religious leaders believed that the Great Migration posed a threat to the institutional vitality of their denominations unless a way could be found to stem the diaspora of their members and their loss to others. The Great Migration could prove to be a blessing in disguise, but only if the black churches aided the hand of providence by regathering their scattered Zion and rebuilding anew in the Promised Land."[71] Religious leaders of mainline denominations were often part of the black American elite. In some cases, the migration posed a threat to their social status. As such, the urban environments to which many migrants moved were not perceived as a promised land, but instead were portrayed as cradles of immorality.

Religion was invoked to negotiate the move to an urban environment. In churches across the South there were cautionary tales of the moral deprivation of the city. Parishioners were exhorted to return or stay as though their souls depended on their

---

[71] Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land,* 121.

physical location. In this 1913 editorial, the writer expresses concerns for those who move to the North without a firm plan. The writer cautions would-be migrants to seek the guidance and protection of a church prior to moving. The writer states: "Moreover, the city with its allurements is no place for our people who are not accustomed to city life. Many Negro boys and girls who have otherwise been innocent in the South will be victims of all sorts of schemes and pitfalls and influences for degradation in the cities. It is well, therefore, when our people contemplate moving North, before they start, that they get in touch with some of the pastors of the churches of whatever denominations in the city where they expect to go…"[72] (see Appendix B 3). This letter demonstrates the urban/rural dichotomy veiled in the Great Migration discourse. The South was rural and the North/West was urban. Urban spaces were often depicted as morally corrupt and at the same time filled with opportunities. The ambivalence of the city comes to the fore in the exchanges of these letters, sermons, and other correspondences.

For some, the stories of migration were more cautionary tale than triumphant entry into a land flowing with milk and honey. In a letter published in the *Chicago Defender*, an "unknown party but member of the race," solicits clarification from the newspaper concerning the information they are receiving in church about the North that

---

[72] Ibid., 74. Others similarly expressed concerns of the moral deprivation of the city. "Newark's Hamilton Travis, worried that his southern kin would become spiritually corrupted by city life, urged united action so that migrants might 'maintain the religious standards that are always a part of the lives of our people.' Fearing that thousands seeking their El Dorado in the North would arrive blind to the realities of discrimination, Travis warned that 'the Land of Promise does not accept the black man in all times and in all places.' In Philadelphia, black clergy cooperated with the NAACP in combating the influence of saloons, gambling dens, and other places of vice." Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 121.

seems contrary to what the reader has read and heard concerning the migration. The writer explains:

> The Preacher of the Big Zion Church is in the pulpit preaching to the members of the Race telling them not to come North, that they cannot work for those people up there and they'd better stay here. He is telling them when the train puts you off in the North you all have got no place to put us and nothing for us to eat till we can get something, are part of them that are gone there have frozen to death for the want of fire. He said he saw it in the paper…I heard some talk of the prejudices saying that all the members of the Race should not come North. Before they would stand for it they would have blood. Well, that shows no freedom and if they are going to do that, it shows that we are still under the bonds of slavery. (see Appendix B1)

Some churches construed the North as dangerous, a place to be suspicious of and a place to avoid. The writer's inquiry, however, demonstrates that he/she is also suspicious of the information the preacher is giving its congregants. The importance of communication for the migration is elucidated by this example, as is the ambivalence of the city. The one who controls the information is the one who has the power to create the perception. Given the wide distribution of information during this time, it became easier to challenge (religious) authority, especially since it could be done publicly, but anonymously. Religion and religious themes did not only make clear the ambiguous construction of urban spaces (and therefore, the North), it also elucidated the perilous context in which decisions to migrate were being made.

The hesitancy to stay and the hesitancy to leave the South point to the complex cultural context of the New Negro. Lacy Kirk Williams' sermon "God Ahead for 1926" paints a picture of a future filled with uncertainty for a people who are acquainted with suffering. Beginning with the text of Hebrews 11:8–10, the sermon uses the occasion of the new year to encourage its audience of God's abiding presence despite past suffering

and an unknown future (see Appendix A 7). Simmons and Thomas observe, "The text and sermon have strong migrant themes of God's comfort in the midst of travel, transition, and change."[73] Three noteworthy themes are found in William's homily. First, Williams engrafts his audience into God's family. It is this genealogy that enables the audience to embrace love and not fear. Given their past and their hostile environment, the listeners appear to have every reason to be discouraged and apprehensive about the future. However, God's presence facilitates a "sustaining grace." Next, Williams depicts home as a fluid concept. It is more than an emotive expression or a physical location. Home is represented as an intangible concept that connects heaven and earth. Finally, this connection between heaven and earth reinforces a relationship between the past and the future. One's pilgrimage is mapped against eternity, not in time. It is this focus on eternity that allows one to envision one's true home: a mansion in heaven made by God. One can endure the troubles of the present when s/he has this assurance of an endless future where pain and failure are impossible. Williams concludes: "Soon your pilgrimage between two eternities will be ended…For you who are tired, footsore and depressed; for you who are lonely ones not remembered with a gift by anyone at Christmas; for you who are homeless; for you who have been looking upward the past years through blinding tears; for you who have the bitter memory of sweet homes dissolved by the cruel blows of death; for you who trust Him, He is fitting up your mansions. And you shall get them, you shall win, shall conquer, for 'The Lord, He it is that goeth before thee.'"[74] It would

[73] Simmons and Thomas, 476.

[74] Ibid., 476–83.

seem unlikely that a minister would encourage his parishioner to leave. It is not clear that Williams is doing so. However, the thesis of his message is that God goes before you, in time and in eternity. As such, the New Negro's home is neither in the North nor the South; in both of these physical locations, trouble may accompany him/her. Religion provides the framework for creating a New Negro who can negotiate such spatial ambivalences by attempting to transcend them. The New Negro is "courageous and faithful" despite his circumstances or location. He is also a visionary; the ability to see a better future directly correlates with the ability to discern his life as part of a divine plan.

Theme of Suffering

The identity of the New Negro was negotiated in a precarious environment. Lynchings in the South and the race riots in the North attest to the tumultuous reality for blacks in the United States in the early twentieth century. In an editorial published on July 3, 1917, in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* a writer describes mob violence against a black man (see Appendix B7). He writes: "The East St. Louis affair, as I saw it, was a man hunt, conducted on a sporting basis, though with anything but the fair play which is the principle of sport… 'Get a nigger,' was the slogan, and it was varied by the recurrent cry, 'Get another!' It was like nothing so much as the holiday crown with thumbs turned down, in the Roman Coliseum, except that here the shouters were their own gladiators, and their own wild beasts."[75] The comparison of mob violence to Roman gladiators underscores the event as a spectator fueled public murder. Such spectacles served to

[75] Eric Arnesen, *Black Protest and the Great Migration: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2003), 83.

remind black Americans that their mere presence could result in violence or even death. The expectation is that this type of violence would occur in the South[76], (see Appendix B9) however, St. Louis and other Northern and Western cities demonstrated that no place was safe for the Negro, new or old.

Violence was clearly a significant motivating factor for migrants. In *Buffalo American* on July 22, 1920, a writer declared: "There is another mighty exodus of the Negro from the South. The chief cause this time is not economic, although practically all who come are able to get work, but the movement is due to an epidemic of intimidation and lynching."[77] A. Philip Randolph's construction of the New Negro depicts a hospitable North over against a malevolent South. He states: "As the Negro migrates North and West he secures political power to help himself in his new abode and at the same time to strike a blow for his less favored brothers in wicked 'old Dixie'."[78] The New Negro was formed over/against images of tortured bodies. This identity was political; participation in the political process served as a catalyst for change and citizenship provides the foundation for fighting against other injustices. If the New Negro is enfranchised, he is an officially recognized and sanctioned identity in this nation. However, the persistent presence of violence in the North and West undid the image of a promised land. The dichotomy of North versus South and all that these geographies signified (the South was rural, underdeveloped, and violent; the North was urban,

---

[76] In July 1918 editorial in the Messenger, describes the South as the "land of the lynching bee and home of the slave." While this is true, the North was not free of violence.

[77] Ibid., 189–90.

[78] Ibid., 107. (See also Appendix B9)

progressive and inclusive) are deconstructed by the ways in which both characteristics are found in both locations.[79]

The context of violence, in both subtle and distinct ways, is ever-present in the construction of the New Negro. One of Charles Albert Tindley's best-known sermons, "Heaven's Christmas Tree," not only "depicts the fruits of the Holy Spirit as ornaments" but also clarifies that such fruit is produced as a result of great suffering.[80] In this sermon, Tindley exhorts: "I see another package higher still; it's marked Peace for the Troubled Soul…the apostles all suffered great afflictions and most of them martyrdom…there is a promise of sweet peace to all the children of God…when these heavy burdens and tight straps shall have been taken off your heart and from your soul you will shout in the vigor of the new morning with life and joy of happy childhood in the land that knows no sorrow."[81] The gift, or package, of peace is given to those who are suffering, even those who suffer to the death. Death brings peace. However, Tindley portrays death as a monster. He continues: "On this top-limbed package are the words Home for the Homeless…That dreaded monster death has carried your loved ones to the grave; your homes are broken up and you are homeless wanderers." (see Appendix A5). The land that knows no sorrow is neither in the North, South, or the West: It is otherworldly. The heavenly focus undergirds an exhortation to "bear your cross and endure your pain." It is widely acknowledged that lynching victims were referred to as "strange fruit." Moreover,

---

[79] The Red Summer, as we have seen in Chapter 1, is an example of the violence throughout the country.

[80] This sermon is dated around 1913. Simmons and Thomas, 468.

[81] Ibid. (See Appendix A5)

these victims were hung from trees. To be sure, for his audience, the themes of suffering and trees would have conjured images of lynching (as well as Jesus' crucifixion). Nonetheless, black Americans invoked the cross as an image of freedom and redemption.[82] Shifting the focus from the temporal to the eternal enabled black Americans to experience pain as temporary. Focusing on aspects of "otherworldliness" enables one to endure the suffering of this world and can be seen as a survival mechanism and not simply as misplaced or misguided motivation. Spatially, the sermon describes an upward (Northern) climb to freedom. While the New Negro image did not outright reject such an otherworldly focus, it critiqued it as being misguided. Still, religion provided a context for attempting to understand suffering.

In addition to religion, other frameworks were employed to attempt to make meaning of the suffering of black Americans. Mordecai Wyatt Johnson similarly suggests that there should be "contentment with suffering." In his August 1924 sermon "Work, Business, and Religion" Johnson asserts the interconnected of work and religion. In fact, he declares they are one and the same (see Appendix A4). He asserts: "My friends, it is such good news that slaves who have been living under the worst conditions in the world have discovered it, and many of them have been content to suffer in slavery by seeing the glory of hard work. There is nothing wrong with common work – the truest end of work

[82] For black people, Cone writes: "The cross was God's critique of power – white power – with powerless love, snatching victory out of defeat." He continues: "In that era, the lynching tree joined the cross as the most emotionally charged symbols in the African American community – symbols that represented both death and the promise of redemption, judgment and the offer of mercy, suffering and the power of hope" James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011). 2-3.

and not the accidental end of it – because God made everyday work and business."[83] Johnson's message about the interconnectedness of work and religion was delivered amid concerns about making quick profits and the growing appeal associated with manufacturing jobs (over agricultural jobs) that were motivation for migrating. By highlighting "the glory of hard work" Johnson sought to counter the conception of slavery and, by extension, agricultural work as demeaning and insignificant. It was not only important work, but it is praiseworthy. Yet, because he lauded the work of the slaves without acknowledging the conditions in which the slaves were forced to work, Johnson's extolling of "contentment with suffering" requires further interrogation. The context of one's work, religion, and life must be examined. Is the glory found in the work only or also in the suffering? I suggest that there is no glory in suffering that demeans and destroys, and still I must acknowledge that this kind of suffering was part of the construction of the New Negro identity. Recall that the New Negro was a proud man proud of his race. This necessity of pride is reflected in Johnson's message. However, under the surface I detect issues of socioeconomic status that is reflected in the work he did. Despite these differences, the New Negro shared the pervasive and persistent presence of violence and suffering. It was this context of this brutality that precipitated the desire to move.

Movement/Space

Given the significance of the migration, one of the prominent images in black sermons in the early twentieth century was that of trains—one of the ways by which

[83] Ibid, 418-21.

migrants escaped the South. The train represented more than a mode of transportation; it was a multivalent image. While the train could be the conduit to a new life, in numerous sermons preached in the early twentieth century it could also lead to a path of destruction. The metaphorical train described in Rev. C. C. Lovelace's sermon "The Wounds of Jesus"[84] transcends time and space (see Appendix A2). In this message Lovelace describes two trains—one that goes to Calvary and one that goes to Jesus' "beatific throne." Traveling through Christian history, some passengers get off at Calvary, where the train is derailed, and escape condemnation. The train not only transverses time (present, past, and future), it also moves through spaces (the Jordan River, Calvary, Heaven). Spatiality is important to the message. In fact, it is the message - location determines one's status. One must know which train to ride and where to get off. In this particular sermon, the movement through space connotes a conversion from sinner to Christian. Those who get off at Calvary are Christians. Place is integral for forming a Christian identity. The "two trains of time" meet at the place of judgment. So while, one train arrives at salvation, it is clear that one also leads to damnation.

In some sermons, the train symbolized moral deprivation. For example, Reverend J.M. Gates, described by Simmons and Thomas as "the most prolific black sermonizer of the early 1900s,"[85] recorded a sermon titled "Hell Bound Express Train" in October 1927 (see Appendix A1). This sermon was "emblematic of the use of the metaphor of a

---

[84] Zora Neale Hurston also records this sermon, "The Wounds of Jesus" (May 3, 1929), in her book *The Sanctified Church*. The sermon is by Rev C. C. Lovelace in Eau Gallie, Florida.

[85] Simmons and Thomas, 390. They conclude that the popularity of this sermon "spawned sermons by others that contained similar titles and ideas."

train."[86] In particular, it portrayed urban life as antithetical to a pious living. Gates declared: "All aboard for the hell bound express train. It makes some stops…She's going lighting speed though State Street in Chicago, Illinois, and down Taylor Street in Detroit Michigan, and onto Harlem, New York through Harris up to the burning city of hell. I can hear the damnation passengers when they cry: *Woe is me*."[87] This train contains passengers who engage in sinful behavior. The train begins in the South and ends in the city of hell (it is seemingly located in the north). The literal northward bound train was thought by many to be a way to the promised land; this metaphorical train instead takes them to a place of damnation. This image of the train is found repeatedly in sermons, and the message is clear—one must be a discerning passenger. The figure of a train underscores the significance of place and movement in constructing identity and the dependence of one on the other.

Spatiality is important for identity formation. Vernon Jones' sermon "Transfigured Moments" employs the image of a mountain in order to move his audience to a different vantage point and thusly a different perspective. Like many of Jones' messages, "Transfigured Moments" encourages his audience to seek justice (see Appendix A6).[88] Jones declares that one's position determines one's perspective. In

---

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Simmons and Thomas write, "Publication of the sermon in 1926 in Joseph Fort Newton's Best Sermons, along with sermons of great white preachers such as Reinhold Niebuhr, Harry Emerson Fosdick, and Henry Sloane Coffin, increased Johns' already growing stature among blacks; his preaching genius coupled with his vociferous fight for social justice led some of the future leaders of the civil rights movement to seek Johns out as a mentor" (Simmons and Thomas, 402).

order for justice to become a reality, one first had to envision justice. According to Jones, a person can only envision justice after changing his or her perspective; one must soar to the heights in order to see change. In his message of equality, Jones develops the image of ordinary people who can be transformed and transfigured—people who, like the "Hebrew people," are "members of a despised race, and of the remnant of a subjected and broken nation." The similarity to black Americans' plight would have been clear to his audience. Jones is clear that changing one's perspective does not necessarily entail changing one's occupation or physical location. Yet, his spatial language (up there, on the heights, on the mountain top) insinuates the importance of geography to God's vision for the past and present. The Mount of Transfiguration for this audience is not necessarily Washington DC, Chicago, or Harlem, where one might expect to hear the call of change exclaimed. Instead, it could be found in each individual's ability to create "a mountaintop/transfiguration experience" in his or her unique location. Everyone's perspective could be elevated no matter where she or he was located.

Spatiality not only clarified God's vision, but it was also employed to envision a just future for black Americans. The New Negro's search for justice and equality would require knowledge of the past in order to see their current situation as participating in the transformation of society and to understand that these acts of transfiguration would result in the promised vision of the future. Recall the epigraph, "The New Negro is *privy to his past, understanding of the present, unafraid of the future."*[89] Justice and equality were lofty ideals that needed to be grounded in reality.

---

[89] Gates and Jarrett, 149.

Many of the letters written and published during the Great Migration made real the desire for a home and better living and works conditions. The imaginary spaces described in these sermons are supplanted by the real places in these letters (see Appendix B1). One writer states: "Being desirous of leaving the South for the beterment [sic] of my condition generaly [sic] and seeking a Home somewhere in Ill' Chicago or some other propserious [sic] town…I am informed by the Chicago Defender which has for its purpose of the uplifiting of my race."[90] While this writer searches for a Northern home, an editorial in the Fort Worth Record in July 21, 1917, declares he is at home in the South (see Appendix B6). He writes: "The self-respecting Negro throughout the South that owns his home, his farm, his ranch, having his truck, garden growing his fruit orchid, are here and are here to stay. They are not moving, they are not thinking about going north; they have no dream in that direction. It is a mistaken idea that the good Negroes of this country who are worth anything, who are willing to work and make an honest living, will even leave their homes. The South is our home."[91] He ends with an appeal to trust God. He concludes, "We must have patience, wait and trust God and work until God in His own way will unravel the great bulk of ignorance that we are so heavily burdened with. Those who want to go north without a dime, without railroad fare thinking they are so much loved, let them go."[92]These various definitions of home challenge the notion that all black Americans in the South aspired to leave. While some

[90] Arnesen, 65.

[91] Adero, 140–41.

[92] Ibid.

vehemently proclaimed that the South belonged to the Negro and the Negro in the South, others left with no desire to return (see Appendix B11) and all were part of the new Negro identity.[93] It is clear that spatiality informed the construction of the New Negro identity. Portrayed as an urban and Northern identity over against a rural and Southern one, the New Negro, in fact reflected ambivalence to urban life.

An ambivalence to urban spaces is notable, as migrants were forced to reside in *particular* urban spaces. Carole Marks observes: "Migrants were directed to specific industrial centers, industries, and jobs."[94]The migration not only meant the Negro went from living in rural to urban spaces, but it also changed occupational concentrations from agricultural to industrial. The New Negro, however, was confined to particular jobs and places. In Albany, New York where tensions rose concerning the growing number of blacks in the city, a solution was proposed. Sernett writes:

> In order to sell the concept of residential segregation, the realtors advised, 'Call a meeting of the Negro preachers – for the progress of the city. A Negro zone should be diplomatically established with the cooperation of the Negro clergy, who in turn would be able to increase many times the size of their congregations.' The Albany plan was never formally adopted, but in that city and across the urban industrial North, African American migrants from the South

---

[93] "When asked by a reporter of the *Journal Survey* in 1919, one migrant replied, "Miss, if I had the money I would go South and digup my fathers' and my mothers' bones and bring them up to this country (Philadelphia). I am forty-nine years old and these six weeks I have spent here are the first weeks in my life of peace and comfort." Carole Marks, "The Social and Economic Life of Southern Blacks during the Migration," in *Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South*, Alferdteen Harrison, ed., 48.

[94] Marks, 46. She continues: Between 1910 and 1920 for example, New York experienced a 66 percent increase in its black population; Chicago a 148 percent increase; Detroit a 611 percent increase; and Philadelphia a 500 percent increase. By 1920, almost 40 percent of the black population in the North was concentrated in these four cities."

> discovered that life in the Promised Land was but one more chapter in the odyssey of a pilgrim people.[95]

While the plan to create a ghetto in Albany may not have been adopted, the model was implemented in other urban locations.[96] That is, the New Negro had to be put in a particular place.

Despite the constraints and confinements, black Americans made the spaces they occupied their own. As Gregory describes it, the newspapers told of "a *space* where African Americans controlled their own social life, a city within a city, a black metropolis."[97] Harlem and Chicago were examples of such a black metropolis. The space, more often than not, was a relegated place. Much like the Alexandrian Jews I will discuss in the chapter 3, the negotiation of identity becomes necessary when a hegemonic system confronts the migrant, and space is one of the ways identity is affirmed. This space facilities the negotiation of identity.

In summary, in the sermons and letters that I examined, I identified the interconnectedness of religion, nation, and place. The appeal to religion for meaning making, the physical movement and refusal to move, as well as the threat of violence exemplify ways that the New Negro identity is constructed, contested, and responds to its

---

[95] Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land,* 85.

[96] As a result, ghettoization is strongly correlated to the Great Migration. Grossman concurs: "Conventionally considered part of the history of northern urban ghettos and race relations, the Great Migration has usually been viewed from a northern vantage point, with either an institutional orientation or an emphasis on the migrants as a 'social problem.'" James R. Grossman, "Black Labor is the Best Labor: Southern White Reactions to the Great Migration," in *Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South*, Alferdteen Harrison, ed., 51.

[97] Gregory, 52.

environment. Religion provides a framework that assisted in shaping the New Negro. Movement highlights the ambivalence of urban spaces and the desire to change one's circumstances. The violence that accompanied this new construction—in the ghettos of the north and the farms in the South—amplifies the context of omnipresent suffering ensuring that the trope remained agile.

Conclusion

It is the sheer physicality of movement, such as this migration, that reminds of how (racial) oppression is defined, at least in part, as strictures on movement. From the hold of a slave ship to a plantation—slavery and "passes"; free blacks and curfews, share cropping, chain gangs, and ghettoization as a result of migration, black American identity has been shaped by its ability or inability to move.[98] The African American migratory experience embodies an ambivalence concerning issues of hope, belonging, and autonomy. And yet, perhaps most importantly, migration enabled change. Isabel Wilkerson points to the Great Migration as a "turning point in history." She writes: "It would transform urban America and recast the social and political order of every city it touched. It would force the South to search its soul and finally to lay aside a feudal caste system. It grew out of the unmet promises made after the Civil War and, through the sheer weight of it, helped pushed the country toward the civil rights revolutions of the 1960s."[99] In other words, equality was made possible and justice seemed achievable

---

[98] I am grateful to Dr. Lillian Edwards for this observation.

[99] Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (Vintage: New York, 2010), 9.

simply because people "moved." Moreover, movement impacted identity formation and negotiation.

The Great Migration significantly influenced the ways both African American and American peoplehood was conceived. The Great Migration had more than a geographical impact on the country, it impacted and challenged its culture. Wilkerson describes the actions of the migrants as "universal and distinctly American." Despite the language of "nation within a nation" and a "city within a city," black American in the early twentieth century desired to be understood as fully American, having all the rights and privileges associated with their citizenship. I contend that the Great Migration should be understood within the context of all migrations. One must understand the motivating factors that result in mass movements. Concerning the Great Migration, Wilkerson writes: "Their migration was a response to an economic and social structure not of their making. They did what humans have done for centuries when life became untenable…What binds these stories together was the back-against-the-wall, reluctant yet hopeful search for something better, any place but where they were. They did what human beings looking for freedom, throughout history, have done. They left."[100] This migration resulted in the creation of a diasporic identity, the New Negro.

Just as we are to understand the Great Migration in the context of all migration, this diasporic identity should be examined within the context of other diasporic identities. As I have stated, diasporic identity attempts to transcend dangerous binaries and create something new. The New Negro is an example. Eric Watts explains the contribution and

[100] Ibid, 15.

possibilities of the trope of the New Negro thusly:

> Since its emergence, the trope of the New Negro has shaped and animated diverse and divergent interpretative acts. As a metaphor, it refracted ways of seeing and knowing, encouraging alternative discursive and material associations and social configuration; it, thus, reveals itself to be an important and conflicted "time and place" to witness and explore ways of fusing together and pulling apart identifications. The New Negro drew into its gravitational field forms of discourse that could be reinvented and rearticulated as, in essence, not existing before, as the arrival of the unfamiliar that promised rebirth and renewal. The New Negro asserted blackness enveloped in an aura of possibility, sometimes of radical innovation; this was so because as a trope it was capable of performing the sort of masterful transfigurations one witnesses as metaphor morphs into metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. [101]

The mass movement of a people created a space for the negotiation of an identity and served as the impetus for social change. Diasporic identity at the same time celebrates its novelty and concomitantly subsumes it by relying so heavily on the past to create it; such is the irony of the New Negro. Identity is a fragile construct, and diasporic identity, as the letters and sermons examined in the next chapter will reveal, formed and challenged through discourse, is replete with transformative potential.[102]

---

[101] Eric King Watts, *Healing the Hurt: Rhetoric, Aesthetics, and Politics of the New Negro Movement*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012), 2.

[102] Eric Watts similarly observes contestation not only in the formation of the identity, but the role that art played in the formation of the New Negro. Watts writes: "Artistic and intellectual works of the New Negro, therefore, are treated as historically contingent 'places' staging struggles amid competing interests regarding the very idea of a 'New Negro.'" Eric King Watts, *Healing the Hurt: Rhetoric, Aesthetics, and Politics of the New Negro Movement*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012), 2.

CHAPTER 2

THE NEW NEGRO: THE SEARCH FOR A PLACE TO CALL HOME

The New Negro is here. Perhaps no more courageous than the Old Negro who dropped his shackles in 1863, and fought against ignorance, propaganda, lethargy and persecution, but better informed, privy to his past, understanding of the present, unafraid of the future.

George S. Schuyler, "The Rise of the Black Internationale"

The New Negro was a literary trope that reached its height of popularity during the Great Migration. Closely associated with the Harlem Renaissance, the 1925 anthology that bore its name showcased the culture and talent of black Americans.[1] However, its main purpose was to (re)present the Negro. Black Americans were characterized as an uneducated, docile and slavish people with no culture. The "new" Negro, however, was an educated and proud advocate, even fighter for equality.

As the epigraph suggests, the New Negro was portrayed as someone/something different than the Old Negro. This identity was formed over against "the image in popular American imagination of black as devoid of all the characteristics that supposedly separated the lower forms of human life from the higher forms."[2] That is, the New Negro was fully human and fully present and demanded to be recognized on his terms. The New Negro identity, a popular trope of this time period, represents an attempt to reconstruct

---

[1] *The New Negro*. *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, Alaine Locke, ed. with Introduction by Arnold Rampersad. New York: Touchstone, 1925, 1992.

[2] Henry Lewis Gates, Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett, eds. *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, African American Culture, 1892–1938* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 3. They continue: "If various Western cultures constructed blackness as an absence, then various generations of black authors have attempted to reconstruct blackness as a presence."

black American identity; what was old is made new. The trope functioned solely to re/deconstruct a people. Paradoxically, the construction of the new was still very much dependent on that of the old. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett observe, "The figure, moreover, combined implicitly both an eighteenth-century vision of utopia with a nineteenth-century idea of progress to form a black fin-de-siècle dream of an unbroken unhabituated, neological self…A paradox of this sort of self-willed beginning was that its 'success' depended fundamentally upon self-negation, a turning away from the 'Old Negro.'"[3] In other words, The New Negro was everything the Old Negro was not. Yet, the continued use of the term Negro, itself, is an indication that there is something of the old in the new. The New Negro was a counter to the negative images of Negro that white America sought to perpetuate after slavery. The trope was a refashioning of who Negroes were. Gates writes: "Accordingly, to manipulate the image of the black was, in a sense, to manipulate reality. The Public Negro Self, therefore, was an entity to be crafted."[4] Yet, this constructed idealized image was as much an illusion as the old one.

The use of this literary device highlights the significance of naming, and moreover, of language. Naming is important, particularly in the context of struggle, highlighting the desire to claim one's identity after having been named by external authorities. As Gates surmises, a "name is a sign of the self."[5] It follows that changing

---

[3] Ibid., 4.

[4] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black," *Representations* 24 (1988), 137.

[5] Ibid.,133.

one's name is the result of a change in ones' self-understanding. Gate recalls the example of Sojourner Truth, a woman who changed her name after being freed from slavery. She writes:

> My name was Isabella; but when I left the house of bondage, I left everything behind. I wan't goin' to keep nothin' of Egypt on me, an' so I went to the Lord and asked him to give me a new name. An de' Lord give me Sojourner, because I was to travel up an' down the land, showin' the people their sins, and' bein' a *sign* unto them. Afterward I told de Lord I wanted another name, 'cause everybody else had two names; and de' Lord give me Truth, because I was to declare the truth to de people.[6]

A new name signified a new life for many freed slaves and moving to a new place underscored the possibility of envisioning a life that was different from the life they had experienced as slaves.

Though generally accepted, the term Negro was an ambivalent one.[7] The term Negro aggregates diverse individuals into a people. I suggest that it was not the color of

---

[6] Ibid. Gates similarly points to an excerpt of Booker T. Washington's book *Up From Slavery* to further underscore the importance of naming to self-understanding. Washington writes: "After the coming of freedom there were two points upon which practically all the people on our place agreed, and I find that this was generally true throughout the South: that they must change their names, and that they must leave the old plantation for at least a few days or weeks in order that they might really feel that they were free."

[7] In his 1967 article, "What's in a Name?" Lerone Bennett, Jr. responds to a debate concerning the origin and usefulness of the term Negro. Tracing the term back to the transatlantic slave trade, Bennett provides examples of early black immigrants referring to themselves as colored or African, for example he cites the preamble of the Free African Society, founded in Philadelphia in 1787 that began: "We, the Free *Africans* and their descendants of the City of Philadelphia in the State of Pennsylvania or elsewhere…" Bennett sees the turn of the twentieth century as a period when in "reaction and extreme stress, black people usually turn inward. They begin to redefine themselves and they begin to argue seriously about names…The word 'coloured' still retained a commanding position in this period, but men like Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington used

their skin that resulted in peoplehood. Instead, it was an act of interpellation.[8] It was this act of naming (and the expected response to the name) by the ruling class/race in America that called a people into being. Such an identity that is imposed on a people has dangerous and lasting effects, and stereotypes that persist today for people of African descent attest to this. Thus, the significance of naming—and particularly, its ability to both destroy and create—is evident. It destroys diversity and individuality while concomitantly creating the appearance, in fact, an illusion of unity and cohesion. This is

---

the word 'Negro' freely. There were also exponents of the Afro-American theme, as evidenced by the founding, in 1899, of the National Afro-American League, and the Baltimore Afro-American newspaper, established in 1892. Toward the end of the century, the word 'Negro' began to supplant the words 'colored' and 'Afro-American…' It was during this period that the first national *Negro* organizations (The American Negro Academy in 1897 and the National Negro Business League in 1900) were founded. The founding of the National Association for the Advancement of *Colored* People in 1909 marked, it seems, the disappearing peak of the colored movement. By 1919, the *Negro Year Book* could report: 'There is an increasing use of the word 'Negro' and a decreasing use of the word 'colored' and 'Afro-American' to designate us as a people. The result is that the word 'Negro' is, more and more, acquiring a dignity that it did not have in the past.' During this same period, there was an aggressive campaign for capitalization of the word 'Negro.' This campaign, which was led by the NAACP, peaked in 1930 when the *New York Times* announced that it would print the word 'Negro' with a capital letter. In an editorial (March 7, 1930), the newspaper said: 'In our 'style book' 'Negro' is now added to the list of words to be capitalized. It is not merely a typographical change; it is an act of recognition of racial self-respect for those who have been for generations in 'the lower case'." Lerone Bennett, Jr. "What's in a Name?" in *Africans in America: Old Memories, New Moods*, 2nd ed. Peter I. Rose, ed. (New York: Atherton Press, 2007), 377-78. This summary of the expansion of the use of the term Negro demonstrates the ambivalence of the term and the significance of naming.

[8] Here, I evoke Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation, the process by which a subject is called into being in language. Judith Butler further elucidates the dual nature of interpellation and, thus, the possibilities of naming. Interpellation is capable of both disabling (harming) and enabling (facilitating the ability to exceed the intent of the naming). She writes, "By being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given certain possibility for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior purposes that animate that call." (Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* [New York and London: Routledge, 1997], 2).

made evident in an example of an exchange captured in the March 1928 edition of *The Crisis*, the official journal of the National Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In it, W.E.B. DuBois, the editor, responds to the query of the significance of the name, Negro. Roland A. Barton writes: "I am only a high school student in my Sophomore year, and have not the understanding of you college educated men…why would it designate, and segregate us as 'Negroes', and not as 'Americans'…The word, 'Negro, or 'nigger', is a white man's word to make us feel inferior. I hope…that by the time I become a man, that this word, 'Negro', will be abolished."[9] Barton's question elucidates a dissenting opinion concerning use of the term Negro. DuBois' response to this young man's inquiry demonstrates the ambivalence of the term. DuBois responds: "Do not at the outset of your career make the all too common error of mistaking names for things. Names are only conventional signs for identifying things. Things are the reality that counts."[10]

> While providing a historical accounting of the term "Negro," he makes the argument for its continued use: Etymologically and phonetically it is much better and more logical than 'African' or 'colored' or any of the various hyphenated circumlocutions. Of course, it is not 'historically' accurate. No name ever was historically accurate: neither 'English,' 'French,' 'German,' 'White,' 'Jew,' 'Nordic' nor 'Anglo-Saxon.' They were all at first nicknames, misnomers, accidents, grown eventually to conventional habits and achieving accuracy because, and simply because, wide and continued usage rendered them accurate. In this sense 'Negro' is quite as accurate, quite as old and quite as definite as any name of any great group of people.[11]

DuBois concludes with this observation. "If a thing is despised, either because of

---

[9] W.E.B. DuBois, "The Name 'Negro,'" *The Crisis* (May 1928): 96.

[10] Ibid., 96-7.

[11] Ibid.

ignorance or because it is despicable, you will not alter matters by changing its name. If men despise Negroes, they will not despise them less if Negroes are called 'colored' or 'Afro-Americans'. Your real work, my dear young man, does not lie with names. It is not a matter of changing them, losing them, or forgetting them. Names are nothing but little guideposts along the Way."[12] Importantly, the response to the violence and trauma of being named is often a people (re)naming themselves.

If Negro was the name given to black Americans, then *New* Negro was a self-designation and a re-definition. Nonetheless, the problem of language persists. Gates and Jarrett note that because the utopic figure is indeed rhetorical or discursive (as opposed to literal or real), it can exist only in "what Michel Foucault has called 'the non-place of language.'"[13] They continue, "Just as utopia signifies 'no place,' so did 'New Negro' signify a 'black person who lives at no place,' and at no time. It was a bold and audacious *act of language*, signifying the will to power, to dare to recreate a race by renaming it, despite the dubiousness of the venture."[14] Any attempts to (re)create a people, and most especially an oppressed people, were met with resistance. Creating is an act imbued with

---

[12] Ibid., 96-7. DuBois charges Barton: "Your real work as a Negro lies in two directions: *First*, to let the world know what there is fine and genuine about the Negro race. And *secondly*, to see that there is nothing about that race which is worth contempt; your contempt, my contempt; or the contempt of the wide, wide world. Get this then, Rowland, and get it straight even if it pierces your soul: a Negro by any other name would be just as black and just as white; just as ashamed of himself and just as shamed by others, as today. It is not the name--it's the Thing that counts. Come on, Kid, let's go get the Thing!"

[13] Gates and Jarrett, *The New Negro*, 5. Utopia indicates the perfected state of being, but the pun is not lost on Gates and Jarrett who know in the Greek it can mean both a good place and no place.

[14] Ibid. emphasis mine.

power and danger. Paul C. Johnson reminds how for "diasporic models of blackness" race is, in fact, *the* "metalanguage." Johnson writes: "Emigrants enter a political context where race is the master key, a 'metalanguage' that subsumes other sets of social relations…The rise of diasporic models of blackness…all seem to be hybridizing and racializing previously national politics, cultures, and identities."[15] Migrating to the North "hybridized" identities – Negroes could no longer be portrayed as simply southern, rural, and uneducated (though this was never the case). New Negro identity resulted in migrants from the South being mapped into such a diasporic model. Therefore, the problem of language for this diasporic people included more than naming and race.

The metalanguage of race suppressed other important aspects of identity that equally informed the making of the New Negro. Gender, class, and religion were all important considerations. Just as the image of the New Negro sought to undermine that of the Old Negro, it simultaneously subjugated the image of the Negro woman. Fannie Barrier Williams' essays, "The Club Movement among Colored Women of America" and "The Intellectual Progress of Colored Women of the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation" are examples of the voice of women who worked diligently to improve the condition of their communities. In 1898 Williams writes the following:

> The Negro as an "alien" race, as a "problem," as an "industrial factor," as "ex-slaves," as "ignorant," etc., are well known and instantly recognized; but colored women as mothers, as homemakers, as the center and source of the social life of the race have received little or no attention. These women have been left to grope their way unassisted toward a realization of those domestic

[15] Johnson, 8.

> virtues, moral impulses, and standards of family and social life that are the badges of race respectability.[16]

Williams' assertion of the significance of women is clear. Women were essential not only to family and community life, but also to black people as a whole. Black women contributed significantly to remaking of the image of black people in this country. However, when the roles of women were highlighted they were often reduced to domestic issues. The Black Women's Club Movement is an example of a gendered "face" of the New Negro. These clubs were described as meeting the needs of the community, performing benevolent acts such as caring for the sick and orphans, arranging burials for the indigent, and providing training and education. Yet, these organizations were political, as well. They participated in anti-lynching and women's suffrage campaigns. In fact, Ida B. Wells and her anti-lynching campaign was a catalyst for black migration out of Memphis and serves as another example of women's leadership during the migration.[17]

Though active participants in shaping the New Negro, the role of women was diminished, if not erased, during the development of this identity. In her article, "Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak notes the ways in which women are "used and abused" in both past and current

---

[16] Gates and Jarrett, 54.

[17] For a detailed and nuanced account of the life and work of Ida B. Wells, see the biography by Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009). For additional examples, see also, Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999) and Stephanie Shaw, *What a Woman Ought To Be and To Do: Black Professional Women Workers during the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

diasporas. The Great Migration was no exception. In addition to the mistreatment of women, in the context of diaspora, Spivak writes, "Every rupture is also a repetition."[18] That is, the separation and violence that often accompany migration are not new; they are simply repeated.

Indeed, violent separations characterize diasporas. For black Americans, the slave trade is evidence of perhaps the most violent kind of separation.[19] Once they were taken from their homeland, Africans were subject to more ruptures. During slavery, it was

---

[18] Gayatri Spivak, "Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World," in *Class Issues: Pedagogy, Cultural Studies, and the Public Sphere,* Amitava Kumar, ed. (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 92. Spivak goes on to state that the role that women play in the creation and sustaining of diasporas are important to acknowledge and can provide a way to see the interconnected complexities of the social structures that influence the movement of people.

Julia Kristeva describes exile as a cutting of links. She writes: "The language of exile muffles a cry, it doesn't shout….Our present age is one of exile. How can one avoid sinking into the mire of common sense, if not by becoming a stranger to one's own country, language, sex, and identity?…For if meaning exists in the state of exile, it nevertheless finds no incarnation, and is ceaselessly produced and destroyed in geographical or discursive transformations. Exile is a way of surviving in the face of the dead father, of gambling with death, which is the meaning of life, of stubbornly refusing to give in to the law of death. Julia Kristeva, "A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissent" in Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader* (trans. Sean Hand; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 298. As such discourses of dislocation can be understood as both survival techniques and acts of self-assertiveness for groups who may otherwise not have a voice. Following Kristeva, I suggest these discourses are a whisper.

[19] Berlin describes the slave trade as the process that created Africans. He writes: "Ultimately the mixing of African nations—not the perceptions of European slave traders or American slaveowners—made the many peoples of Africa into Africans" (51). He continues: "A few may have been sold by desperate or depraved kinsmen and neighbors for some real or invented offences, but Africans rarely sold their own people, as they understood it… Instead, black people were taken by mercenary armies, bandits, and professional slavers" (Berlin, 55-56).

common for members of families to be torn asunder.[20] The end of slavery did not result in the end of such separations. In fact, Rutkoff and Scott affirm: "Most traveled as members of a family, but the trauma of migration often ended in the separation of fathers from their families and left children under the sole care of their mothers."[21] These fissures, economically motivated, demonstrate the far-reaching effects of the power dynamics that accompany the creation of diasporas. However, such separations did not destroy family, they simply redefined family. The migration served to further solidify fictive kinship ties that had characterized black American life since slavery.

The negative impact of the migration on black family structures persisted during the Great Migration and resulted in the importance of fictive kinship.[22] Fictive kinship

---

[20] Berlin writes: "Indeed, in defining the slave family as women and very young children, slave traders showed little interest in the family groups that they demeaned as 'mixed lots.' Enslaved black men and women came to appreciate the fragility of the marriage bond, and parents came to understand that their teenage children would disappear, never to be seen again. Sales to the interior shattered approximately one slave marriage in five and separated one-third of children under fourteen from one or both or their parents" (Berlin, 109-110).

[21] Peter M. Rutkoff and William B. Scott, *Fly Away: The Great African American Cultural Migrations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 93. "In leaving the South, many young black women broke with their families and found themselves alone, except for their children. In the North, few uneducated black women enjoyed upward mobility. They gained the vote, but most found only menial employment, usually as domestics. Their children, however, especially their sons became the justification for migration. They gained access to well-funded public schools and to opportunities unimaginable for black males in the South. In New York, three sons of poor migrant women found international fame, made possible by their mother's decision to migrate. Harlem painters William H. Johnson and Jacob Lawrence and dancer and composer Alvin Ailey were quite different men. Each followed a different artistic path, but without their mothers' help, none could have fulfilled their artistic dream."

[22] See for example, Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* Vintage: New York, 2010.

was one of the ways peoplehood was affirmed during the Great Migration.[23] Terms like "brother," "sister," and "blood," are employed in order to create a sense of family and to underscore a common past and shared culture. This kinship "denotes a cultural symbol of collective identity among African Americans based on more than skin color. The fictive kinship system also implies a particular mind-set, a specific was of being human."[24] Fordham goes on to assert that "the hypothesized fictive kinship system is African Americans premier prestige system in their imagined nation-state, conveying the idea of brotherhood and sisterhood all African Americans regardless of class, gender, or sexual orientation."[25]Fordham's assessment of fictive kinship in the African American community is instructive for understanding the risks or hesitancy for African Americans to critique each other publicly. As such, the internal debates that are elucidated in the New Negro trope require close examination.

Not only did fictive kinship create the positive, unifying images, it also undergirded a system by which a people shared both honor and shame. As such, ethical imperatives become essential characteristics in the shaping of the identity of a people. We will see many examples of this in the letters and sermons that follow. One represents the whole. Melissa Harris-Perry describes the importance of fictive kinship to African

---

[23] Signithia Fordham, *Blacked Out: Dilemmas of Race, Identity and Success at Capital High* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 72. Following anthropologists, Fordham defines fictive kinship as "people within a given society to whom one is not related by birth but with whom one shares essential reciprocal social and economic relationships" (71).

[24] Ibid., 72.

[25] Ibid.

American political thought and life and analyzes ways in which honor and shame are shared as community. She asserts, "There is a sense in which we are all family."[26] As such, one's behavior, positive or negative, affects the "family name." The reputation of a people is at stake. Harris-Perry reminds that this "voluntary sense of shared identity maps onto the historical constructions of race."[27] I argue that it is this mapping onto race, along with economic factors, that necessitate fictive kinship. Fictive kinship for the New Negro extends beyond the borders of the United States. In fact, for all diasporas, fictive kinship serves as a kind of connective tissue. Notwithstanding this connectivity, New Negro identity is nevertheless portrayed on the black male body.

Despite the fact that the New Negro was a rhetorical device, he was given physical features. I suggest that giving physical features to this trope is an attempt to make it tangible. John Henry Adams' essay, "The New Negro Man" appeared in the October 1904 edition of the *Voice of the Negro.* Adams describe the New Negro thusly:

> Here is the real new Negro man. Tall, erect, commanding, with a face as strong and expressive as Angelo's Moses and yet every whit as pleasing and handsome as Reuben's favorite model. There is that penetrative eye about which Charles Lamb wrote with such deep admiration, that broad forehead and firm chin. …Such is the new Negro man, and he who finds the real man in the hope of deriving all the benefits to be got by acquaintance and contact does not run upon him by mere chance, but must go over the paths of some kind of biography, until he gets a reasonable understanding of what it actually cost of human effort to be a man and at the same time a Negro.[28]

---

[26] Melissa Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes and Black Women in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 36.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Gates and Jarrett, 14.

The image of the New Negro was vividly painted on the body of a black male. It was "the precise structure and resonance of the black *voice* by which the very *face* of the race would be known and fundamentally reconstructed."[29] In fact, the search for an identity and a home is often closely associated with masculinity. Painter affirms that the "quest for manhood was older than the Great Migration and would continue long past it. For New Negro men, getting out of the South and casting a vote represented two giant steps into manhood."[30] For a people whose bodies were abused, such a physical (re)construction takes on new significance. This resurrection of the black body was not slavish or weak; in others words, it was no longer emasculated. The New Negro was "self-confident, urban, and Northern…He—for the race was still envisioned as one man—was proud to be a Negro. He fought back when attacked and proclaimed his pride in his race. The New Negro emerged from his times."[31] He had a voice, and therefore he could have a face.

The proud face on this resurrected black body had the overwhelming responsibility of combatting racial stereotypes that illustrated how black bodies remained very much under the constant threat of violence. The public image of the "Old" Negro was utilized to remind black and white alike of white supremacy.

> American images of blacks permeated advertisements from many products in the domestic sphere, including baking products, appliances, food, and cleaning supplies. These advertisements often fetishized the black body.... Images that displayed distorted black

---

[29] Ibid., 13.

[30] Painter, 193.

[31] Ibid., 189.

> bodies for white enjoyment allowed whites to reenact their social power over African Americans.... In the New South, whites were prohibited from owning African American bodies in ways that allowed a form of this practice to continue by displaying African American bodies in ways that allowed gazing white consumers to reaffirm their own superiority on a daily basis. [32]

Although the message conveyed by the black images on consumer products was in no way benign, the image of black bodies hanging from trees, beaten and sometimes burned accentuated the constant and very real need to control black bodies. The message to black Americans was clear; even with "freedom" they were perceived as objects, expendable objects. In his book, *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism*, Lewis Gordon writes, "The black body lives on a fine line between Absence and orchestrated Presence. It disciplines itself to be incognito, to blend in with its environment on the one hand, and at other times it grins, dances, leaps, twirls; it exaggerates itself. Its existence is always superfluous. Since its problem is that it exists, its efforts to justify its existence always miss their mark."[33] Inevitably, the black body was ironically a signifier, for whiteness, specifically Southern white supremacy. As such to counter the negative images and stereotypes projected onto the black body, the New Negro was necessarily an embodied signifier. Its challenge was to convince white Americans of his "newness," while concomitantly persuading his own community of his necessity.

The seemingly unified image of the New Negro falters when challenged by its own diversity. Although strategic essentialism The New Negro did not consist solely of

---

[32] Kristina DuRocher, *Raising Racists: The Socialization of White Children in the Jim Crow South* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 69.

[33] Lewis R. Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995), 102. Gordon reminds: "There was a period in the American South when, for blacks, looking a white in the eye carried the risk of being lynched."

the descendant of slaves— free persons of different economic statuses and varying ethnicities were also a part of this people. As Painter observes, "Considered as a whole, the New Negroes were not only a national people, they were also international, multi-lingual, and ethnically heterogeneous."[34] This cosmopolitan description of the New Negro reveals important distinctions that were occluded by the presentation of a unified identity. Rutkoff and Scott suggest that elite constructed the New Negro and opportunistic blacks who denied their heritage. They write: "Determined to demonstrate their gentility, Harlem's brown-skin elites announced the Harlem Renaissance… Locke described the 'New Negroes' as those African Americans who had transcended their backward peasant ways and become civilized. In short, New Negroes had freed themselves from their African cultural roots, and except for physical appearance, were no different than middle-class, European Americans." [35] This recasting of the New Negro elucidates the internal struggles for black American self-definition.

---

[34] Painter, 192. Specifically, Painter indicates: "Between 1910 and 1920, 33,464 people of African descent immigrated to the United States. In 1920, the total of 73,803 foreign-born blacks in the United States came overwhelmingly from the Americas, notably the West Indies and Cuba." Ethnicity was also a difference among black Americans, one that was frequently overlooked.

[35] Peter M. Rutkoff and William B. Scott, *Fly Away: The Great African American Cultural Migrations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 61.

In his introduction to the anthology, *The New Negro,* Arnold Rampersad writes: "*The New Negro* also papers over serious differences over substantive issues concerning culture, politics, sexuality, and related matters between the younger and the older generation of the Renaissance. To the young journalist George Schuyler, for example, Locke was the "high priest of the intellectual snobbocracy." Locke's elitist vision of culture may be seen in the treat of music in *The New Negro*. *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, Alaine Locke, ed. with Introduction by Arnold Rampersad (New York: Touchstone, 1925, 1992 – introduction), xix.

> Disdainful of rural southern culture, by 1925 Harlem's New Negroes understood their fate was intertwined with poor southern migrants. The Great Migration had redefined their status, from a small isolated group of northern Negroes, who provided menial services to wealthy whites, into the leaders of a large and increasingly powerful racial class, answerable only to its own people. In the 1920s Harlem's Old Settlers formed migrant assistance organizations, recruited migrants to their churches, and provided newcomers legal, medical, dental, beauty, and funeral services. They advised migrants on appropriate dress and hygiene and served as the formal and informal teachers. Old Settlers, now New Negroes, became Harlem's leaders.[36]

Did the New Negro, then, represent an assimilation or accommodation to the United States' hegemonic practices? To the extent that the elite (of any race or any subordinated people) create, control, and manage discourses, power dynamics must interrogated. Among the black elites, DuBois, for example, was a socialist and Pan-Africanist who challenged the political system and fought for equal education and enfranchisement, which he considered to be fundamental components of citizenship in America.[37] Booker T. Washington, on the other hand, did not seek to challenge the

---

[36] Ibid., 60.

[37] W.E.B. DuBois' notion of the talented tenth is an elitist, strongly inflected by gender and socioeconomic status. DuBois writes: "The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races. Now the training of men is a difficult and intricate task. Its technique is a matter for educational experts, but its object is for the vision of seers. If we make money the object of man-training, we shall develop money-makers but not necessarily men; if we make technical skill the object of education, we may possess artisans but not, in nature, men. Men we shall have only as we make manhood the object of the work of the schools—intelligence, broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is, and of the relation of men to it—this is the curriculum of that Higher Education which must underlie true life." W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," in *The*

political establishment, at least not directly. Instead, he advocated for technical education and encouraged participation in free enterprise (black businesses for black people). These different approaches to obtaining racial equality both participate in the making of the New Negro. It is my contention that while the New Negro was at times accommodating to the dominant culture it was at the same time resistant to it. The New Negro was an attempt to hold these and other dichotomies in tension and perhaps even supersede them. As a diasporic identity, such tensions will exist and these conflicts often expose the fragility of identity.

Diasporic identity, which always already contains both a notion of home and exile, risks being undone by its own construction; so, too the New Negro. The New Negro, like all diasporic identities, needed to be flexible. This was clear even in the anthology, *The New Negro*, as "definitions of New Negroism that would include both Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen would have to be elastic."[38] Yet, this kind of essentialism was strategic, enabling an oppressed people to imagine a future, one drastically different from the reality they were experiencing.[39] While the trope cannot be

---

Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative Negroes of To-day (New York, 1903).

[38] Rampersad, xix. Providing additional example of the diversity of the New Negro, Rampersad writes: "Important, too, is the process of smoothening required to make all these artists and intellectuals conform to Locke's perception of a new breed of Negroes in a brave new world of Negro-ness. In many ways, the avant-garde Jean Toomer was out of place in *The New Negro* – certainly Toomer himself thought so, having already protested to a number of people that (despite his black ancestry) he was not a Negro and resented being referred to as one. Bruce Nugent was far more concerned with his gay identity than with his sense of race or ethnicity; but he question of homosexuality is never raised in the text – the age would not have permitted it."

[39] Strategic essentialism, coined by postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,

mapped solely as accommodationist, it was nonetheless an elitist construction. Those who did not subscribe to the ideals purported by the trope challenged it. These aspects of the New Negro identity point to an internal debate within the black community that is not always apparent.

The Great Migration generated a new identity discourse for blacks in America and sparked the imagination of a people who produced a plethora of literature, art, and music that changed American culture and identity. The Harlem Renaissance exemplifies the proliferation of creative expressions that occurred during this time. The Harlem Renaissance is so closely associated with the New Negro identity that it is often referred to as the New Negro movement. Arnold Rampersad explains:

> To many scholars and critics of the movement known as the Harlem Renaissance – that dramatic upsurge of creativity in literature, music, and art within black America that reached its zenith in the second half of the 1920s – *The New Negro* is its definitive text, its Bible…*The New Negro* alerted the world in 1925 that something approaching a cultural revolution was taking place among blacks in New York, as well as elsewhere in the United States and perhaps around the world. The book also attempted in a fairly ambitious expansive way to offer a definition of this cultural movement.[40]

---

refers to her claim that for the colonized "In some instances, it was important to strategically make essentialist claims, even while one retained an awareness that those claims were, at best, crude political generalizations." For the development of this argument see "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg, eds. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313.

[40] Rampersad, ix.

From poetry to sculpture, the New Negro was being made over and over again in literature and in images in attempts to counter projected stereotypes.[41] Moreover, this bible of the Harlem Renaissance, the 1925 anthology edited by Alain Locke, *The New Negro*, sought to demonstrate the distinguishing characteristics of the New Negro by displaying its art and literature (fiction, poetry, plays, essays, etc.). In his forward, Locke writes, "Negro life is not only establishing new contacts and founding new centers, it is finding a new soul. There is a fresh spiritual and cultural focusing. We have, as the heralding sign, an unusual outburst of creative expression. There is a renewed race-spirit that consciously and proudly sets itself apart. Justifiably then, we speak of the offerings of this book embodying these ripening forces culled from the first fruits of the Negro Renaissance."[42] I suggest that artistic expression was another way of meaning making for black Americans during the Great Migration. Among the numerous genres that participated in this new identity discourse were letters, sermons, and essays, to which I will turn in the chapter that follows.

---

[41] The Harlem Renaissance was a cultural explosion of artists who created works of art in various genres. Although it began in Harlem, the movement spread throughout the country. Arnold Rampersad writes: "Sharing in the prosperity of the nation as a whole, and enjoying many of the freedoms of the era that followed World War I, blacks responded with a new confidence in themselves and their abilities. As reflected in magazines and newspapers, as well as on stage and in nightclubs, literature, musical and the other arts began to flourish virtually as never before. The national success on Broadway of the all-black musical play *Shuffle Along* in 1921 brought black song and dance into a new prominence. In 1923 came the first novel (if Jean Toomer's blend of fiction, poetry, and drama in Cane can be called a novel) by an African-American to appear from a major publishing house in over ten years" (Rampersad, xiii).

[42] Ibid, xxvii.

Conclusion

The New Negro is a constructed and contested diasporic identity illustrative of an imaginative attempt to create a sense of stability in a hostile and often violent political environment. The Great Migration transformed the context in which black American identity had previously been construed. This movement creates a space for identity to be (re)negotiated. Upon close examination, the presentation of a necessarily unified identity, nevertheless, occludes diverse expressions of what it meant to be a black American in the early twentieth century. Changing their orientation in space enabled black Americans to challenge and transform the ways in which they were perceived.

In the chapters that follow, I will employ the New Negro trope as a lens through which to read 1 Peter and Hebrews. Engaging in dialogical imagination, the internal debates and diversity of the New Jew are amplified enabling the audiences of Hebrews and 1 Peter to have a voice. Like the creation of a black geography, a "Christian" geography must take seriously its rhetorical and social-political spaces: I will do so by exploring ancient presentations of diasporic identity. Before turning to 1 Peter and Hebrews, I will explore the negotiation of Jewish identity in a Roman imperial complex.

CHAPTER 4

THE MAKING OF A PEOPLE: JEWISH IDENTITY IN THE ROMAN IMPERIAL CONTEXT

…looking upon the heavenly country in which they have the rights of citizens as their native land, and as the earthly abode in which they dwell for a while as in a foreign land. For to those who are sent to be the inhabitants of a colony, the country which has received them is in place of their original mother country; but still the land which has sent them forth remains to them as the house to which they desire to return.

Philo, *A Treatise on the Confusion of Languages*, 1:78

In the first-century Mediterranean world, as Roman rule expanded, various ways of belonging (citizen, exile, etc.) were negotiated. Among the many people seeking to establish their position in Roman society were the Jews.[1] These negotiations were emblematic of a desire for stability, but as we have seen with the Great Migration, subjected peoples also needed to be agile. On the one hand the dynamic environment required flexibility, yet on the other, it demanded oppressed peoples to create unity declare their allegiances.

This chapter will focus on the formation of Jewishness in a first-century Roman imperial context— specifically on the ways in which this context facilitates the negotiation of identity. In order to evoke a resonance with the Great Migration, I will begin exploring the motifs of exodus and exile in Jewish self-understanding. I will then

[1] Various groups were subjugated during Roman imperial rule and would have similarly been attempting to clarify their relationship to empire during this time. In the preface to *Diasporas in Antiquity*, Ernest S. Frerichs attests: "Viewed as a mass migration or movement or flight from one location to another location or locations, diaspora could be viewed as an event in the history of several peoples in antiquity." (Ernest S. Frerichs, Preface to *Diasporas in Antiquity*, Shaye J.D. Cohen and Ernest S. Frerichs, eds. [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993], i).

turn to recent scholarship concerning the relationship between imperialism and Jewishness, focusing on the Roman imperial period. Next, I will provide a detailed analysis of the construction of Jewishness in Philo's historical treatise *In Flaccum* as an example of a textual negotiation of Jewish identity in a Roman imperial setting. Finally, I will conclude with an assessment of how Philo's efforts demonstrate the complexity and fragility of identity formation, a construction that is exacerbated by its imperial framework and that highlights the porous borders of ethnic identity constructions. While putting the biblical texts in dialogue with the New Negro, an examination of Jewishness in a Roman imperial context is important for this study since I contend that the identities encountered in Hebrews and 1 Peter are also particularly Jewish identities being negotiated in this very context.

Exodus and Exile: Jewish Identity as Diasporic Identity

The motifs of exodus and exile figure prominently in the discourses of displacement that form of Jewish identity. Perhaps for no other people has displacement been such an integral part of identity than for Jews. In order to understand Jewish identity as diasporic identity, one must examine the themes of exodus and exile, themes intricately connected to place (and land).

Exodus, literally "the way out," is a multivalent narrative that is both liberating and political. It also serves as a paradigmatic theme variously deployed throughout history. The triumphalist account of the Exodus recounts the suffering of the Israelites enslaved by Egypt who are delivered by God. The people of Israel move from bondage to freedom into a promised land. The familiar themes of liberation and covenant are

important motifs of the narrative, but they do not completely capture the underlying idea of exodus. That is, the Exodus is concomitantly a tale of power and a story about establishing a people in relation to an empire. These political aspects of the Exodus narrative should be taken into consideration when examining how the narrative has been used to shape political self-understandings, as we have seen with examples of how black Americans employed the exodus narrative in slavery and again during the Great Migration. For Jewish identity, the Exodus narrative establishes place, specifically a promised land, as an integral part of their relationship to the divine. In fact, the land mediates this relationship.

While the Exodus narrative establishes land as a constitutive factor of Jewish identity, exile locates this identity as away from this designated place. That is, exile describes a separation from the Promised Land.[2] The narrative of Babylonian exile, understood as the first of many displacements, purports that while some Judeans stayed in Babylonia, others decided to return to Palestine when Persian rule began. Imperial rule is a major factor in both of these narratives. As a result of the decisions to stay or return to Palestine, a discourse of displacement is created as a diaspora is formed. Jacob Neusner writes: "The paradigm of exile and return contains all the Judaisms over all times, to the present."[3] This paradigm shaped and continues to shape the ways in which Jews and by extension, I would argue, Christians came to understand themselves.[4]

---

[2] As posited, if the land mediates the relationship between the people of Israel and the Divine, then exile would indicate a breach or infraction of covenant.

[3] Jacob Neusner, "Exile and Return as the History of Judaism," in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish and Christian Conceptions* (Leiden: Brill; 1997), 221. Neusner goes on to define a Judaism as "a system made up of a world-view, a way of life, and a social group that

The concept of diaspora (in terms of both leaving and return) is embedded in the narrative, as are the related notions of alterity and election. Neusner argues:

> the experience of the few that formed the paradigm for Israel beyond the restoration taught as normative lessons of alienation…*the life of the group [those who return] is uncertain, subject to conditions and stipulation. Nothing is set and given, all things a gift: land and life itself. But what actually did happen in that uncertain world – exile but then restoration – marked the group as special, different, select.*[5]

The idea of exile, and its associated feelings of (not) belonging, particularly in circumstances of suffering are related to a self-understanding of election. Designating oneself as set apart or elect, for example ἐκλεκτοις παρεπιδήμοις (chosen exiles, 1 Peter 1:1), is part of a construction of a self that embraces a sense of alterity because of or perhaps in spite of suffering. Therefore, a sense of otherness is also interconnected with the theme of diaspora. The language employed in discourses of displacement makes this clear. As Reinhard Feldmeir asserts: "Israel's unusual relationship with an intrinsically negative foreignness is evident in the fact that the nation, or at least individual Israelites, can describe even themselves as strangers."[6] Identifying as a stranger is traced to a

---

defines its life through that world view and lives in accord with the descriptions of that way of life" (221).

[4] Although this section will focus on Jews in antiquity, it is worth noting that the issues of identity and relationship to the land of Israel and its entanglement with religion and politics persist as contemporary issues in Judaism today.

[5] Ibid., 227. Emphasis original. Neusner holds that such an interpretation did not have to hold true for those who did not return. He emphasizes that what is found in scripture is an "invention" or interpretation and should be understood as such.

[6] Reinhard Feldmeier, "The 'Nation' of Strangers: Social Contempt and Its Theological Interpretation in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity," in *Ethnicity and the Bible,* ed. Mark G. Brett (Brill: Leiden and New York: 1996), 244.

heritage of Abraham, who describes himself "as a sojourner, and finds its *basis in the post-exilic situation*."[7] Hebrews and 1 Peter are part of this tradition as these texts variously employ this heritage to construct the identity of their audiences, as strangers and as elected by God. Self as other then becomes another significant factor for fashioning a Jewish self. Feldmeir traces this assertion to the Hellenistic period and reminds of the inverse relationship between citizenship and exile. Feldmeir writes:

> Quite deliberately, then, living in the land as a situation of fulfilled promise is contrasted with the existence as strangers. The corollary of this is that in its own land Israel is not a sojourner at all, but a full citizen, designated as such by God…This attitude…which is clearly oriented towards the common ancient ideal of the full citizen, is typical of many parts of Judaism of the Hellenistic period.[8]

Citizenship is figured in contrast to exile. Citizens, even heavenly ones, as the epigraph makes clear, have certain privileges. The political and material implications for citizenship are important considerations. Feldmeier similarly observes: "Membership of the people of God could, in early Judaism, imply a clear distance from the endeavor to overcome state and political constructions in a religious manner…[T]he self-understanding of believers as 'strangers' implied both things: distinction and encounter, loyalty to one's own belief and coming to terms with the foreign."[9] While attempting to make a distinction between the religious and the political, perhaps what Feldmeier elucidates is the way in which all of these aspects of identity are intricately related; however, I would argue that it is encounter that necessitates distinction.

---

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 249.

[9] Ibid., 269.

The concept of exile is important to discourses of displacement, but is not unique to Jewish identity and, therefore, should be situated in a larger cultural context, particularly one with Hellenistic influences. In his article, "The Discourse of Displacement," Jan Felix Gaertner explains, "…ancient authors often do not distinguish between exile and other forms of displacement."[10] As such, the language of alterity (strangers), exile, diaspora and other semantically related terms participate in discourses of displacement. In addition to expanding the definition of exile, Gaertner goes on to insist that "linking 'exile literature' to the psychological condition of exile…reveals a clear bias towards subjective, autobiographically tinged treatments of exile against the fictional, historiographical, philosophical, and political dimension of the theme…such a distinction is artificial and highly problematic."[11] These problems highlighted by Gaertner suggest that exile has been limited not only in its definition, but also in its various, often dichotomous, classifications. Thinking of discourses of displacement as containing both these psychological elements, as well as containing political dimensions, is important.

Gaertner not only expands the definition of exile, he goes on to trace the origins of what he calls a discourse of displacement and how it evolves over time. Gaertner explains the role of displacement in foundation myths underscoring the significance of origins to discourses of displacement. He writes: "[E]xile and displacement play a key

---

[10] Jan Felix Gaertner, "The Discourse of Displacement in Greco-Roman Antiquity," in *Writing Exile: The Discourse of Displacement in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, ed. Jan Felix Gaertner (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 3.

[11] Ibid.

role in explaining the foundation of new states…Later the very same motif is central to Greek foundation myths. With the remarkable exception of the Athenians, who claimed autochthony, most ancient Greek city-states (not to mention their numerous colonies) explained their coming into being by myths of exile or displacement.[12]

The evolution of exilic literature that Gaertner traces is from one of developing primarily local identity and state imposed, to self-initiated exile, and then later applied to "social" identity. According to Gaertner, local identity constructions that involved exile were accented by nostalgia. These include "mythical exiles and exilic plots (suppliant-exiles, wandering heroes, and founder-exiles)."[13] He states, "[W]e also have a clear inventory of themes and motifs of exile (recollection of one's *patria*, 'exile as shipwreck,' wish for death, desertion, linguistic and cultural isolation). All of these elements later become central to the ancient perception and description of exile."[14] The shift that Gaertner suggests is one that redefines exile from simply being an action of the state to also including a self-imposed separation. He describes this expansion as "exile as a condition that provokes a profound change of perspective and offers knowledge and

---

[12] Ibid. The examples that Gaertner provides are as follows: "The dynasty of Akkade is reported to have been founded by Sargon (2340–2284 BC), who was allegedly exposed in a basket on the Euphrates and travelled downstream until he was found by the water bearer Aqqi.…Thebes was allegedly founded by Cadmus, who had been told by his father to find his sister or go into exile; the foundation of Sparta was commonly linked with the return of the sons of Heracles; the inhabitants of several Greek cities in Asia minor, namely of Ephesus, claimed descent from Ionian immigrants allegedly led by Androclus; and most famously Rome, in particular the Roman family of Iulii, claimed descent from Trojan refugees under Aeneas."

[13] Ibid. The examples he provides include Odysseus, Patroclus, Jason, and Cadmus.

[14] Ibid.

greater insight, and exile as a political, social, even metaphysical metaphor."[15] One implication of this expansion of the notion of exile is that it is not only an instrument in the construction of social identity, that is local or national identity, but it is also used as a component of individual identity.[16] This shift to the personal is accompanied by a change in the disposition of the discourse. He writes: "Whereas social identity was traditionally connected with man's place in society and exile was seen as proximate to social death, the Cynics begin to employ exile positively. They fuse it with the concept of cosmopolitanism and integrate it into their appeal to the norms of the universe and the rejection of the norms and conventions of society."[17] This is one example of the changes that Gaertner identifies. He concludes that by the fourth century BCE "all major motifs of the later discourse of exile have been introduced, and what follows is primarily a process of recombination and adaptation of these motifs and concepts and of fusing them with other schools of thought and with various literary genres."[18] Gaertner provides a historical reconstruction of the ways that exile and discourses of displacement were deployed throughout Greek history. This legacy can be extended into the Roman period.

The use of exile in the ancient world continued to experience recombinations and adaptations as it was employed in a Roman context. In Joe-Marie Claassen's monograph

---

[15] Ibid., 10.

[16] Gaertner uses Thucydides as an example. He writes: "Thucydides allegedly said that it was exile that made him a philosopher. The concept has had a wide following, and exile was soon recognized as an essential component of the experience of the historian and that of the philosopher" (Gaertner, 10).

[17] Ibid., 11–12.

[18] Ibid., 12.

Displaced Persons, Claassen conducts a study of the "literature of exile" that first acknowledges that "exile is a basic aspect of *la condition humaine* " and then affirms, "Exile in the ancient world was, as today, a major political tool and as such it was often employed by the powerful to reduce the power of their most feared opponents."[19] This political framing of Claassen's literature of exile acknowledges it as a power discourse. The geopolitical dimension of the discourse of displacement is further underscored by Claassen's final description of the literature as a way by which "the displaced person creates his own place in history."[20] The discourse of displacement explored here is employed by men of status who in many respects create history. Once again, elite men shape the identity of a people. This heritage was available to the writers of the first century who variously deployed it.

Given these religious and cultural influences, the persistence of the theme of exile for Jewish identity formation endured. In his essay "Exile and the Self-Understanding of Diaspora Jews in the Greco-Roman period" James Scott writes: "There is evidence that at least some Diaspora Jews of the Greco-Roman period understood themselves as living in an ongoing 'exile' which would be remedied by an eventual return to the Land."[21] Scott

---

[19] Joe-Marie Claassen, *Displaced Person: The Literature of Exile from Cicero to Boethius* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 9.

[20] Ibid., 258.

[21] James M. Scott, "Exile and the Self-Understanding of Diaspora Jews in the Greco-Roman Period," in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish and Christian Conceptions* (Leiden: Brill; 1997), 218. This book examines an experience that "began to cause a transformation of Israelite religion which supplied the contours of the larger Judaic framework within which the various forms of Judaism, including the early Christian movement, developed" (2). Exile is only one factor highlighted in this transformation.

contends: "For the exiled population, the pain of separation from the homeland was often deeply felt. Population transfer was seen in the ancient world as a negative experience from which it was hoped the exiles would return. Displaced peoples so longed to return to their native homelands that they did so whenever possible."[22] As we have seen, exile is often associated with nostalgia and yearning and viewed as an emotive, if not negative, experience. However, the experience of exile or living in diaspora cannot be only viewed disparagingly.

In contrast to the view of living in diaspora as a continual longing for home, some scholars suggest it is possible that the majority lived contently and even flourished in diaspora. In order to support this assertion, Erich Gruen explores the relationships between Jews and Romans and Jews and Greeks. Looking specifically at Jews in Rome, Gruen states: "The continuity of Jewish communities in Rome seems largely uninterrupted. It would certainly be wrong to imagine that Roman Jews lived in perpetual insecurity, with bags packed and departure vehicles at the ready. Life in the city afforded them a stable existence."[23] He continues, "The Roman government engaged in no systematic persecution of Jews—nor indeed any persecution at all. The very few and rare instances of 'expulsion' resolve themselves into matters of state that had little or nothing

---

"Destruction of Jerusalem," as well as "cessation of the sacrificial cult and of the monarchy" are additional considerations Scott examines such a transformation.

[22] Scott, 203–4. Scott cites an example of a "huge number of refugees from Athens living widely scattered ended up losing their language but not their identity by assimilation, and they eventually returned to their homeland."

[23] Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 52–53.

to do with Jews as such."[24] The picture that Gruen paints of Jewish existence in Rome is one of Roman "disregard and detachment" for and from Jews.[25] Gruen acknowledges a connection to the land, concluding as follows:

> Palestine mattered, and it mattered in a territorial sense—but not as a required residence. Gifts to the Temple and pilgrimages to Jerusalem announced simultaneously a devotion to the symbolic heart of Judaism and a singular pride in the accomplishments of the diaspora. Jewish Hellenistic writers took the concurrence for granted. They were not driven to apologia. Nor did they feel obliged to reconcile the contradiction. As they saw it, there was none.[26]

While James Scott's romanticized presentation of Jewish life in diaspora paints the picture of a people constantly longing for a return "home," Gruen represents diasporic life as "ordinary."[27] Shaye J.D. Cohen similarly argues as follows: "In the homeland (at least until the fourth century CE) Jewishness for Jews was natural, perhaps inevitable, but in the diaspora Jewishness was a conscious choice, easily avoided or hidden, and at best

---

[24] Gruen, 52. Gruen continues: "But government action (in the testimony that has come down to us) never fastened on them alone: Chaldeans, magicians, Egyptians, *collegia*, or some other groups simultaneously came under state strictures, thus to accord proper publicity."

[25] Ibid., 53. Gruen reaches a similar conclusion concerning the history of Jews in Alexandria. He reads the pogrom of 68 as an aberration and suggests that it should not define or obscure the previously long, mostly positive experience of Jews in Alexandria. (See pp. 54–83).

[26] Ibid.

[27] Like Gruen, Johannes Tromp argues: "They may have been unhappy people, they may even have suffered on account of their Jewish identity, but they did not ascribe their unhappiness or their suffering to their displacement. They were at home in the cities and countries where they happened to live, and perhaps they were homesick when they were travelling; but not for Jerusalem, because to them that was a foreign city" (34). Johannes Tromp, "The Ancient Jewish Diaspora," in *Strangers and Sojourners: Religious Communities in Diaspora*, ed. Gerrie ter Haar (Peeters: Leuven, 1998).

tolerated by society at large."[28] Cohen goes on to assert that "Jews and gentiles in antiquity were corporeally, visually, linguistically, and socially indistinguishable."[29] Three examples of the ways in which Jews lived in diaspora can be found in the works of Philo, Josephus, and 2 Maccabees. Josephus lauds the homeland while highlighting the merits of diaspora. Josephus writes: "their multitudes will fill all the world, islands and continents, outnumbering even the stars in the heavens…Palestine, as ever, merits a special place. But the diaspora, far from being a source of shame to be overcome, represents a resplendent achievement."[30] As Gruen notes, "Philo saw no inconsistency or contradiction in this. Diaspora Jews might find fulfillment and reward in their communities abroad. But they honored Judaea as a refuge for the formerly displaced and unsettled, and the prime legacy of all."[31] Asserting the significance of a homeland did not undermine the contentment of living in diaspora. The portrayal of diasporic Jews as at home in diaspora is perhaps an oversimplification for people whose difference did not matter, until it mattered. That is, when differences are highlighted or asserted by the empire, as we shall see, it is likely that Jews, and other subordinated groups, lived with the haunting possibility of violence. Throughout this study, I highlight contexts of violence mindful that those who live in the in-between spaces, in third space (neither a

---

[28] Shaye J.D. Cohen, "'Those Who Say They are Jews and Are Not,'" in *Diasporas in Antiquity*, Shaye J.D. Cohen and Ernest S. Frerichs, eds. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 3.

[29] Ibid, 10

[30] Gruen, 252.

[31] Ibid.

citizen or an exile), must continuously negotiate their identity. In an imperial context, these negotiations presented the options to resist or to accommodate. Negotiating identity was not simply between a people and an empire, it also occurred among other groups (their neighbors) and within the group itself.

One of the many influences upon Jewishness was Greek culture. Numerous scholars have explored the cultural interaction between Jewishness and Hellenism.[32] Concerning the encounter between Jewish and Greek cultures (and identities), Gruen describes this interaction as a "cultural revolution." Gruen's investigation into diaspora is directly related to the relationship that the Jewish people had with other cultural influences, mainly Hellenism, and with the ruling Roman authority. He finds that "Ancient Judaism was never quite the same again. The adjustments entailed by that encounter played a profound role in the reshaping of Jewish self-conception…They not only engaged with the Hellenized Mediterranean; they constructed that environment for themselves."[33] Gruen concludes: "Jews deliberately eschewed blending, syncretism, or assimilation. They molded Hellenism to their own design."[34] This would have been particularly true for Jewish elites. Gruen continues:

> Jewish intellectuals of the diaspora had access to the literary and philosophical world of Hellenism, indeed held a place within it—while forever reexamining and rearticulating their own traditions. They stood simultaneously inside and outside

---

[32] See for example, Lee Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998).

[33] Ibid., 213.

[34] Ibid., 227.

> the Greco-Roman cultural community, a fact that explains much in their construction of that community.[35]

It is this double stance—both inside and out—that I suggest makes diaspora Jewish identity vulnerable.

Clear distinctions between Judaism and Hellenism can only been made by acknowledging the influence these systems had on each other. In *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict and Confluence* Levine defines Hellenization as how the dominant culture was localized. He writes: "There are those who claim that Jewish life has survived intact and vibrant throughout the ages – despite persecution, exile, and discrimination – precisely because the Jews succeeded in maintaining their own particularistic ways, refusing to accommodate any foreign patterns of thinking and behavior…There is certainly some truth in this claim; however, it is only a partial truth, when taken alone is, in effect, a distortion of the whole."[36] Levine argues that the interaction between the two cultural systems (Hellenistic and Jewish) was influenced by a variety of factors including, socioeconomic class, and geographical region, urban versus non-urban setting, among others. He concludes that there was a "dynamic interplay" between the cultures, asserting that in order to understand Jewish identity for any historical period, particularly the Greco-Roman period both influences must be considered.[37]

Moreover, the interaction among various cultures may have made it difficult to make distinctions. Shaye J.D. Cohen argues that Jewish identity was "elusive and

---

[35] Ibid., 230.
[36] Lee Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 183-4.

[37] Ibid., 184.

uncertain" in late antiquity.[38] He maintains that Jews were indistinguishable from others based on looks, clothing, speech, names, or occupations. Cohen posits a shift in the nature of Jewish identity from ethnos to ethnoreligion, in the 2nd century BCE, which would allow for non-Jews to enter into the Jewish community. As a result, Jewish identity should be understood as diverse and fluid.

Jewish Identity in a Roman Imperial Context

The imperial context facilitates, forces, and regulates coherent identity formation and thus concomitantly ensures its instability. The story of Judaism's formation and evolution, its continuities and discontinuities, is told in terms of changing realities of living under Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and later Roman rule. *In Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200BCE to 640CE*, Seth Schwartz examines the Jewish response to an imperial context over time. He argues that ancient Judaism was influenced by imperial power as much as it was by the religious tradition. According to Schwartz, adoption of Greco-Roman culture was voluntary for the Jews, and as a result, Palestine was like any other Roman province. There were times that the Jews were afforded imperial support enabling integration, even a degree of protection. However, when imperial patronage was lacking, "Judaism shattered."[39] In fact, Seth Schwartz describes the shattering of Judaism as a response to "the combined impact of the destruction of the temple, and the failure of two revolts, the deconstitution of the Jewish nation, and the annexation of Palestine by an

---

[38] Shaye J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 3.

[39] Seth Schwartz, *In Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200BCE to 640CE* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 15.

empire at the height of its power and prosperity."[40] As Schwartz makes clear, Judaism was adversely impacted, but not utterly destroyed. The events Schwartz outlines are part of a narrative that illustrates the varying relationship Jews had to Roman imperial power between 70-135. Furthermore, Schwartz makes clear that the Jewish elite had the most to gain from adopted Greco-Roman culture. By "becoming Roman" they could have joined a wider group of provincial elites throughout the Roman Empire.

The effect that empire had on Judaism is only one side of the coin; the other side is the reaction of Judaism to imperial forces. Steven Weitzman highlights these reactions in *Surviving Sacrilege: Cultural Persistence in Jewish Antiquity*. He explores the role of the imagination and creativity in the struggle for cultural survival in Jewish texts. According to Weitzman, in the context of empire when a people have no power the strategies for survival include integration, flight, and resistance. Weitzman shows how these "crises inscribed themselves deeply on Jewish memories" and how the Jews employed survival tactics he refers to as the "arts of cultural persistence."[41] Weitzman defines imagination as the capacity to "reshape the past to accommodate present needs, to transcend the constraints of visible reality, and to conjure invisible allies, which in his view at times constituted a pragmatic survival strategy."[42] In order words, the "shattered

---

[40] Ibid.

[41] Steven Weitzman, *Surviving Sacrilege: Cultural Persistence in Jewish Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 5, 6.

[42] Weitzman, 5. Weitzman concludes his analysis: "Indeed, this struggle [for cultural survival] was artful in two senses of the word: in antiquity the Latin *ars* denoted what we have been calling a tactic; in more recent parlance, of course, 'art' also denotes works of imagination. What unites all the efforts examined in this book is precisely that they enlist both kinds of artfulness" (161). In fact, Weitzman proposes three categories of survival

shards" are gathered to make something new, yet recognizable. According to Weitzman, it is the "art of the pivot" a kind of necessary duplicity as a strategy. Weitzman maintains that foreign rule and its threat are only one of many potential sources that could result in a disruption of culture. Yet, it is such an imperial context that exacerbates the need for an easily recognizable identity (e.g. citizen or foreigner while at the same time interpellating or calling a people into being whose customs, practices, and ways of being challenge its powers.

While sameness (assimilation, acculturation) can be observed in the first century Mediterranean world, difference was also made apparent in various ways. It is necessary to (re)define oneself in an imperial context, particularly when distinctions are emphasized. It is within this context that a discourse of displacement is produced and strangers are made.

Philo of Alexandria: The Flexibility of Alexandrian Jewish Identity

Philo's *In Flaccum* is an example of how an imperial context affects the construction of the identity of a diaspora Jewish community. *In Flaccum* is a treatise written about a particular place (the city of Alexandria), at a particular time (38 CE), during a particular political moment (pogrom issued by Flaccus, Roman governor of Egypt). The pogrom asserted that Alexandrian Jews were "called aliens and foreigner" (ξενος και επηλδυας ημας απεκαλει).[43] By examining three aspects of the treatise, I show

---

strategies. 1. Appeasement and symbiosis 2. Resistance and 3. Flight, concealment, and deflection.

[43] *In Flaccum* 54.

that Philo's construction of Alexandrian Jews, and by extenstion diasporic Jewish identity, is unstable and in many ways undone by its own construction. I will explore these three areas: (1) public declarations of identity and naming, (2) the use of space to assert difference and particularly the significance of a homeland for diasporic identity, and (3) the construction of a self over other.

Alexandrian Jews are interpellated in a very public way that further illuminates the importance of how group identity is communicated. There are two aspects of the pogrom outlined in *Flaccum* 54 that underscore this communication: (1) It is an official pronouncement and (2) it is a public declaration. The decree comes from a Roman officer, making it authoritative. The sanctioning of the Alexandrian Jews status solidifies what previously could have been debated. It is not clear what their status was prior to the decree. Scholars' opinions vary as to whether Jews were allowed to participate in the gymnasium or if they held citizenship in the city of Alexandria.[44] As such, a seemingly ambiguous status may be preferable to one that is fixed or stable. Fluidity enabled the Jews to continue to make a case for their desired status. The fact that the decree is public is significant, as well since the spread of knowledge facilitates action. In this case, the actions were violent. Philo goes on to detail the unfolding of the brutality that occurs in Alexandria. Jews are expelled from four of the five living quarters in the city and driven together into a very small corner of the one (55). They were deprived of all their belongings (56), die of famine (62), and are stoned by the mob if they happened to catch sight of them (66). Their dead bodies are dragged through the streets (71); and they are

[44] Pieter van der Horst provides a summary of this debate and a survey of scholarship concerning it in *Philo's* Flaccus*: The First Pogrom* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 22.

crucified (72). The public notice gave license, in a literal sense, for previously concealed hatred and envy towards the Jews to be expressed openly and violently. The publicity of the new status of Alexandrian Jews precipitates the violence that they endure. This was violence sanctioned by the province.[45] Their previously uncertain status afforded them safety, but now their newly declared status was seen and/or heard publicly and therefore could be exploited. The edict as Philo describes in *In Flaccum* 54 (απεκαλει) calls them forth or calls them out or as Van der Horst's renders απεκαλει, it "scandalizes."[46] This underscores that the Jews considered the edict to be offensive. Much like the audience of 1 Peter who are exhorted not to be ashamed to bear the name of *Christianos*, these Alexandrian Jews carried the burden of being declared ξενος και επηλυας. It was a public humiliation that demonstrates the impact of (official) naming.

Naming is one way to assert difference. The New Negro in the context of the twentieth century United States and *Christianos* in first-century Roman provinces of Asia Minor are examples of how communities are doubly labeled or named from within the community and by those outside. In *In Flaccum* 54 the decree "called them by the

---

[45] Allen Kerkeslager, "The Absence of Dionysios, Lampo, and Isidoros from the Violence in Alexandria in 38 CE," in *The Studia Philonica Annual* XVII (2005) 49-94. Kerkeslager concludes: "the violence may have been a perfectly 'normal' expression of the same brutal Roman policies that were well attested in punitive measures imposed both on individuals and communities across the empire. Roman imperialism, not a culture war between Judaism and Hellenism or a religious conflict between various subject peoples, may provide the most illuminating theme for understanding the violence in 38." (94)

[46] απεκαλει can also have the meaning to call back from exile, to call away, recall, or to call by a name by way of disparagement, as van der Horst further suggests.

unpleasant name of aliens and foreigner" (ξενος και επηλδυας ημας απεκαλει).[47] However, in the words of Flaccus, (Roman governor of Egypt) Philo more accurately describes Jews as "sojourners (κατοικοι) in the land entitled to full privileges" (172). There is a clear distinction between how the imperial power views Alexandrian Jews (foreigners and aliens) and how Philo believes Alexandrian Jews should be seen (sojourners, entitled to full privileges). Naming is one of ways in which self-understanding is expressed.

Space is also utilized to create and reinforce difference. In the contemporary example of the Great Migration, migrants in the North were often delegated to particular spaces in the city, creating ghettos.[48] Philo's treatise demonstrates that as a community, Alexandrians share spaces (theatre, gymnasium, etc.). At the same time, there are places that are marked as "sacred" for particular people within the community (temples, synagogues).[49] During this time of violent uprisings, the Jewish community is designated

---

[47] E. Mary Smallwood, *Philonis Alexandrini Legation ad Gaium* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 216. Smallwood goes on to explain the relationship between the change in designation of the Alexandrian Jews and their physical space. She writes, "As ξενοι the Jews were now to have the right of domicile in one section only of the five into which Alexandria was divided – the section assigned to the original Jewish settlers early in the city's history and designated 'Jewish'…The Jews were now to lose the privilege acquired in the course of time, but never legally granted to them, of residing in all parts of the city, and were to be restricted to the one original Jewish section, which thus became the first ghetto in the Roman world" (20-1).

[48] The Great Migration is often associated with urbanization and ghettoization, as we have seen in chapter 1.

[49] It is important to note that the gymnasium was not an all-inclusive entity. Membership to the gymnasium would have been based on social status. There were most assuredly elite Jews who had such a membership. As such, the question of identity and the pogrom that is addressed in the treatise has class implications. It seems the elite have the most to

a space in which to live by Flaccus, creating a ghetto.[50] For example, in his essay "Philo's *In Flaccum*: Ethnicity and Social Space in Roman Alexandria," Richard Alston observes that the buildings of the city were "significant symbols of group identity and by excluding the Jewish community from this urban space, the rioters enforced a particular interpretation of the urban community."[51] Boundaries were being drawn for Jewish exclusion and difference is witnessed in the landscape. Forcing the Jewish community into a particular space, as well as laying claim to their sacred space, underscores the declaration that the Jews were not citizens, but foreigners and strangers in Alexandria, as the pogrom declares. This kind of placement of a people was yet another way to regulate bodies and control people who are deemed different. For this group of Jewish Alexandrians, their identity is violently dis/placed as their difference is made apparent.

Despite (or because of) their physical location in Alexandria, Philo looks to another city upon which to construct their identity. Philo professes that Jews are unified by Jerusalem, their mothercity. Philo constructs a fragmented or displaced identity acknowledging their fatherland (country of residence) while esteeming their mother city, Jerusalem. Maren Neihoff suggests that it is the very context of empire that provides Philo with this paradigm. She writes:

> Philo's construction of Jerusalem as mothercity implied further classical features of colonization… imply[ing] that the Jews should construct their

---

lose. See Alston, 167-9. Women also would have been excluded. Class and gender are other ways in which difference can be asserted.

[50] See Philo, *In Flaccum*, 54-96.

[51] Richard Alston, "Philo's *In Flaccum:* Ethnicity and Social Space in Roman Alexandria," in *Greece & Rome* 44:2 (Oct 1997), 165.

> identity in analogy to Greek colonists, who looked up to the cult of their mothercity and modeled their own religious practice on it…More generally, Philo wished to convey the idea of faithfulness to one's place of origin.[52]

Jerusalem was never *physically* the mother city of Philo and yet, for him and many other diasporic Jews, Jewish identity is rooted in this distant land. This is one split in Philo's construction of Jewish identity. Cynthia Baker observes: "Judea is not *their patris*, nor are Judeans like Agrippa their countrymen. Philo's Judean king speaks of his homeland in the singular possessive; for him, it is 'my' homeland, never 'ours'."[53] Among Jews, the relationship to the homeland varied. There is no purity in identities. In fact, the seemingly cohesive identities contain a great deal of diversity. Baker argues: "The first-century Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria not only recognized multiple Jewish ethnic identifications; he insisted on them as an essential attribute of Jews."[54] She concludes: "At the very least, Philo must be understood to be arguing here for dual Jewish-Alexandrian 'ethnicity' (and, likewise, Jewish-Roman, Jewish-Asian, Jewish-Syrian, Jewish-Macedonian, and so on) as over and against a singularly Jewish/Judean ethnicity,

---

[52] Maren Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2001), 35. Cynthia Baker similarly observes: "The dual and gendered parentage constructed through the two 'genealogical' elements of Jews' identities ('fatherland' and 'mother city') signal the relative import of each (fatherland is primary), even as it affirms the significance of both" (Baker, " 'From Every Nation under Heaven,'" 87).

[53] Baker, 88.

[54] Ibid., 86. Citing Flaccus 46, Baker contends, "Philo sets out to formulate explicit and universal claims about the nature of Jewish 'ethnicity.' It is in this context that he asserts that, although Jews (ought to) bear an attitude of fond piety for what he terms (adapting the ancient Greek colonial concept) their 'mother city' – a certain unnamed 'Holy City where the sacred Temple of the most high God' – their claims of ancestry, birth, kinship, and inheritance are appropriately reserved for the myriad 'fatherlands' around the world where they have dwelt from time immemorial."

in order for the passages in *Flaccus* and *Embassy* to make sense in context."[55] This kind of diversity makes singular difference almost impossible. Although similar, Jewish identity is not the same as Roman or Greek, and yet "Jewishness" cannot be expressed without "Romanness" and "Greekness" and in this case, "Egyptianness."[56] Philo does, however, clearly align Jewish identity with the empire. In order to do so a common enemy, an other, had to be identified.

It is attested that one way to form an identity is by asserting a self over an other. As Judith Perkins succinctly states, "Cultural identities are produced through difference; an 'us' is created in terms of a 'not them'."[57] In *In Flaccum*, Philo constructs Egyptians as the ultimate other. One way in which Philo degrades Egyptians is by emphasizing their connection to the land. He speaks against "Egyptian attachment to soil and stresses the value of diaspora life, which transcends the physical homeland, but remains loyal to the mothercity…As far as Philo was concerned, Jews should no longer see themselves as

---

[55] Ibid., 90.

[56] Steven Weitzman makes a similar observation. He suggests that Philo's writings can be read from a post-colonial perspective, and more specifically as colonial mimicry. Paraphrasing Homi Bhabha, Weitzman asserts: "Jews are almost the same as the emperor, but not quite. The "not quite" that complicates this equation is Jewish tradition—aniconism, the synagogue, and other practices make it difficult for the emperor to recognize in the Jews a "reformed, recognizable Other"…Within the Roman imagination that Philo was addressing, friendship was marked by like-mindedness but it also required difference, the true friend proving his affection by only partially imitating his companion. By emphasizing his people's refusal to imitate everything about the emperor, Philo resists the imperial desire for a recognizable Other even as he accommodates it, his model in this endeavor is the true friend who proves his love by being almost the same but not quite." (74-75). In this way, Jews are neither the self (Roman imperial identity) nor the Other. They occupy a third space. Weitzman, here, highlights the conundrum of identity formation in an imperial setting.

[57] Perkins, 18.

Egyptians."[58]As such, Jews could not be attached to the land; they were sojourners. A sharp distinction needed to be made between Jews and Egyptians. Despite attempts to clearly delineate Jews from the other ethnic groups in Alexandria, it seems that just as the Greek culture had infiltrated the land of Egypt, Egyptian practices likely influenced Greeks, as well. Hellenism in Egypt is not entirely distinct from Egyptian culture, just as Judaism in Egypt was not entirely different from "Egyptianness." There was the potential for overlap. Niehoff makes a similar observation. She concludes, "[P]recisely because Egypt is a constant threat, she has also become a prime constituent of Jewish identity."[59] Alexandrian Jews lived with the constant threat of being seen as Egyptians. Proximity alone makes "mixing" possible. In forming an Alexandrian Jewish identity, Philo could not simply highlight similarities between Jews and Greeks and Romans because in a multi-ethnic environment, it became necessary, particularly during a crisis, for Jews to distinguish themselves. Alexandria's multi-ethnic nature was a result of its colonized status, having first been conquered by the Greeks, then the Romans. It must always be

[58] Niehoff, 62-3.

[59] Ibid.,46.

considered within its imperial context.[60] Philo's ethnic reasoning attempts to legitimize this form of Jewishness. He does this by polemically separating Jewishness from Egyptianness.

In Alexandria, the imperial context made it necessary to present a stable and fixed identity. In this same Roman imperial context, the author of Hebrews constructs a new Jewish identity over and against an old. In the American hegemonic context, the New Negro is formed over and against the old. In all examples, the old constitutes the new demonstrating the dependence of one upon the other. All of these diasporic identities rely on the concepts of diasporic space as a place to negotiate their identities.

Philo's treatise provides a way to consider how diasporic identity is negotiated in an imperial context. The official naming by an imperial force may not be aligned with how a community names themselves. Interpellation can have violent implications, and identities are often constructed over against each other. Finally, space can be variously employed to constitute identities and to assert difference. This space can also be a productive space to reimagine one's place in the world.

---

[60] Schenck states, "Aside from Rome, Alexandria was the greatest city in the empire and was home to the best-known library of the ancient world" (9). Alexandria's rich history further elucidates the competition for status. "The ethnic group that held primacy in Alexandria was Greek. After Alexander the Greek conquered Egypt in 332 BCE, Egypt came under Greek control. Alexander's general Ptolemy retained control of the region after Alexander's death, and his descendants ruled for the next two centuries. The aristocracy of Alexandria (the chief city of Egypt) was thus primarily Greek, a situation that continued even after Roman acquisition in 30 BCE" (9). Furthermore, Philo takes great pride in Alexandria. Sarah Pearce assesses that this "pride in the city under Roman rule stresses the great benefactions of the emperor Augustus, whose monuments, 'particularly in our own Alexandria,' surpass the greatest works existing in other cities. The importance of Alexandria as a great city in Philo's consciousness is revealed by the fact that Alexandria is the only earthly city he calls a megalópoliς (great city), a word he normally uses to describe the cosmos…" (Sarah Pearce, *The Land of the Body* [Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2007], 14.)

Conclusion

Jewish identity is informed by the concepts of exile and exodus; when these concepts are explored within their cultural context they reveal complex negotiations concerning issues of power, ethnicity and race, religion, status, and place. Exile and exodus are spatial constructs that create diasporic identities. Jewish identity is an example of diaspora identity. As I have suggested in chapter two, religion provides a framework for meaning making. Neusner observes: "How and why the exile and return became the pattern for Judaic systems to which the actual experience of exile and return was alien tells us much about the power of religion, not merely to respond to, but to define the world."[61] This persistence of the paradigm of exile and exodus elucidates one of the ways in which Jewish identity is conceived of as diasporic.

Diasporic identities occupy a third space, a diasporic space that is a space of enunciation where identity is affirmed and (re)defined.[62] In this space of tension –

---

[61] Neusner, 222.

[62] See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 55. Here, Bhabha writes, "It is this Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of cultures have no primordial unity or fixity that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew." Edward Soja's notion of third space has resonance here well. Soja surmises his notion of Third Space thusly, "Thirdspace (as Lived Space) is simultaneously (1) a distinctive way of looking at, interpreting, and acting to change the spatiality of human life (or, if you will, human geography today); (2) an integral, if often neglected, part of the trialectics of spatiality, inherently no better or worse than Firstspace or Secondspace approaches to geographical knowledge; (3) the most encompassing spatial perspective, comparable in scope to the richest forms of the historical and sociological imaginations; (4) a strategic meeting place for fostering collective political action against all forms of human oppression; (5) a starting point for new and different explorations that can move beyond the 'third term' in a constant search for other spaces; and still more to come" (269-70). Edward J. Soja,

between homeland and home - diasporic identity is negotiated. Examining Jews in Hellenistic Egypt, Joseph Modrzejewski describes the status of the Jews as "neither 'citizens' nor 'autonomous aliens."[63] The example of Philo's construction of Alexandrian Jewish identity as sojourners exemplifies the dangers of occupying such a space. Modrzejewski reminds: "given favorable circumstances, dual allegiance falls within the realm of possibilities, but they give us due warning that, in the long term, it can prove dangerous. They also remind us that the success of any acculturation is closely linked to social and political status."[64] While diasporic identities attempt to transcend dichotomies, their contexts require clarification of their identity. Acculturation or resistance is an example of one such dichotomy. Further, Daniel Boyarin asserts that "Jewishness disrupts the very categories of identity, because it is not national, not genealogical, not religious, but all of these, in dialectical tension with one another."[65] Diasporic identity is both "disaggregated" and "threatened."[66] Yet, he proposes that diasporic culture and

---

"Thirdspace: Expanding the Scope of the Geographical Imagination," in *Human Geography Today* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 260-78.

[63] Joseph Meleze Modrzejewski, "How to be a Jew in Hellenistic Egypt?" in *Diasporas in Antiquity,* Shaye J.D. Cohen and Ernest S. Frerichs, eds (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 80.

[64] Ibid, 90-1.

[65] Boyarin, 244. He further suggests: "Rather than the dualism of gendered bodies and universal souls or Jewish/Greek bodies and universal souls…– we can substitute *partially* Jewish, *partially* Greek bodies, bodies that are *sometimes* gendered and *sometimes* not. It is this idea that I am calling diasporized identity" (245).

[66] Ibid., 243-246. Boyarin observes: "Diasporized identities seem threatened ones, and one of the responses to such threats is separatism, an attempt at a social structure that re-aggregates the disaggregated, re-integrates the non-integral, by closing off borders, by indeed attempting to prevent mixing, whether biological or cultural" (245-6).

identity are a more productive alternative to dualistic tendencies that abounds in universalism. According to Boyarin, "Disaporic Jewish identity has been founded on common memory of shared space and on the hope for such a shared space in an infinitely deferred future. Space itself is thus transformed into time. Memory of territory has made deterritorialization possible, and paradoxically, the possession of territory may have made Diaspora Jewishness impossible."[67] Diasporic identity is complex, contradictory, and productive.

As I have stated, for the first few centuries of the Common Era, there was no clear or consistent distinction between what we now identify as "Christian" and "Jew." As such, understanding diasporic identity as a way that Jewish subjects in the Roman Empire negotiated their identity is paramount to understanding the formation of identities in Hebrews and 1 Peter. In the chapters that follow, I will demonstrate how the texts of Hebrews and 1 Peter engage in ethnic reasoning to form identities that are fixed and fluid.

---

[67] Ibid., 245. Paul Christopher Johnson also notes: "In Jewish thought *diaspora* carries within it a soteriology, the promise of the future salvation of the people through a return to the place of origin…This common feature suggests how different diasporas draw on different imaginative and sentimental sensibilities: diasporas of hope, of terror, of despair, of desire"(32).

Baker similarly acknowledges the dangers of universalism and its denial of diversity. Baker concludes: "Identifying 'universalist' or 'multiethnic' elements in some early articulations of Jewishness might lead us to recognize the peculiar, imperial 'particularism' of some early Christian claims to be the one fully realized human race, to the exclusion of all others. Were this to happen, we might find ourselves on the cusp of a profound paradigm shift. Regardless, acknowledgement of the full spectrum of ancient ethnoracial rhetoric concerning both Jews and Christians might begin, at the very least, to disarm and dismantle some of the rhetorical weapons of mass destruction that our generation has inherited from our own forebears."

Reading these identities through the lens of the New Negro elucidates how this fixity conceals diversity and complex internal negotiations for defining one's peoplehood.

CHAPTER 5

A BETTER COUNTRY: HEBREWS AND CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, God has prepared a city for them.
Hebrews 11:16

Hebrews is a text that exemplifies transgressing boundaries and yet concomitantly reifying them, moving fluidly between heaven and earth; it establishes countries and cities and borders of the camp—outside or in—and while doing so, it creates a people. In these ways, Hebrews participates in the emerging first-century identity construction that would become "Christian." One of the ways it does so it by exhorting its audience to move. The text beckons its audience to "approach" the throne of grace, to "draw near" to God and to enter the sanctuary (4:16; 7:19; 10:19–22). Each of these exhortations represents a movement not only toward God but also to a newly conceived identity.[1] The author ultimately urges the audience to "come outside the camp" (13:13). This final exhortation is a (re)location of the inscribed audience. The second way Hebrew forms a new identity is through ethnic reasoning. Much like the identity of the New Negro, Hebrews ethno-spatially constructs what I will call a "New (Christian) Jew." This identity, inflected by class, gender, and ethnicity/race, though seemingly rigid, is flexible enough to respond to its complex cultural context.

[1] Mary Rose D'Angelo writes, "To draw near means not only to go forward in understanding the scripture and the message of Christ but also to endure and resist the persecution that the author foresees, so as to enter into God's presence with Christ." Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Hebrews," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, eds. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 455.

In this chapter, I will begin by outlining the historical-critical issues of Hebrews. Next, I will present a summary of recent Hebrews scholarship concerning its social context and spatiality. I will then offer a reading of Hebrews through the lens of my work on the New Negro. This reading will highlight the ways the author constructs peoplehood through kinship, creating an identity for the audience by making particular ancestral claims. The ancestral claims are employed to construct a diasporic identity, exhorting to audience to accept an identity as strangers and aliens. As with both the Great Migration and the Jews in Alexandria, however, diasporic identities can have material implications for a minority group that can be engaged through dis/placement and movement. I will thus explore how the context of suffering not only connects the audience to its past, but also to its more hopeful future. The call to come outside the gates offers the audience an opportunity to "move" and ultimately illustrates the audience's autonomy. I will suggest that envisioning a future, even an imperial one, provides hope for a different future in a context of suffering. Finally, I will conclude by introducing (an)other voice, the text of Matthew, into the conversation of first century Jewish identity formation. In summary, this chapter seeks not only to underscore the ethno-spatial formation of community identity in the text, but also to assert that this construct, although presented as coherent, is in fact a threatened and fragile attempt to bring together disparate cultural pieces to create a wholly recognizable people, something we might think of as a "New (Christian) Jew."

Historical Critical Issues in Hebrews

Genre

Although tradition has held that Hebrews is an epistle more recently scholars have

asserted that it is a homily.[2] First, the text describes itself as "a word of exhortation" (Heb. 13:22). This is the same description applied to Paul's sermon at the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia in Acts 13:15. The document also lacks the form of a letter. Witherington describes the genre of Hebrews thusly: "This document, like 1 John, is a homily; and Daniel Harrington calls it 'arguably the greatest Christian sermon ever written down.' It does not have the elements of a letter except at the very end of the document (13:22-25), and these epistolary features are added because this sermon had to be sent to the audience rather than delivered orally to them by the author." [3] In fact, Gabriella Gelardini suggests that it is an ancient synagogue homily for Tisha be-Av.[4] Witherington goes on to argue: "Sermon manuscripts, ancient or modern, do not conform to the characteristics of a letter, with addressor or addressee expected at the outset. Neither do other rhetorical forms of speaking – and this document involves rhetoric of

---

[2] The arguments for characterizing the text as an epistle have warrant. The end of the document (Heb. 13:22-25) contains the features of a letter. See, for example, Ellingworth, *Hebrews,* 62 who contends Hebrews is an epistle. Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 22.

[3] Ben Witherington, III, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVersity Press, 2007), 20.

[4] Gabriella Gelardini, "Hebrews, An Ancient Synagogue Homily for Tisha be-Av: Its Function, Its Basis, Its Theological Interpretation in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods-New Insights*, ed. Gabriella Gelardini (Biblical Interpretation Series 75; Boston: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 107-27. Hartwig Thyen further suggests that Hebrews is the only preserved Jewish homily of the period. See: Ben Witherington, III, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians*, 20. In his recent commentary, Gareth Lee Cockerill similarly finds: "Hebrews is best understood as an example of the kind of homily or sermon typical of the synagogue and thus used in early Christian worship…After all, the purpose of a homily was to interpret an inspired and authoritative texts, show its relevance for the present and urge the hearers to obey its teaching." Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 12-3.

considerable skill... The oral and homiletical character of the document cannot be stressed enough."[5] Luke Timothy Johnson observes the predominant use of the first person plural "we" and the frequent references to speaking (see Heb 2:5, 5:11, 6:9) as appropriate to a homily.[6] In my opinion, the final greeting of Hebrews does not outweigh the internal evidence and self-description and overall character of the document, therefore, I, too, suggest that Hebrews is a homily.

Author

The author of Hebrews is unknown.[7] With little to no evidence for its author, tradition maintained that Paul wrote Hebrews. This argument was bolstered by Hebrews' position in the earliest manuscript where it found among the Pauline epistles.[8] However,

---

[5] Witherington, 20-1.

[6] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation,* revised. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999), 458.

[7] See Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 44-5. He summarizes: "Origen commented that the identity of the author of Hebrews is known to God alone, and this view has been widely adopted by scholars" (45). Ruth Hoppin argues for Priscilla's authorship in her article, "The Epistle to the Hebrews Is Priscilla's Letter" in *A Feminist Companion to the Catholic Epistles and Hebrews,* Amy-Jill Levine with Maria Mayo Robbins, eds. (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 147-170.

[8] In her article, "The Epistle to the Hebrews in Modern Interpretation" Shelia Griffith writes: "The earliest manuscript tradition of Hebrews comes from the early-third-century Chester Beatty Papyrus, P^{46}, which is a collection of Pauline letters. In this collection Hebrews, titled 'To the Hebrews' (ΠΡΟΣ ΣΒΡΑΙΟΥΣ) is sandwiched between Paul's letters to the Romans and the Corinthians. This positioning reflects the long-standing belief in the East that Paul authored Hebrews." Shelia Griffith, "The Epistle to the Hebrews in Modern Interpretation," *Review and Expositor* 102 (2005), 236. See also: Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation*, 19-27.

Pauline authorship was debated as early as the third century.[9] Now scholarly consensus holds that Paul is not the author, given the sermon's style and content. Despite the theological and stylistic differences between Hebrews and Paul's epistles, the suggested authors of Hebrews are individuals associated with Paul. Koester highlights 5 of Paul's companions as potential authors. They include: Barnabas, Apollos, Silas (Silvanus), Priscilla, and Aquila.[10] No evidence concerning authorship is conclusive. Establishing that Paul is not the author, the question of authorship remains an open one.

Date of Composition

Scholars have posited that Hebrews was written between 60 and 100 CE, and I do not see that a more precise date can be determined.[11] The use of Hebrews by Clement of Rome is most often the basis for the terminus of its dating.[12] Attridge also suggests the reference to Timothy in 13:23 and his inability to still be alive much beyond 100 further supporting this as *terminus ad quem*.[13]

Scholars are generally divided into two camps within this date range, pre-destruction (of the Jerusalem Temple) or post-destruction. The dating proposed for the

---

[9] See Harold Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews,* Hermenia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 1-3.

[10] Koester, 44-5.

[11] For a detailed discussion of the date, audience, and occasion of Hebrews see Attridge, 6-13. Witherington, III, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians,* 18. Koester, 48-54. Johnson, 32-40.

[12] See 1 Clement 36:1-6.

[13] Attridge, 8.

homily is also often closely associated with how one identifies the audience. Generally, those who suggest a Jewish Christian audience favor an earlier pre-destruction date for Hebrews. For these scholars, it would be almost inconceivable that the author would not mention the Temple if it had been destroyed, given the author's extensive use of cultic language and imagery.[14] Others who suggest the audience of Hebrews is mixed (Gentile and Jewish Christians) more often propose the latter part of the first century as the date of composition. The relationship to Judaism, for such an audience, would perhaps have been less important and the lack of any mention of the Temple can be explained by the fact that the Temple no longer existed. It has also been argued that the homily was written in response to the destruction of the Temple, if so, the homily functions as a proposition for an alternative way to worship in its absence.[15]

In addition to the relationship between Judaism and the audience, the context of suffering is used to try to determine a more precise dating of the text but to little success. In Hebrews 10:32-34, the author refers to "those earlier days" when the inscribed audience endured various persecutions. William Lane argues that this description of suffering is a reference to the Emperor Claudius's edict that expelled Christians from

---

[14] Barnabas Lindars contends, "With a writer as rhetorically astute as this author, the deafening silences are very telling about the date of writing." *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews,* New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 10. This argument from silence, while compelling is not definitive. It is quite possible that the author

[15] See: Marie E. Isaacs, *Sacred Space: An Approach to the Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews,* JSNTSup. 73 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992) and Ellen Bradshaw Aitken, "Portraying the Temple in Stone and Text: The Arch of Titus and the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Sewanne Theological Review* 45:2 (Easter 2002), Isaacs and Aitken both suggest the occasion of Hebrews is the destruction of the temple.

Rome in 49 CE, as a result he concludes that the current crisis is likely Neronian persecutions and dates Hebrews' composition between 64-68.[16] Another suggestion for a time when Roman imperial policies that would have caused hardship for a Jewish/Christian audience is during the reign of Domitian. This would result in dating Hebrews later in the first century, around 90. However, some scholars propose that there is no evidence of systematic or sustained persecutions of "Christians" during the time of Domitian's reign (81-96).[17]

While the methods for dating Hebrews are fairly subjective and inconclusive, internal evidence may provide additional information to assist on this question. The mention of Timothy (13:23) and reference to the audience as "second generation" followers of Christ (Heb 2:3) offer additional data, but little guidance for narrowing the gap of the proposed dating. Moreover, for some scholars the high Christology found in Hebrews has been a factor in suggesting a later date. However, as Sheila Griffith argues, "Indeed, some of the highest Christology in the New Testament can be found in the undisputed letters of Paul (e.g., 1 Cor. 8:6; 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:5-11). Most scholars argue

---

[16] William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8,* Word Biblical Commentary, ed. D. A. Hubbard and G. W. Barker, vol. 47A (Dallas: Word, 1991)*,* lxiv-lxv.

[17] See: Steve Muir, "The Anti-Imperial Rhetoric of Hebrews 1.3: Χαρακτηρ as a 'Double-Edged Sword'" in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in its Ancient Contexts*, eds. Richard Bauckham, Daniel Driver, Trevor Hart and Nathan MacDonald (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 181.

It is important to note that there is no consensus among historians concerning the severity or extent of persecutions of "Christians" during the reign of Domitian. For instance, Steven Friesen writes: "Political executions in the imperial center increased late in Domitian's reign, but there is no support for a systematic campaign against Christians in Rome or elsewhere." See: Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 143.

that these high Christological ideas did not originate with Paul, but with the larger Christian community *before* Paul. Thus, it cannot be argued that the high Christology embedded in Hebrews necessarily indicates that Hebrews was composed at a relative late date."[18] Weighing all of the evidence, it seems difficult, if not impossible to be more precise with dating Hebrews.

Audience

Scholars have identified three primary questions concerning the recipients of Hebrews: their location, their ethnicity, and their social situation. I will begin by exploring their location. The proposed location of the audience has oscillated between with two major proposals: Palestine and Rome. The author's reference to the city in Heb 13:14 ("for here we have no lasting city") may be an indication that the audience is in an urban setting. Given the prevalence of the cultic themes, some commentators suggest Palestine as the location.[19] Koester writes: "Interpreters since at least the fourth century have thought that the Tabernacle and Levitical priesthood would have been most significant for those living near the Temple. Since the author extends the greetings of 'those from Italy' in 13:24, many assumed that Hebrews was sent from Italy to Jerusalem."[20] Furthermore, Cockerill highlights, "The early ascription of the title 'to the Hebrews' and subscriptions at the end of chapter 13 in various manuscripts suggest that

---

[18] Griffith, 239.

[19] See: For example, Attridge, 10.

[20] Koester, 48-9. Cockerill points to John Chrystostom as an example *Hom. Heb*. 2.

early copyists affirmed a Palestinian destination."[21] However, the greetings may be coming from those living outside of Italy. As such, Rome has been suggested as a potential destination for the homily.

There is additional internal and external evidence to offer support for Rome as the location of the audience. The use of the title "leader" supports a Roman destination. Koester writes: "The title 'leader' (*hegoumenos*, 13:7, 17, 24) fits a Roman destination, since the similar title (*proegoumenos* was used in literature associated with early Roman Christianity (1 Clem. 1:3; 21:6; Herm. *Vis* 2.2.6' 3.9.7)."[22] Moreover, Koester highlights the similarities between 1 Clement, *Shepherd of Hermas*, and 1 Peter to illustrate "that the issues posed by Hebrews was debated by Christians in Rome in the second century."[23] For me, this draws attention to the rhetorical effect of constructing an identity that is beyond the grasp of Roman imperial power when the audience is configured as located at the very center of imperial power.

Thus, I agree with the majority of scholars who contend that the recipients of the sermon are most likely in Rome. Their ethnic identity has been proposed to be Jewish Christians, Gentile Christians, or a mixture of both.[24] However, I read the inscribed audience as Christ believers complexly situated in the imbrications of ethnicity and religion, and Romanness, Greekness, and Judeanness, at the end of the first century.

---

[21] Cockerill, 13.

[22] Koester, 49.

[23] Ibid.

[24] See: Luke Timothy Johnson, 33.

The determination of the ethnicity of the audience is often directly connected to the major themes and interpretive strategies identified in the homily. Despite the cultic language and the significant use of Hebrew scripture, commentators tend to conclude that they are Christians because of "the appeals to maintain their confession."[25] A great deal of scholarship speculates about the relationship between the addressees and Judaism. Some scholars argue that managing the audience's relationship to the past is the occasion for the homily.[26] That is, the fear of apostasy is the motivation of the writer. This would point to a Jewish Christian audience negotiating their relationship to Judaism. However, other aspects of Hebrews can lead to different scholarly conclusions. For example, the allegorical interpretation in the text is often characterized as a Hellenistic tendency and the presence of Platonic philosophical language in Hebrews have led some scholars to suggest a Gentile audience. However, given that the writings of Philo and Josephus similarly use allegorical interpretation and Platonic language, such a suggestion cannot be conclusive. Koester purports: "Therefore, instead of seeking to identify the listeners' ethnic background, we do well to consider the complex way in which they would have

---

[25] Attridge, 10. A balanced discussion can also be found in Andrew H. Trotter, Jr. *Interpreting the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1997), 28-31.

[26] See for example: Barnabas Lindars proposes that an overwhelming sense of sin and guilt had caused those in the community to resort to Jewish customs that would give them a tangible sense of relief, and Hebrews answers by presenting Jesus' death as a once-for-all atoning sacrifice. deSilva resists this reading and instead suggests that rather than violent persecution or an attraction (reversion) to Judaism, the audience's desire for esteem and goods lost by their association with the Jesus movement is what the audience is struggling with. George H. Guthrie, "Hebrews in Its First-Century Contexts" in *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research* Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne, eds., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 441.

related to the dominant Greco-Roman culture, Jewish subculture, and Christian community."[27] Even within this helpful mapping, however, identity borders within and around "Jewish" and "Christian" should be understood as under construction and contestation (see pp. 7-9 in the introduction).

A thematic approach to the audience's identity has yielded a great deal of scholarly engagement and is most apropos to this project. These studies of Hebrews explore the identity of the audience beyond a Jewish/Gentile divide. Identifying the audience as wanderers, aliens, and strangers is an example of such a thematic approach. Perhaps the most influential work on Hebrews highlighting its pilgrim/sojourner themes is Ernst Käsemann's 1939 monograph *Das wandernde Gottesvolk*, translated into English as *The Wandering People of God* in 1984. Käsemann explores the motif of wandering in Hebrews. He identifies this theme as related to the "gnostic" concept of the soul's journey from the dark material world to the heavenly realm and reads Jesus' journey and work against the backdrop of this "redeemer myth." He writes, "The message of Christ in Hebrews makes use of mythical tradition to portray the redemptive event, but does not submit to it totally and without reservation."[28] Though compelling in many regards, this approach to Hebrews does not give full consideration to the fact that these motifs, found in the Hebrew Bible, are part of an inherited tradition or cultural milieu for the author of Hebrews.[29] While this work does little to illumine the identity of the audience, it does

---

[27] Koester, 48.

[28] Ernst Käsemann in *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews*, trans. R. A. Harrisville and I. L. Sandberg (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 151.

[29] Käsemann duly acknowledges the role of the Old Testament in Hebrews, but is dismissive of any relationship between the thought world of Philo and that of Hebrew's

elucidate the variety of options available to a community negotiating their identity. "Gnostic" is yet another possible identity option available to this audience.[30] Additionally, the theme of wandering (purposefully) toward the city of God is a productive and important one to explore further. The theme brings attention to the audience's movements through time, connecting the past to the present and future. Such connections, as we shall see, are important for establishing peoplehood.

Benjamin Dunning has similarly explored the audience's identity as sojourners. Dunning underscores both the importance of the audience's rhetorically constructed marginalization and interprets this status within the Greco-Roman context. In *Aliens and Strangers*, Dunning writes that alien identity is not "a string of broken paradoxes but

---

author. It is clear that in highlighting the theme of pilgrimage and reading it alongside the Gnostic redeemer myth, Käsemann is attempting to bring something new to the study of Hebrews. Käsemann begins his investigation by stating: "The old prejudice that Hebrews represents a more or less historically conditioned dispute with the Jewish religion would otherwise be not be held to with stubborn tenacity, and in the most diverse variations and abridgements…It merely closes off understanding for this most unique writing of the New Testament and cannot be confirmed by enlisting the advocates of this thesis, however, great." Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God*, 24.

[30] I place Gnostic in quotations to remind that the term is highly contested. This is an extremely limited attempt to expose the shortcomings of the current typology of this and other terms such as "Roman" or "Hellenism" or "Judaism" or "Christianity." For a more detailed discussion on Gnosticism as a term see: Michael Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 1996 and Karen King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard University Press), 2003.

David Brakke argues for early Christian diversity in *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). He highlights three key figures in second century Rome (Valentinus, Marcion, and Justin Martyr) to illustrate the unity and diversity of early Christianity, see pp. 90-111.

rather a rich and versatile discourse of emerging identity."[31] Dunning presents various ways in which Christians characterize themselves as "aliens or sojourners" by exploring a variety of texts (Epistle to Diognetus, *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Apocryphon of James* and Hebrews). In Hebrews, Dunning identifies the attempts to distinguish themselves by employing the language of alienation, in effect constructs Christians as "not so different" from Roman society. He contends: "[I]n laying claim to a valorized space of marginality, this strategy of differentiation does enact a resistance of sorts, seeking to choose the terms on which others recognize the place of Christians within the field of ancient identities."[32] Dunning refers to this identity as a "rhetorically shaped usable social identity."[33] Looking beyond the Jew/Gentile divide elucidates the constructed and contested nature of identity, particularly in a Roman imperial context.

Social Context of Hebrews

As I have noted, the text represents the social situation of the audience as having experienced suffering, shame, and affliction (10:32-35; 12:4,13). Kenneth Schenck summarizes the situation as such: "Christians….could be accused of unlawful assembly

---

[31] Dunning, *Aliens and Sojourners*, 103. Dunning takes this position in contrast to that of Rowan Greer. Greer argues that "the paradox of alien citizenship can never be successfully put into practice on a social scale. All the figures I have discussed state the paradox as an ideal, but in trying to actualize it, they break it" Rowan Greer, "Alien Citizens: A Marvelous Paradox," in *Civitas: Religious Interpretations of the City*, Peter S. Hawkins, ed. Atlanta: Scholars, 1986), 54. By questioning the viability of this identity, Greer appropriately highlights its fragility.

[32] Ibid., 63.

[33] Ibid.

or, during the reign of Domitian, be charged with failure to pay the Jewish tax – even if they were not Jewish. They could be charged with atheism for failure to participate in the state religion."[34] This is more than we can say with surety about the experience and self-understanding of the audience. However, all of these scenarios underscore potential hardships for a community in an imperial context, particularly one that lived on the edges of Judeanness and Romanness. Despite the uncertainty of the coherence or extent of the severity of the "persecutions" (ranging from shame to exile), what seems to be clear from Hebrews is that some Christ believers understood themselves as living in a hostile environment and generated a discourse that responded to this and thereby reinforced such a self-understanding. My examination of Hebrews will explore how spatial and ethnic-racial thinking played a role in that endeavor.

The social context of Hebrew is not limited to its Roman imperial context and the audience as minorities within this context; it also involves various philosophical and/or Jewish traditions that influenced the thought and life of the audience. Scholarly debates have been concerned with classifying Hebrews within a particular tradition and then reading the text through this lens. The text has been categorized as Platonic, Gnostic, Philonic, Qumran, and mystic traditions, among others.[35] William Lane and others have

---

[34] Kenneth Schenck, *Understanding the Book of Hebrews* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 104.

[35] For example, see Lincoln Hurst, *The Epistle to The Hebrews: Its Background of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Here, Hurst explores what he calls two "movements" in the text: Christian and non-Christian backgrounds. In addition to the aforementioned categories, Hurst identifies Merkabh mysticism and Samaritans as additional considerations for influences on Hebrews in addition to categories he labels as Christian (e.g. Pauline, 1 Peter, Stephen). For more on the background of Hebrews'

noted characteristics that mark Hebrews as a project in line with the thought of first-century Hellenistic Judaism.[36] While these essentialist categories do little to further our understanding of the text they do elucidate its multifariousness. As George Guthrie observes, "Hebrews' background of thought is complex and read inadequately against a simple or single cultural or theological context. Hebrews forms a point of convergence for several first-century 'worlds.'"[37] It is this point of intersection in which I understand that an emerging Christian identity is being negotiated, largely through evoking Jewish narratives, practices, and spaces. While all of the aforementioned influences are important to acknowledge, the focus of my investigation will be limited to the ways in which space, ethnicity/race, and power are employed to create a sense of belonging and how the identity that is formed responds to its environment. This text must be examined within this complex cultural milieu of the first-century Roman world in order to understand the complex identity negotiations of its audience.

Themes in Hebrews

In recent studies, scholars explore Hebrews in light of various aspects of its cultural context that previously received little attention. There are two particular themes that I will highlight. One is the Roman imperial context of Hebrews and the other is the theme of spatiality. Concerning space, scholars have explored issues of ritual or sacred

---

thought see also Jeremy Punt, "Hebrews, Thought-Patterns and Context: Aspects of the Background of Hebrews," *Neotestamentica* 31, no. 1 (1997): 119-58.

[36] Guthrie, 427. Here, Guthrie looks to three of Lane's characteristics of Hellenistic Judaism exhibited in Hebrews: 1. divine wisdom tradition 2. angels as mediators and 3. veneration of Moses.

[37] Ibid., 415.

space and more recently have begun to examine the theme of land particularly through a postcolonial lens. Space is also explored through the themes of exodus and exile, which I have already established are persistent themes for Jewish self understanding.

Roman Imperial Context

David deSilva develops a model for analyzing how the social dynamics of honor/shame functioned in ancient Greco-Roman societies generally and in the community of believers in Hebrews specifically. He purports that "The author of Hebrews makes extensive use of the social code of reciprocity, the mutual expectations and obligations of patrons and clients, in his sermon."[38] By highlighting an honor/shame framework in the text, deSilva concludes: "The believers' path to honor is finally the path of two clearly recognizable virtues, namely piety and gratitude."[39] This important work brings to the fore the social context of the community. Yet, for this community, I suggest that a loss of status necessitates a revaluing of this system. The challenge of "choosing shame" is important to note; like choosing marginality, the implication is that such a choice is possible. What would this choice entail given an imperial context? deSilva and similar socio-rhetorical readings of Hebrews underscore the status of the audience as

---

[38] David Arthur de Silva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle 'to the Hebrews'* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 59.

[39] David Arthur de Silva, *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews,* SBLDS 152 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 313.

inferior (by choice or otherwise) within the Roman imperial establishment.[40] Other scholars have not only highlighted the status of the community in its Roman imperial context but also asserted the author's compliance or resistance to it.

In his article "The Anti-Imperial Rhetoric of Hebrews 1.3," Steve Muir brings to the fore the text's imperial context by examining Χαρακτηρ ("image" or "impression") as the key to the author's multilayered rhetorical strategy. He concludes that the author of Hebrews "appropriates elements from the Roman imperial cult in order to offer tacit resistance to that cult. In particular, the emperor's claim to be Pontifex Maximus, the pre-eminent religious mediator between the people and the gods, is denied in Hebrews' assertion that Christ is the mediator above all mediators."[41] Employing strategies from James C. Scott's *Domination and the Arts of Resistance,* Muir finds that the author's critiques of the imperial system are veiled by his critique of the Jewish cult.[42] The omnipresence of the emperor's image is important to Muir's argument, as Χαρακτηρ in Hebrews may have evoked such a connotation. The status of the community requires a

---

[40] For example, Barnabas Lindars proposes that the audience of Hebrews is experiencing an overwhelming sense of sin and guilt and as a result the community reverts to Jewish customs. Lindars, 10. deSilva resists reading the audience as experiencing violent persecution or an attraction (reversion) to Jewish customs as the impetus of actions.

[41] Muir, "Anti-Imperial Rhetoric of Hebrews 1.3," 170.

[42] Ibid., 174. Koester perceptively notes in his commentary on Hebrews: "Hebrews does not fully embrace or entirely reject Greco-Roman culture, but appropriates and transforms its imagery in ways that support a distinctly Christian confession." Craig Koester, *Hebrews*, 78. Attridge similarly contends that, "Hebrews represents a particularly complex case of both the appropriation and rejection of that heritage." Attridge, *Hebrews*, 1.

subversive critique of the Roman imperial cult.[43] In his article "The Sermon as 'Art' of Resistance," Darryl L. Jones similarly suggests that Hebrews is resistance literature. Highlighting the genre of Hebrews, Jones writes that the sermon is "a rhetorical art that has been effectively employed to enable certain subordinate groups to engage in low-profile forms of resistance."[44] Ellen Aitken also contends that Hebrews represents "an act of resistance." She concludes, "Hebrews' use of the theology of the Roman triumph is, moreover, an act of resistance and an act of appropriating the religio-political strategies of the oppressor for the community's own ends. In proclaiming an alternative, 'true' triumph and victor, it is likely that Hebrews thus empowers those who are dispossessed."[45] These studies of Hebrews highlight the imperial context of text and the author's and by extension the audience's resistance to it. While I agree that the audience's response demonstrates a form of resistance to Roman imperial power, I would also assert that other powers dynamics, such as internal ones, in the letter should be further interrogated.

Spatiality in Hebrews

Scholars who have focused on spatiality in the book of Hebrews have often sought to further explicate the tent/tabernacle motif (see Hebrews 8:2,5). More often, it is attributed to Jewish apocalyptic thought, characterized by its use of spatial distinctions. In

---

[43] Ibid., 175.

[44] Darryl L. Jones, "The Sermon as 'Art' of Resistance: A Comparative Analysis of the Rhetorics of the African-American Slave Preacher and the Preacher to the Hebrews," *Semeia* 79 (1997): 12.

[45] Aitken, "Portraying the Temple in Stone and Text," 151.

his commentary on Hebrews, Luke Timothy Johnson writes, "The author works with two basic axes. One is spatial, the other is temporal."[46] This succinctly underscores the significance of space in Hebrews. The author employs space in various ways.

In her monograph *Sacred Space: An Approach to the Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Marie Isaacs calls attention to the ways in which the theology of the homily depends distinctly on spatial terms, thereby suggesting that this spatiality be taken seriously in order to understand its theology and message. Isaacs shows the importance of sacred space in Hebrews, proposing that God's promises of land, tabernacle, and access to God were to be reinterpreted in light of Jesus' exaltation to the heavenly place. Isaacs suggests that these Jewish Christians were mourning the loss of Jerusalem and the temple. The purpose for Hebrews, therefore, was to raise their eyes to "the only sacred space worth having"[47]—heaven. She argues that the main concern of Hebrews' author is sacred space; that is, the profane versus the holy. Isaacs writes: "Standing as he does within the religious tradition of Judaism, our author inherited notions of sacred space

---

[46] Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews*, 218. Johnson employs the author's use of the tent as an example of a spatial orientation in the text. Acknowledging the "polyvalent" nature of each axis, both horizontal and vertical. He writes, "Hebrews distinguishes an outer ('first') and inner tent, and there is a veil before each tent (9:2-3). The author asks us to picture priests entering the outer tent to perform their duties (9:6), and the high priest alone entering the second (inner) tent once a year (9:7). Already we see that the spatial and temporal mix: outer and inner, the many and the one, the constant and the once! *But the spatial axis is also turned 'vertically,' so that the outer and inner tents correspond to what is less real and more real, less true and more true, what is material and what is ideal, what is human and what is divine*." Emphasis mine. Johnson reminds of the complexity of the spatial orientations in the text of Hebrews and also cautions against its literal understanding. I suggest these spatial orientations are utilized as a method for constructing identity.

[47] Isaacs, *Sacred Space*, 67.

whereby it was identified with the land, Jerusalem, Zion, and the sanctuary . . . From the stance of Israel's wilderness period, Hebrews' preoccupation with sacred space is worked out in terms of both her entry into the promised land and entry into the inner sanctum of the desert tabernacle, together with the covenant and priesthood upon which these two means were based."[48]The redirection of the audience to the heavens suggests an otherworldly focus. If heaven is configured as the promised land, then the audience is journeying through the wilderness and the Christ event is to be understood in this context.

In their article, "Ministering in the Tabernacle: Spatiality and the Christology of Hebrews," Annang Asumang and Bill Domeris suggest that spatiality and Christology are interconnected themes in Hebrews. Extending beyond "dualistic cosmology" and "apocalyptic presuppositions," they, too, purport that space is more than a subtext.[49] They write, "Ideological arguments and narratives are sometimes structured according to spatiality and that in these spaces; human relations are represented as hierarchical and are infused with elements of power and territoriality."[50] In fact, they suggest that the author of Hebrews depicts such hierarchical relationships. Utilizing the spatial theories of Michel Foucault, Robert Sack, and Yuri Lotman, they conclude that the Christological development and spatial emphasis of the wilderness camp and tabernacle in the text are intricately linked. They argue, "The author's interpretation of the sacrificial death of

---

[48] Ibid., 61–62.

[49] Annang Asumang and Bill Domeris, "Ministering in the Tabernacle: Spatiality and the Christology of Hebrews," *Conspectus, The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* Vol. 1 (2006), 3.

[50] Ibid., 3–4.

Jesus into separate stages, or better put, spaces, so that its significance in the space of Hebrews 2:5–18 matched the first component in the three episodes of the sacrificial ritual is one reason for this conclusion."[51] That is, Hebrews' "Christology is expressed in terms of territoriality."[52] While maintaining that space and movement between spaces is important for ascertaining the meaning of the text and more specifically, the significance of Jesus in the text, I explore Hebrew's spatiality in order to discern how it constructs its audience and in turn, how this audience then responds to such a construction.

Spatiality is likewise, foregrounded in Christina Patterson's "The Land is Mine: Place and Dislocation in the Letter to the Hebrews." She suggests that suspensions of time and (seemingly) place in the text should be read with suspicion, arguing, "Not only do we have the discussion entering the land in chapters 3–4, but combined with the notion of the heavenly homeland in chapter 11, the land effectively frames and thus underlies the cultic discourse."[53] Patterson finds the cultic discourse to be

> the ideological underpinnings of the perceived ruling class. The reader is placed on the threshold of new understanding, which is produced by a subversive reading of the Torah that points beyond the present dominant position . . . We then have the imagined places, produced by the author: the rest, the heavenly sanctuary, the heavenly Jerusalem. But the production of imagined places will only

---

[51] Ibid., 13.

[52] Ibid., 16–17.

[53] Christine Patterson, "The Land Is Mine: Place and Dislocation in the Letter to the Hebrews," *Sino-Christian Studies* no. 4 (2007): 71–72. Patterson sees Hebrews as part of a discourse that "generates this movement from place to space, and sustaining the distinction between them" (73). Patterson argues that "the letter rewrites place through space, connecting all the important meanings to space, and making place empty, barren land ready for conquest" (75). The issues of land, power, and place are present in antiquity and accompany contemporary interpretations of the text.

> work while the representation of spaces and the associated spatial practices are present and accepted authorities, hence the presence of both within the argument of the letter.[54]

Following Lefebvre and his interpreters, Patterson argues that the symbolic and literal land cannot be separated. [55] For me, underscoring the significance of the land supports my argument that the identities are rooted in a particular place and such spatial representations are important to understanding the identity formation work in which the author engages.

In addition to spatial research that highlights the significance of land, scholars have also highlighted the importance of the body as a place of meaning making in Hebrews. For example, in his article "'Not Apart from Us' (Hebrews 11:40): Physical Community in the Letter to the Hebrews," Steve Motyer also argues that it is necessary to deconstruct another dualism in the text in order to see its significance; he explores the flesh/body divide. Just as the Patterson alludes to a space/place dichotomy that undermines the prominence of the land in the text, Motyer suggests that focusing on spirit occludes the significance of the body. Motyer writes: "Hebrews makes Jesus' humanity, his sharing of our flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14), a permanent feature of his identity, for—as we will see—he does not leave it behind when he enters the Most Holy Place as our 'forerunner.'"[56] He continues: "But this view has now given way to something much more Jewish (and Aristotelian?), in which the polarity is not between 'flesh' and 'spirit' (or 'earth' and 'heaven') but between 'holy' and 'profane,' and the tabernacle forms a

---

[54] Patterson, *The Land Is Mine*, 81.

[55] Ibid., 83.

[56] Motyer, "Not Apart from Us: Hebrews 11:40": Physical Community in the Letter to the Hebrews," *Evangelical Quarterly* 77.3 (2005): 238.

kind of 'transition zone' between the two."[57] If the tabernacle represents a transition zone of sorts, it can be read as a third space. That is, it is neither holy nor profane, to follow Motyer and Isaacs. It is a space of enunciation.[58] I suggest that it is in this third space where identity is negotiated. Moreover, Motyer emphasizes the physicality (one that embraces spirituality). As an example, he writes, "Hebrews 10:5–7, especially with its change (probably deliberate) of the LXX 'ears' into 'body.' God does not desire animal sacrifices, but he has prepared a 'body' for Christ, through which his will will be done."[59] He concludes: "So I want to argue for an understanding of 'flesh', or of physicality, which does not treat it just as an *illustration or index* of our relatedness but sees it as the *actual arena* of our encounter with Christ in Spirit, on both sides of death."[60] Extending Motyer's point, I would further suggest that the body is a place where identity is negotiated and bodies are placed in spaces.

In fact, it can be argued that the author of Hebrews places his audience in a specific time and place. In his article, "Hebrews and the End of Exodus," Matthew Thiessen builds on Käsemann's argument, concurring that the wandering people of God is the basis of Hebrews. However, Thiessen reads the motif in continuity with Judaism. Thiessen argues that the author of Hebrews "renarrates Israel's history as an extended exodus which comes to an end as a result of Christ's high priesthood . . . many believed

---

[57] Ibid., 239. A vital term in Hebrews: see also 9:9, 10:2, 10:22, 13:18.

[58] Bhabha, 55.

[59] Motyer, "Not Apart from Us," 240.

[60] Ibid., 245.

that Israel's history remained frozen in the period of exile."[61] Yet Thiessen concludes that the author of Hebrews "does not place himself and his readers in the time of exile but even further back in Israel's history, into the time of the exodus and wilderness wanderings."[62] This is significant because Hebrews, then, can be read as part of a continuity of this history. More precisely, Hebrews recreates a Jewish history, one that occludes as much as it reveals. Equally as important as belonging to the time of the Exodus, the audience is represented in a space of wilderness; in fact they, too, are wandering. In this sense, the audience is not presented as new as much as it is (re)presented as renewed. Like the New Negro, this audience "is seeking a homeland" (11:14) and "desire a better country" (11:16).

In conclusion, the Roman imperial context necessitates a negotiation of identity as its power is challenged or resisted. The analysis of Hebrews that follows builds on these studies of the imperial context, spatiality, and identity of the audience by asserting that the audience's identity is both constructed and contested. This identity is malleable, both threatened and pregnant with possibilities. Identity is relational and the audience's identity is constructed in relation to a past. I would argue that is necessary to understand the past in order to make sense of the presence and this is what Hebrew's author attempts to do.

---

[61] Matthew Thiessen, "Hebrews and the End of Exodus," *Novum Testamentum* 49 (2007): 354.

[62] Thiessen builds on the thesis proposed by Ernst Käsemann in *The Wandering People of God*, 24. That is "the motif of the wandering people of God forms the hidden basis of Hebrews."

The much examined relationship between the audience and Judaism connects the audience to its past. It is important to note that this audience is not misappropriating Jewishness, as it constructs them as Jews. Like Thiessen and others, I read the Christ believing community in continuity with or as an extension of this past.[63] Richard Hays argues that Hebrews is "Jewish messianic covenantalism and not an attack on Judaism or Jewish leaders and that 'supercessionist' is an anachronistic term."[64] To read Hebrews as a polemic against Judaism, one must read it as a Christian text and at this point in history, I suggest that there is not yet clearly a thing we would call Christian. The Jewish past is deployed in Hebrews to imagine a different expression of Jewishness. In other words, much like the New Negro is substantially a renarration of the "Old" Negro, I suggest viewing the identity of the audience as a sort of "New" Jew, a renarration of the old in a context of dis/placement.

---

[63] This idea of continuity is in line with the way in which the author of Hebrews constructs his arguments. Timothy Luke Johnson suggests analogy is one form of argument that the author employs. He writes, "In Hebrews the element of continuity is the word that God speaks to God's people. God spoke in the past, and continues to speak in the present…The elements of discontinuity, then, is the agent bringing the word to the people." Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews*, 32.

It is important to note that this reading is also over and against a supersessionist reading of Hebrews. For detailed analyses see: Lloyd Kim, *Polemic in the Book of Hebrews: Anti-Judaism, Anti-Semitism, Supersessionism?*" PTMS (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick), 2006 and the section entitled "The Problem of Hebrews' Supersessionism" in Richard Bauckham, et. al. (eds.) *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 151-228. Specifically here, Richard B. Hays, "Here We Have No Lasting City: New Coventalism,"151-73.

[64] Richard B. Hays, "Here We Have No Lasting City," 152.

Reading Hebrews through the New Negro Lens

In 1916, William Pickens in an essay entitled, "The New Negro," writes: "The 'new Negro' is not really new: he is the same Negro under new conditions and subjected to new demands. Those who regret the passing of the 'old Negro' and picture the 'new' as something very different, must remember that there is no sharp line of demarcation between the old and the new in any growing organism like a germ, a plant, or a race."[65] Pickens asserts the inherent value of the "old." Yet, he still defines the New Negro as such:

> The new Negro is a sober, sensible creature, conscious of his environment, knowing that not all is right, but trying hard to become adjusted to this civilization in which he finds himself by no will or choice of his own. He is not the shallow, vain, showy creature which he is sometimes advertised to be. He still hopes that the unreasonable opposition to his forward and upward progress will relent. But at any rate, he is resolved to fight, and live or die, on the side of God and the Eternal Verities.[66]

As I have underscored, the New Negro attempts to be everything that Negro is not. However, the construction falters in its very dependence on the old. There are four motifs that the New Negro analytical lens brings to the fore in the text of Hebrews: 1. The role that ancestral claims and kinship play in the formation of a people, particularly an ethnic one 2. The relationship between migration and autonomy 3. The material implications of marginality and 4. The significance of hope for a people who are experiencing suffering.

---

[65] William Pickens, "The New Negro," in *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, African American Culture, 1892–1938.* Henry Lewis Gates, Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett, eds. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 79.

[66] Ibid., 84.

Re/membering Ancestral Claims: Kinship, Imitation, and Marginality[67]

A common past is a defining feature of peoplehood and an important feature for constructing collective identities. The text of Hebrews depends on the ancestors to understand the current situation. Hebrews begins its discourse by underscoring the importance of ancestors, lineage, and inheritance. The author writes: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors (πατηροσιν)" and also to "a Son, whom he appointed heir (κληρονομον) of all things"[68] (1:1). This son is the "reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, a representation of the essence of God" (1:3). The audience is immediately made aware of a connection to the past—specifically, their ancestors and their relationship to God. The author then affirms Jesus' relationship to God. Jesus' status is directly connected to the audience as they are portrayed as his brothers and sisters (2:11) and also the children of God (2:13). Jesus is not only a reproduction of God's glory; he is also the pioneer of this community (12:2). He writes: "Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are *his house* if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belongs to hope" (3:6). In Hebrews, participating in the household of God requires faithfulness and hope.

---

[67] I use re/membering in this chapter to indicate remembering is always incomplete (as the term member indicates). Also, in the text of Hebrews there are bodies (of ancestors) that were "sawn asunder" (11:37) and the ancestors who will not be made complete or perfect until the community is rewarded (11:40). This denotation reminds of how the both bodies and the text are not whole, they are also incomplete.

[68] πατερ, father, is found eight more times in Hebrews (1:5, 3:9, 7:10, 8:9, 11:23, 12:7, 12:9*2).

In addition to their divine heritage (they are part of the household (οικιος) of God) the author also describes the audience as descendants of Abraham (2:16).[69] The audience is grafted into the lineage of Abraham, who "set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. He went out not knowing where he was going. He migrated to the land of the promise as in a strange land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the fellow heirs of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundation, whose architect and builder is God" (11:8–10). The audience, heirs of this same promise, are similarly on a journey toward a heavenly city (12:22). As with Abraham, the covenant that God makes with the *house* of Israel is reaffirmed. That is, "God will put his laws in their minds and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be my *people* (8:10)." The ancestral claims in Hebrews describe the audience as members of the God's household; they belong to God. They are a people.[70]

Sermons from the Great Migration similarly portray the New Negro as part of God's family. In 1909 Reverdy Cassius Ransom delivered a sermon on Thanksgiving Day at the Bethel AME Church in New York entitled, "The American Tower of Babel; Or, Confusion of Tongues Over the Negro." Ransom employs the language of brotherhood in order to express how differences can be overcome by looking to what all people have in common, their humanity. He similarly attempts to bring a diverse group of people together by highlighting their commonality and utilizes familial language to do so.

---

[69] οικιος, or house(hold), occurs in Hebrews eleven times (3:2, 3:3, 3:4, 3:5, 3:6*2, 8:8*2, 8:10, 10:21, 11:7).

[70] The audience is referred to as λαω του θεου, or people of God, thirteen times (2:17, 4:9, 5:3, 7:5, 7:11, 7:27, 8:10, 9:7, 9:19*2, 10:30, 11:25, 13:12).

Ransom states: "Now we learned to articulate in unison another world – that word is *brother*. Now standing face-to-face they say – "*man and brother.*" The recognition is instant. Barriers are broken down, the confusion is silenced, and in brotherly cooperation they set themselves the task of building their civilization a tower of strength, because all men who toil and strive, who hope and aspire, are animated by a common purpose that is peace, happiness, and the common good of all."[71] Brotherhood language is employed in political ways, to assert equality of all people, despite color. In Vernon Jones' 1926 "Transfigured Moments," he similarly asserts: "There is no difference between Jew and Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, but all are one in Christ Jesus…Out of one blood hath God created all nations…This is the language of men who have kindled their lives at the feet of Jesus for the wise and noble adventure in human brotherhood."[72] Appealing to the Christian ancestral tradition, this human brotherhood declares equality for all at a time when black Americans were not experiencing equal treatment.

In addition to the use of familial language to affirm equality, fictive kinship ties of black Americans also present cohesion to a diverse group. Lacy Williams preached that: "God is our environment…You talk about family backgrounds, but God is the best one."[73] Family backgrounds, particularly for elite black Americans could have been an important differentiator. That is, coming from a professional family would have distinguished established Northern black family from working class migrants. God's

---

[71] Simmons and Thomas, 458-9.

[72] See Appendix A.6 "Transfigured Moments"

[73] See Appendix A.7 "God Ahead for 1926"

family subsumes such differences. As a part of God's family, black Americans can find hope that justice and equality will prevail. Kinship language asserts both sameness and difference concomitantly. Kinship organizes people and also stratifies them. The language of brotherhood can, at times, exclude women while at the same time promoting unity. Kinship language functions similarly in Hebrews.

Kinship also is always social and not only establishes relationship, but more specifically relationships of power. In her book *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul,* Caroline Johnson Hodge reminds,

> In ancient Mediterranean cultures, in which patrilineal kinship ideologies played such a fundamental role in social organization, the criteria for establishing kin relationships were complex and negotiable . . . They [kinship and ethnicity] are well suited to such arguments, for at the same time that they present themselves as natural and fixed, they are also open to negotiation and reworking. This paradox renders them effective tools in organizing people and power, shaping self-understanding, and defining membership.[74]

Johnson Hodge rightly highlights the power dynamics inherent to this aspect of identity negotiation. Pamela Eisenbaum studies patrilineal lineage specifically in Hebrews. She employs Nancy Jay's studies of sacrificial theory and practice, highlighting its gendered dimensions in order to conclude that "Hebrews' unique blend of Jesus as Son of God, high priest and sacrificial offering is predicated on a patrilineal social structure deeply

---

[74] Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 79. As descendants of Abraham, a patrilineal heritage is created for the audience of this text. Johnson Hodge writes: "For Paul, kinship and ethnicity cannot be merely metaphorical, for lineage, paternity, and peoplehood are the salient categories for describing one's status before the God of Israel" (4). She continues: "Like many other ancient authors, Paul understood kinship to be a powerful and *flexible* means of constructing new identities, rearranging power relationships, and associating peoples" (79). It is this notion of flexibility that is important to underscore.

embedded in Mediterranean antiquity, one that not only privileges father-son relationships but also depends on blood sacrifice to maintain those privileged relationships."[75] She asserts that this lineage undergirds the Christology found in Hebrews. She concludes, "The establishment of a ritually defined alternative social order is the overarching purpose of Christ's sacrifice in Hebrews…The Christology of Hebrews…provided the raw material that not only help define Jesus, it defined who Jesus' followers were by establishing a new, superior, divinely sanctioned lineage with new terms of membership."[76] The terms of membership underscore that the author's presentation of a better/new covenant is not necessarily an accepted reality. I do not agree that these terms are superior or even new, even if they are presented to the audience as such. Moreover, just as humanity is figured as male in the New Negro discourse, the superiority of Jesus (and male ancestors) is clear in the text. In Hebrew 11's list of faithful ancestors, the only women mentioned are Sarah (and her barrenness) and Rahab (defined by her profession as a prostitute).[77] The kinship language connects the audience to its ancestors of mostly male foreigners and strangers, as well as to the enthroned Christ, their leader/brother. This patrilineal focus occludes women in this community. Kinship is a flexible tool employed not only to establish a people, but as the New Negro helps us to see, it also hides just as it reveals.

---

[75] Pamela Eisenbaum, "Father and Son: The Christology of Hebrews in Patrilineal Perspective," in *A Feminist Companion to the Catholic Epistles and Hebrews*, eds. Amy-Jill Levine and Maria Mario Roberts (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 128.

[76] Ibid, 146.

[77] There is also the mention of women, who generally, received the dead. (Hebrews 11:35)

As I have claimed, kinship is not only about heritage, it is also about claims to power. The language of enthronement and Jesus' sonship establishes his authority. Jesus, the prototype of the faith for the audience is declared, εθηκεν κληρονομον παντων, the appointed heir of all things, in Hebrews 1. The conferring of this (new) title to Jesus and by extension the status to his related audience makes clear their elevated status; they are heirs of all things. Käsemann writes: "In antiquity, the name denotes a person's status and nature, for which reason a change of name involves the attainment of a new status. This applies to the exalted Christ."[78] Hebrews 1:3b-4 states: "When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the *name* he has inherited is more excellent than theirs." The inherited name of Jesus elevates his status. He is no longer a convicted criminal; he is now an exalted son of God, sitting at God's right hand. As we have seen for the New Negro and Alexandrian Jews in the first century, naming is an important aspect of identity. As the author explicitly states, a change in the priesthood necessitates a change in the law (7:12). Son of God, like citizen, is, indeed an imperial title, a title that rivals or potentially challenges the emperor. However, with a focus on the audience, the exalted status of Jesus in Hebrews may just as importantly, be employed to encourage the audiences to preserve suffering or hardship, as Jesus had in order to receive their own exaltation in the future.

The author's use of kinship establishes the authority of Jesus and defines the audience as a people, that is, God's own people is an example of ethnic reasoning. As a

[78] Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God*, 109. He continues, "The title conferred on him confirms the conclusion of his humiliation and his new heavenly position of authority."

result, God's people are a specifically ethnic people. Denise Kimber Buell's concept of ethnic reasoning elucidates the fixity and fluidity of identity formation found in Hebrews and brings to the fore the ways in which ethnicity informs the construction of peoplehood. Buell, who examines the "rhetorical situations in which early Christian texts use ideas about peoplehood to communicate and persuade readers about Christianness,"[79] defines ethnic reasoning as "the modes of persuasion that . . . legitimize various forms of Christianness as the universal, most authentic manifestation of humanity, and it offered Christians both a way to define themselves relative to 'outsiders' and to compete with other 'insiders' to assert the superiority of their varying visions of Christianness."[80] The author of Hebrew seeks to persuade his audience about Jewishness. He clearly makes claims to Abrahamic lineage and even contends that it is the sharing in *flesh and blood* that relates the audience to Jesus. As children of Abraham and fellow-heirs of the promise alongside Jacob and Isaac, the audience is constructed as Jewish.[81] Similarly, Jesus is clearly depicted as Jewish. The author declares, "For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests" (7:14). This construction of Jesus as Jewish is contrasted with Melchizedek's

---

[79] Buell, *Why This New Race*, 2.

[80] Ibid. Buell expresses how "Early Christians capitalized on this dynamic character of ethnicity/race as being both fixed and fluid in a range of ways. The common description of conversion as rebirth illustrates one central way in which Christians depicted Christianness simultaneously in terms of 'essence' and transformation" (3). The idea of rebirth, for example, is expressed numerous times in 1 Peter.

[81] This idea of the audience being fellow heirs of Christ is underscored in the text. In fact, specifically the promise (επαγγελια) to which they are heirs is found fourteen times in Hebrews (4:1, 6:12, 6:15, 6:17, 7:5, 8:6, 9:15, 10:36, 11:9*2, 11:13, 11:17, 11:33, 11:39).

lack of lineage.[82] Even as the audience is to understand itself to be Jewish, the author at times constructs their identity over/against a *particular* understanding of Jewish identity.

There are various definitions of what it means to be Jewish. The competing understandings of covenant and ritual practices are part of an internal Jewish identity debate. Moreover, this identity can not only redefine or clarify a group's identity among themselves, it must prove useful and more importantly recognizable in its imperial landscape. Buell further explicates, "As formulations of those not in power, pre-Constantinian Christian texts that employ ethnic reasoning can be read as attempts to consolidate and mobilize geographically, theologically, and organizationally disparate groups under one banner—figured as a people, 'the Christians.'"[83] The identity of the audience is reliant on previous understandings of Jewishness, recognizable in its imperial context, in order to establish a different one, a new one.[84] This is theological reorganization of a people, an attempt to create a nation within a nation.

---

[82] This King Melchizedek of Salem, is described as a priest of the Most High God who met Abraham as he was returning from defeating the kings and blessed him; and to him Abraham apportioned 'one-tenth of everything.' His name, in the first place, means 'king of righteousness'; next he is also king of Salem, that is, 'king of peace.' *Without father, without mother, without genealogy*, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

[83] Ibid., 4.

[84] "New" (καινος and νεος) is found only four times in Hebrews (8:8, 8:13, 9:15, and 12:24) and is used each time to describe a new covenant. Based on Jeremiah 31:31-33: "The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband,[a] says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people," the author's homily can be read as midrash.

A national identity of the audience, particularly as a Jewish nation is found most prominently in Hebrews 11. While Hebrews 11 has been read as an example of nation building, Pamela Eisenbaum argues that the Jewish heroes in Hebrews 11 function to denationalize biblical history. Eisenbaum finds that what these heroes have in common is their status of marginalization. She concludes, "Thus, they are 'transvalued'—that is, the value normally placed on these people as national heroes has been transformed into another value: they were faithful as the marginalized."[85] In Eisenbaum's reading, the author of Hebrews uses the heroes as examples for Christians who are struggling with being marginalized, giving them a biblical ancestry devoid of a national identity. Eisenbaum argues, "Hebrews 11 represents a significant point in the evolution that led from the understanding of Jewish scripture as the ethnic history of the Jews to the theological history of Christians."[86] Conversely, Thiessen suggests, "The marginalization

---

Similarly, better (κρειττων) occurs in Hebrews twelve of the fifteen times it is found in the New Testament. The emphasis on this term of comparison is perhaps effective for demonstrating an improvement over their current situation (and not necessarily intended as a simply a polemic against Levitical practices). The term is found in 1:4 (better than angels), 7:7 (blessed of the better), 7:19 (better hope), 7:22 (better covenant), 8:6*2 (better covenant), 9:23 (better sacrifices), 10:34 (better possession), 11:16 (better country), 11:35 (better resurrection), 11:40 (something better for us), and 12:24 (better things).

[85] Guthrie, "Hebrews," 420.

[86] Eisenbaum, *Jewish Heroes*, 192. Eisenbaum revises this assertion in her article, "Locating Hebrews within the Literary Landscape." Concerning the text of Hebrews, she concludes: "In some ways neither Judaism nor Christianity and in other ways it represents both – a unique form of Judeo-Christian religiosity that perhaps existed briefly when Rome was the common enemy of Jews and believers in Jesus and before the rhetoric of Christian and Jewish leaders could construct firm boundaries between Judaism and Christianity" 236-7. See also Pamela Eisenbaum "Locating Hebrews within the Literary Landscape," 213–37.

portrayed in the author's presentation of these Jewish heroes is not meant to sunder the relationship between them and national Israel; rather it is meant to demonstrate that marginalization is and has always been a sign that one belongs to God's people."[87] Extending Thiessen's arguments, I concur that the motifs of marginalization are instructive for reading Hebrews audience as negotiating Jewishness while making sense of their own suffering in an imperial context.

In the early twentieth century, William J. Seymour preaches of the need for perseverance while describing his audience as a people of God who are clearly enduring hardships. He says: "The heroes of the faith take up the cross and walk, as strength is supplied by an indwelling Savior, the way called the Way of Holiness…living and yet not living since Christ liveth in us; citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven; children of the Most High."[88] Seymour is an initiator of the Pentecostalism and this way of holiness he refers to, for him, included women in church leadership and involved manifestation of the Holy Spirit through speaking in tongues. Seymour's message of unity and inclusion was not acceptable in mainstream Christian denominations and the many churches that would result from this preaching would be labeled as quasi or pseudo-Christian. The theological expansion of religion for the (New) Negro, what I have highlighted as their religious diversity, elucidates the possibility of a similarly diverse Jewishness in the first century.

Hebrews employs the language and motifs of marginalization to organize the audience "theologically and geographically." In doing so, it creates a "New" Jewish

---

[87] Thiessen, "Hebrews," 362.

[88] See Appendix A. 8 "The Battle Royal: A Contention of the Faith Once Delivered to the Saints"

identity. This identity depends on aspects of Jewish identity for its formation. Dunning reads Hebrews 13:9–16 as "the culmination of a project of identity construction that enters this larger conversation [the identity struggles of diverse groups within the disorienting heterogeneity of the Roman world]…while still making use of rhetoric and images *associated* with the Levitical tradition."[89] In other words, the dependency and acceptance of the Levitical traditions demonstrate that this identity is legitimized by these traditions. Much like the New Negro identity of the early twentieth century, this Jewish identity is constructed over/against its previous identity (old versus new). It is also similarly inflected by religious/cultural practices. While this accounts for the ethnic construction, there is also a geographical or spatial situating of audience.

Outside the Camp: Putting Outsiders in their Place

The author of Hebrews situates the audience not only in a particular lineage but also in a particular place by first comparing to them to their ancestors in the wilderness and then by exhorting them to move outside the camp.[90] Hebrews 3:17 queries, "Was it not those who sinned whose bodies fell in the wilderness (επνμω)?" In the precarious location of the wilderness or desert, these fallen bodies are in fact dead bodies (κωλα). These bodies are the ancestors who were rebellious and disobedient. They did not enter the promise of God's rest. That is, they did not persevere in the faith, the prerequisite for

[89] Ibid.

[90] The author writes: "As in the days of testing in the wilderness, where your ancestors put me to the test" (3:7) and continues to elaborate on the shortcomings of the wilderness generation as fathers of the audience. The rest that was possible for this generation remains a possibility for the audience of Hebrews. As we have seen, Matthew Thiessen convincingly argues that the audience is being compared to the wilderness generation.

entering into God's rest.[91] The ancestors not only provided examples of what not to do (be disobedient and rebellious) but they also exemplified an identity the audience is to embrace. In Hebrews 6:11–12 there is an explicit call for this assembly of persecuted believers to imitate their ancestors in the faith. They are outsiders, aliens. The author writes, "And we want each one of you to show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope to the very end, so that you may not become sluggish, but *imitators* of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." The believers were to understand this model of the past and yet modify it appropriately for their current situation. The author continues, "All died without receiving the promises but from a distance saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were *strangers and foreigners* (ξενοι και παρεπιδημοι)[92] on the earth, making it clear that they are searching for a country (a homeland)[93]. If they were remembering that country from which they came out, they would have had the opportunity to return. But they desired a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed God has prepared a city for them." (11:13–16). The ancestors are described as embracing alterity, and this is significant because the author has called for the audience to imitate their ancestors. Their ancestors and Jesus provide examples of embracing the identity of an

[91] The author clarifies, "Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it" (4:1). The promise of rest remains available to the audience of the homily.

[92] It is important to note that foreigners, or παρεπιδημοι, is found only five times in the Septuagint (Gen 23:4; Ps. 38:13; Heb. 11:13; and 1 Peter 1:1, 2:11)

[93] More precisely, πατριδα, or fatherland.

outsider, as they wander purposefully toward an unshakeable city made by God, Mount Zion (12:22).

The motif of outsider identity reaches its climax with an important double articulation found in Hebrew 13:12–14: "Therefore Jesus also suffered *outside* the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him *outside* the camp and bear the abuse he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come." The writer reminds us that the "bodies of the animals whose blood is brought *into* the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned *outside* the camp. Therefore, Jesus also suffered *outside* the city gate." The audience is exhorted to go outside the camp. Jesus transgressed boundaries – moving from heaven to earth and back (4:14, 9:24) and from inside to outside the camp. Therefore, the call to go out spatially orients the community to move in solidarity with Jesus and also beckons them to the margins of their society. Dunning argues that the "self-proclaimed outsideness, or alien rhetoric, is used to construct a discourse of outsiderhood as a viable social identity within the 'dizzingly diverse socio-religious world . . . of Greco-Roman antiquity,' and this is done by a reworking of elements of the Levitical tradition so as to transform the 'outside the camp' into a site of purification."[94] Jesus offering of himself as a sacrifice was for the purification of his followers (9:14). This necessary, once and for all sacrifice (9:26) not only purified consciences, it also eliminated *continual* suffering.

---

[94] Benjamin Dunning, "The Intersection of Alien Status and Cultic Discourse in the Epistle to the Hebrews," in G. Gelardini (ed.), *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods—New Insights* BIS 75 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 179.

The call to go outside the camp repositions the audience spatially, even if only rhetorically so. It is in this space that their identity can be (re)negotiated.

Outside (the camp) is only a valuable positioning if being inside has meaning for the audience. Religions situate bodies and the author of Hebrews wants to place the audience's bodies "out of place" in an imperial context. In her book, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality,* Sara Ahmed explains,

> To be an alien in a particular nation is to hesitate at a different border: the alien here is the one who does not belong in a nation space, and who is already defined as such by the Law. The alien is hence only a category within a given community of citizens or subjects: as the outsider inside, the alien takes on a spatial function, establishing relations of proximity and distance within the home(land). Aliens allow the demarcation of spaces of belonging: by coming too close to home, they establish the very necessity of policing the borders of knowable and inhabitable terrains. The techniques for differentiating between citizens and aliens, as well as between humans and aliens, allows the familiar to be established as the familial.[95]

Here, Ahmed describes the relationship between borders and an outsider identity. The author of Hebrews attempts to make the audience family and the alien (the outside of the camp) familiar. More specifically, in the case of Hebrews, an imperially recognizable identity would be at stake for those who moved outside the camp.

As the New Negro identity reminds, the exhortation to leave (or go outside) can occlude an equally viable determination to stay. As the July 21, 1917 letter in the *Fort Worth Record* newspaper states: "The self-respecting Negro throughout the South that owns his home, his ranch, having his truck, garden growing his fruit orchid, are here and are here to stay. They are not moving, they are not thinking about going North; they have

---

[95] Ibid.

no dream in that direction."[96] The autonomy of Hebrews' audience should not be denied. It is possible that some in the audience did not see themselves as aliens or strangers in Rome. Identifying as an outsider and moving to/living in the margins is a precarious position. It is a position that the audience could have rejected. In a context of suffering, however, if survival is directly correlated with one's ability to embrace hope, then identifying as a stranger or foreigner is not a confession of inferiority. Quite the contrary, it is an acknowledgment of a promising future, one that is radically different from one's present condition.

Marginality has material implications. Outside the camp is filled with the anxiety of the uncertainty of provision; a lack of protection; and, concomitantly, a hope that can propel a people forward. Attridge reminds, "The character of the realm 'outside' is its shamefulness, where carcasses were disposed and criminals were executed . . . Hebrews suggests where it is that true participation in the Christian altar is to be found—in accepting the 'reproach of Christ.' The call to go out toward Christ is thus a summons to accept the status of aliens that the heroes of faith endured, but to do so on a new and surer basis."[97] A figurative or spiritual reading of this text minimizes the danger of embracing liminality. This exhortation is more than an "allusion to death and suffering." It represents the danger of the margins, a place where death and suffering are real. Helmut Koester suggests "the place of the Christian is not in holy places with the security which

[96] See Appendix B.6 July 21,1917 *Fort Worth Record*

[97] Attridge, *Hebrews*, 399.

is offered in cultic performances, but in the uncleanness of the world."[98]The author of Hebrews proposes that the perfected Christ who suffered will perfect the suffering audience.

Suffering as an Embodied Experience

Hebrews represents suffering as an embodied experience that is necessary for perfection. The roll call of the faithful in Hebrews 11 not only demonstrates their great and faithful feats but it also highlights how these exemplars suffered. For example, "Moses *choosing* rather to share *ill-treatment* with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin considered abuse suffered for the Messiah to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward" (11:25–26). The audience of the homily also has a sense of autonomy. They, too, can choose (or reject) the status of an outsider. Moreover, the writer continues to describe the ill-treated faithful ones: "Others were tortured (to death), refusing to accept release in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, sawn in two by murder of the sword they died" (11:35–37). In Hebrews, bodies are abused, confined, and even dismembered. These suffering bodies of the ancestors also wandered. "They went about in sheep and goat skins, being in need, being oppressed, being mistreated, of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since

---

[98] Helmut Koester, "Outside the Camp": Hebrews 13:9–14," *The Harvard Theological Review* 55.4: 301.

God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect" (11:38–39). It is clear why these suffering ancestors would have sought rest. However, rest eludes them. Even when commended for their faith, they wait; they remain restless.[99] If the audience is constructed as continuing the exodus journey, as I have suggested that they are, then are witnesses to similar hardships. Like their ancestors, they are to endure suffering (10:32-34).

In Hebrews, suffering bodies are sites where identity is negotiated. Thomas Tweed reminds how bodies construct religious identities. He writes: "Religion begins—and ends—with bodies: birthed bodies and dead bodies; polluted bodies and purified bodies; enslaved and freed bodies; bodies that are tattooed, pierced, flagellated, drugged, masked, and painted . . . kin bodies and strangers' bodies; possessed bodies and emptied bodies; and, as humans cross the ultimate horizon of human existence—however that horizon is imagined—bodies that are transported or transformed."[100] These are bodies that not only dwell in particular places and spaces but they also cross boundaries. Tweed further explicates that "bodies situate individuals in national space by affirming—or rejecting—the homeland."[101] As such bodies are not solely about individual identity; they also signal collective identity. In this homily, the body signifies suffering and alienation.

---

[99] John Scholer, *Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1991). In addition to shedding light on the priesthood of the Christian, Scholer's study also helps distinguish between the use of "perfection" and "rest" in Hebrews. Scholer argues that "the perfection of believers is a present reality, whereas the 'rest' remains that after which Christians are exhorted to strive" (204–06). He argues that "rest" is an entirely future event in Hebrews, not a "present," accessible reality.

[100] Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 98.

[101] Ibid.

Placing bodies outside the camp imbues them with meaning. Outside the gates, bodies are purified and perfect and it is there they can await entry into the new city prepared for them by God. Jesus' body provides the example.

The body of Christ as a signifier of embodied suffering challenges reading Hebrews' Christology as singularly high. While many scholars assert that Hebrews' Christology is high, reading the book of Hebrews through the lens of the New Negro reminds us that it is also at the same time low.[102] It is the lowliness that makes Christ's and the audience's elevation possible. Christ's body lingers over this text—suffering, sacrificed, and exalted. Blood (αιμα), mentioned some seventeen times, more than in any another other New Testament text, in fact, not only makes Hebrews a bloody homily, it makes it a fleshly homily as well.[103] I suggest that this pervasive use of blood is more about embodiment than it is about sacrifice, as it is traditionally read. As such the body and particularly Christ's body functions as a place of meaning-making in the text.

The use of flesh and blood reminds us of Jesus' humanity and amplifies the presence of the audience. Mary Rose D'Angelo similarly asserts the prevalence of blood

---

[102] Studies on Christology in Hebrews abound. For an examination of Christology in Hebrews, see Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians,* 59-67. See also: *Christology, Hermeneutics, and Hebrews: Profiles from the History of Interpretation*, eds. Jon C. Laansma and Daniel J. Treir (New York and London: T&T Clark, 2012). This collection of essays explores Christology as a major theme in the history of interpretation of Hebrews. For example, in her essay, " Christological Ideas in the Greek Commentaries," Frances M. Young examines the differences in the Christological developments of the Antiochenes and Alexandrians using for example Chysostom's Homilies on Hebrews, Theodoret's Commentary, and fragments from Cyril of Alexandria and Theodore of Mopsuestia, asserting the significance of context to the ideas of Christology.

[103] Blood is found in the Gospel of Matthew eight times; the second most frequent mention following Hebrews.

is not about sacrifice in the text. She purports, "For Hebrews, as for antiquity in general, sacrifice consists not in blood and death (which can be, but need not be, its means) but in *communion* with God, access to God's presence . . . Hebrews dwells on the cleansing and ratifying blood only to explain Christ's death (9:11–28)." [104] Following the lead of feminist biblical interpreters, I would also underscore the ways in which Jesus' humanity is displayed in the homily. For instance, Hebrews 2:14 declares, "Since, therefore, the children share *flesh and blood*, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil."[105] Additionally, the author of Hebrews writes: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and was heard because of his reverent submission" (5:7). Christ came as a high priest, mediator of the new covenant, making a once and for all sacrifice (9:14,15), otherwise, "he would have had to suffer again and again" (9:26). As it is, Christ "will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (9:28b). The suffering and alienation of the audience is connected to the suffering and subsequent elevation of Jesus. Grafted into a lineage of those who similarly suffered

---

[104] D'Angelo, "Hebrews," 458.

[105] The passage continues to highlight the humanity of Jesus: "and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested" (Hebrews 5:15–18).

and endured and are awaiting their rest, the audience's suffering is simultaneously associated with the promise of a different future.

The faithful believers' alien identity is seemingly temporary. They will be transformed from outsiders into citizens in the city that is to come. That is, crossing the borders from this world into the next allows for yet another negotiation of their identity. Like his ancestors, Jesus, too, was an outsider. However, this is the past status of Jesus. The author presents Jesus as currently sitting at the right hand of God reigning in power (2:13). As such, to be an outsider in "this world" is to belong (if one perseveres in faith) in the heavenly realm. To go outside, then, is to be properly positioned for a transformative future. To identify as a stranger and foreigner today results in elevation into the heavenly realm in the future. The author allows for the outside to be understood as a pathway connecting the past to the future.

The writer of Hebrews claims, "For we have become partners of Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end" (3:14). Their future partnership is contingent upon their faithful endurance and their willingness to accept their alien status. The willingness to accept liminality is mediated by utopic vision of the future.[106] The new heavenly kingdom is their future home; it is their better country. Ahmed most aptly describes this concept of home. She writes, "Home is some-where; it is indeed else-where, but it is also where the subject is going. Home becomes the impossibility and necessity of the subject's future (one never gets there, but is always getting there), rather

[106] I use utopic to indicate ideal and visionary and also to call attention to the spatiality inherent in the use of this word. It is other-worldly.

than the past that binds the subject to a given place."[107] The restless, wandering saints exemplify this in the text. The audience, too, is encouraged to look to the future, to the city that is built by God.

The City that Is to Come: Imagining a Future

The ability of a people to imagine their future is perhaps as important as their connection to the past. Käsemann, in his *Wandering People of God*, depicts Hebrews 11 as "the cloud of witnesses whose activity is decisively and continually described as a wandering toward the city of God."[108] The goal or the aspiration is a heavenly existence described in the most earthly of terms—a city. Hebrews states, "But you have come to Mount Zion and to *the city of the living God*, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering" (12:22). This city is the inheritance of the audience. The author makes clear, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe (12:28). However, the city is an ambivalent figure in the biblical text.[109] This is similar to

---

[107] Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 78.

[108] Käsemann, *Wandering People of God*, 23

[109] In the bible, the "first" city is the result of Cain's rebellion against God: "Come, let us build a city that reaches the heaven" (see Genesis 11:4) and the new Jerusalem (seemingly, a city) is portrayed as a place of redemption and salvation (Rev 21:2). Therefore, the image of the city is multivalent and ambiguous. In his chapter, "The Biblical Notion of the City," Michael Patrick O'Connor calls for a more nuanced analysis of the use of city in biblical texts and in biblical interpretation, particularly in the Hebrew Bible. He writes: "Two competing accounts of the biblical city, the literary-theological and the archaeological, have made difficult a reading of the biblical evidence informed by historical and philological approaches," Michael Patrick O'Connor, "The Biblical Notion of the City," in *Constructions of Space II: The Biblical City and Other Imagined Spaces*,

the ways cities are depicted in the North during the Great Migration, figured as both the land of promise and the place of one's possible (moral and physical) demise. Thiessen reads Hebrews' writer's depiction of the heavenly Jerusalem complex, as analogous to Josephus' discussion of the wilderness generation, highlighting the significance of the city motif. Referring to this reference as "rhetorical climax of the letter," Thiessen advises, "The reference to the 'heavenly Jerusalem' indicates that this is not merely the physical Jerusalem of Jewish scriptures, but something more."[110] I agree that this city is something more. It is a utopic vision of the author.

By continuously pointing to the future, the goal or the ideal is a utopic configuring of a system that enables a different kind of belonging. The place the writer of Hebrews describes as "a kingdom that can not be shaken" (12:28) is populated with angels; the assembly of the firstborn, Jesus; and the spirits of the righteous. This heavenly kingdom seems to be stratified as Jesus' blood expressly "speaks a *better* word than Abel's."[111] Jesus, who was made "a little lower" than the angels (2:9) is now exalted and

---

John L. Berquist and Claudia V. Camp, eds. (New York and London: T&T Clark, 2008), 34.

[110] Thiessen, "Hebrews," 367–68. Thiessen describes the account in Josephus as follows: "The importance of this city motif is illuminated by Josephus' discussion of the wilderness generation, who were not able to enter into the land as a result of (*akrasia*) (Ant. 3.314), and would therefore be homeless (*anestious*) and citiless (*apolidas*) for forty years in the wilderness (3.314). In response to this, the people cry out that God will 'free them from wandering in the wilderness, and provide cities (*poleis*) for them (3.315). Thus, Josephus' wilderness generation is a people in search of a city. This is exactly what the author of Hebrews has said Abraham and his descendants were in search of (11:10, 13, 16), and in Heb. 12:22 the readers are portrayed as those who are about to obtain it."

[111] "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the

the firstborn are distinguished from the others, begging the question of who comes first and last. How does the (re)located heavenly city differ from all other earthly cities? Who will belong and who are its outsiders?

Hebrews' author's heavenly climax can be challenged as not addressing the current and more pressing needs of his audience. The otherworldly focus of many churches during the Great Migration was critiqued for not addressing the social ills of their parishioners. Allison Calhoun-Brown observes, "…the otherworldly nature of African-American Christianity couple with the apathy associated with lower socioeconomic groups rendered black churches 'involuntarily isolated' and unable to engage their people politically."[112] On the other hand, the social role of many black churches, particularly in the North, as a safe haven and resourceful agent providing essential information to migrants (e.g. housing, jobs, social services, etc.) challenges this notion. Hearing only the homily and not the audiences' response does not provide the complete picture of what may have been going on in the community of believers in Hebrews. Just a the perspective of the role of the black church varied on location of the church, denomination, and other factors, the perspective of the audience of Hebrews could similarly differ from the author's presentation. Other voices contemporaneous to Hebrews can prove useful in painting a more complete picture of identity negotiations.

---

righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (Hebrews 12:23–24).

[112] Allison Calhoun-Brown, "What a Fellowship: Civil Society, African American Churches, and Public Life," in *New Day Begun: African American Churches and Civic Culture in Post-Civil Rights America.* R. Drew Smith, ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 43. Brown acknowledges that this history is being challenged and concludes that "otherworldly sentiments can be associated with racial empowerment."

(An)Other First Century Voice

Written in the late first, the gospel of Matthew is considered the "most Jewish gospel."[113] Ulrich Luz defines Matthew as a "highly tradition-oriented author" and the Matthean community as "Jewish Christian."[114] The text contains tensions in the author's constructions of Jewishness and the nations (Gentiles). For instance, although Jesus is presented as fully Jewish, sent to save the Jewish nation, he also initiates a mission to the nations (Matt 24:14, 28:19). A nascent Christian identity is constructed over against religious leaders (Matt 23:34-39) and at the same time also seeks to distinguish itself from the nations who are seen as dogs (Matt 15:26) and swine (Matt 7:6). The gospel encourages the Torah practices of fasting, offering alms, and Sabbath observance (Matt 23:23, 24:20). However, the strong polemic against religious leaders is perhaps best understood as still operating within the Jewish tradition. Lutz writes, "I see the Gospel of Matthew as representing a Jewish Christian community in conflict with the Jewish mainstream."[115] He goes on to state, "I submit that the conflict between Matthew and Judaism should not be defined only as a mother-daughter conflict but also as one between

---

[113] In her commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Amy-Jill Levine surmises, "Probably written around 85-90 C.E., the Gospel of Matthew addresses an originally Jewish congregation that has begun to incorporate Gentile members. Antioch in Syria is often proposed as the setting, but recent studies suggest that the Gospel may have had a Palestinian, specifically a Galilean origin. Emphasizing Jewish concerns, such as Jesus' descent from King David, the fulfillment of biblical sayings, and the retention and interpretation of Pentateuchal law, Matthew locates the church within the context of Israel's salvation history" Amy-Jill Levine, "Matthew," in Women's Bible Commentary, Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 339.

[114] Ulrich Lutz, *Studies in Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 5, 9.

[115] Ibid., 250.

rival sibling. It is a harsh conflict."[116] Like Hebrews, the Gospel of Matthew understand the role of Jesus in continuity with Jewish tradition, however attempts to (re)define themselves in light of their understanding of the purpose of Jesus is done by forming an identity over against another form of Jewishness.[117] In Matthew, we find another example of this struggle. Issues of class (Jewish leaders), gender (role of women in the gospel), and ethnicity are important considerations for the diverse ways of meaning in the early first century. Moreover, the gospel attempts to hold in tension an otherworldly perspective alongside practical, material living. For example, the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1-11) and the parables (Matthew 13) demonstrate this tension. The Matthean author and this community engage in an internal debate about how to define Jewishness in their context demonstrating the complexity and diversity of these identity negotiations.

Conclusion

The New Negro as a diasporic identity brings to the fore the ways in which migration or movement disrupts identity. Transgressing borders facilitates change. When

---

[116] Ibid., 255. Other examples of scholars exploring the relationship between Judaism and Matthew include: Antonio J. Saldarini, "The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish-Christian Conflict," in David Balch (ed.), *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 38-61. "Breaking Away: Three New Testament Pictures of Christianity's Separation from the Jewish Community," in Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs, *"To See Ourselves as Others See Us." Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity* (Chico: Scholars, 1985), 108-114.

[117] This assessment is not intended to minimize the problematic history of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism that has resulted from reading these texts through a Christian lens. The tragic consequences of such a reading serves as a catalyst for exploring the texts in their own cultural context, to the best our ability to do so. What I offer is that reading these texts as an internal cultural debate highlights the dependence on previous cultural understanding in order to make sense of one's current situation.

we look at the ways the Great Migration made it possible for black American identity to be negotiated, in the face of lynching and racial violence, it is important to acknowledge how spaces of mobility can also become spaces of contestation and change. The motif of the New Negro highlights issues of marginality and autonomy, both in relation to the community and those outside of it.

Hebrews creates a "New Jew" by making ancestral claims concerning kinship and yet ultimately encouraging its audience to imitate its ancestors by embracing an identity as strangers and foreigners. The text accomplishes this by employing narratives of the past to construct the present and the future, but perhaps it does so most explicitly by calling the community to come "outside the camp" (13:13). In other words, the text creates outsiders. This appeal is cast in the shadow of the ancestors, who are to be imitated and who were, in their own right, wandering strangers. Embracing the status of strangers can be seen as a form of resisting their imperial context, but it should also be acknowledged that the audience could have rejected this choice. Inextricably linked to these identities is hope for a better future and a place of belonging, but they are ever attended by the potential for danger and suffering. This is the reality of marginal identities in an imperial context.

It is, in part, the claim to common ancestry and the faith in a common goal, of a new and different world, that coheres the group and makes them a people. The ancestral past and a hopeful future are held in tension with the suffering the community is currently experiencing. Although living outside the camp can be filled with danger and shame, Hebrews introduces the possibility of challenging such an existence of suffering and persecution. The margins could be transfigured from a site of reproach and shame into a

site of creativity and change. Imagining a future that is different from one's current suffering enables a community to remain hopeful. It is possible that this hope creates a space for community—both then and there, as well as, here and now.

CHAPTER 6

A PECULIAR PEOPLE: FIRST PETER AND CHRISTIAN IDENTITY[1]

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of God who called you out of darkness into marvelous light. 1 Peter 2:9

First Peter is a text that exemplifies the difficulties of living life as outsiders, as the "exiles of the diaspora" (1:1, 2:11).[2] The audience is constructed as diasporic. Yet, they are not simply exiles, they are chosen exiles (1:1). These elect outsiders are living in a hostile environment. The epistle makes it clear that the community is experiencing suffering.[3] In spite of their circumstances, the author outlines imperatives for how they are to live in light of their new identity as God's people. For instance, slaves are to "accept the authority" of their masters, those who are kind, as well as those who are harsh (2:18). Wives, likewise, are to "accept the authority" of their husbands, "even those who do not obey the word (3:1)." While these directives may seem to assimilate the audience with the dominant culture, they also elucidate the diversity within the community. Written from Rome, alleging Petrine authorship, First Peter encourages and uplifts its audience while concomitantly keeping them in their place.

---

[1] Only the KJV translation of the New Testament renders περιποιησιν as peculiar. Other versions, such as NRSV, translate it as God's own people.

[2] Bonnie Howe insists on clarifying the scope of the author's text. She writes, "Peter begins his letter with words that open up a large landscape—literally, virtually all of Asia Minor; figuratively, the whole socio-political world; theologically, a cosmos that stretches into heavenly space and moves outside ordinary time. Bonnie Howe, *Because You Bear This Name: Conceptual Metaphor and the Moral Meaning of 1 Peter* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 181.

[3] πασχων (suffering) is found twelve times in the short letter (2:19, 20, 21, 25; 3:14, 17, 18; 4:1 (2x), 4:15, 19; 5:10).

This chapter seeks to demonstrate that the ethno-spatial identity found in the text is a diasporic Jewish identity that is being contested and constructed. I will begin by discussing the historical critical issues in First Peter. I will then explore recent scholarship concerning the audience's social context and the metaphors of spatiality in the epistle. I will then read First Peter through the lens of the New Negro by highlighting four ways by which the author forms a "born again"[4] (ἀναγεννάω) New (Christian) Jewish identity, that is a new Jewishness based their interpretation of the person of Jesus. (1) The author employs ethnic reasoning to establish the peoplehood of the epistle's addressees through kinship language and birthing imagery. (2) Naming, by internal and external forces, further clarify identity and demonstrate its contestation. (3) The context of suffering is examined as having the potential to harm and transform. (4) The moral codes in First Peter that instruct the audience on how to live in an oppressive environment can have multiple meanings. In the struggle to (re)create themselves, the audience provides a poignant example of how suffering and hope can give birth to a reimagined future.

Historical Critical Issues

Author and Location

First Peter is an epistle that alleges to have been written by "Peter the apostle" (1:1), however most scholars argue that this is not likely the case.[5] While some have

---

[4] See 1 Peter 1:3, 23.

[5] Paul Achtemeier suggests that the lack of references to the events in the life of Jesus, the Pauline similarities, as well as the style of Greek point to someone other than the apostle Peter. (Paul J. Achtemeir, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 1-6. Peter Davids and David Bartlett are among

suggested Silvanus as the potential author, largely based on the ambiguity of the idiom, δια Σιλουνου, in 5:12; others claim that a Petrine school or associates of Peter composed the letter.[6] Scholarly consensus is that 1 Peter is a pseudonymous letter written from Rome.[7]

Proposals for a Roman origin are based on similarities with other early Christian documents associated with Rome (*1 Clement, Shepherd of Hermas*, and even Paul's letter to the Romans).[8] Moreover, tradition maintains Peter's presence and influence in Rome.[9]

---

those who propose that Silvanus may have written the letter. (Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990) and David L. Bartlett, "The First Letter of Peter: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 12 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998).

[6] See: Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 10. John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 127-30. Terrance V. Smith, *Petrine Controversies in Early Christianity: Attitudes toward Peter in Christian Writings of the First Two Centuries* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1985), 154.

[7] M. Eugene Boring surmises, "In the name of Peter, and with distinctive elements of Petrine tradition, the author adopts the Pauline letter form and many aspects of Pauline content and theology, associating the Pauline companions Mark and Silvanus with himself (5:12-13). Here the Roman church brings together Peter and Paul, and in Peter's name addresses their fellow Christians in Asia Minor." M. Eugene Boring, "First Peter in Recent Study," *Word and World* 24:4 (Fall 2004), 363. Internal and external evidence link Peter to Rome. See: Daniel W. O'Connor, *Peter in Rome: The Literary, Liturgical, and Archeological Evidence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).

[8] In his monograph, *Coping with Prejudice*, Paul Holloway suggests that the letter originated in the provinces to which it is addressed. He writes: "the fact that 1 Peter claims to have been written at Rome would have guaranteed its early reception there. I think it is more likely that a pseudepigraphal works like 1 Peter originate among those for whom they are intended and not in some distant ecclesiastical center – if that is in fact what Rome was at this point in time – which in this case would place the author of 1 Peter among the gentile Christians in the eastern provinces… a solution supported by the fact that the first verifiable citation of the letter was by Polycarp of Smyrna."[8] (Paul Holloway, *Coping with Prejudice: 1 Peter in Social-Psychological Perspective* (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 16).

Pseudonymonity is also a way for the author to assert his authority over the audience. This seems particularly poignant when written from Rome, the center of imperial power.[10]

Date of Composition

The question of dating First Peter is often associated with the question of authorship. For those who suggest that the author was the apostle Peter, an early date is proposed for the epistle. However, 1 Peter 5:13 refers to Rome as Babylon, an indication that Rome, like Babylon, had already conquered Jerusalem. As a result, most scholars purport a *terminus post quem* of 70 C.E. Some scholars find a connection between 1 Peter and *1 Clement*.[11] This would suggest a date of around 100 C.E. at the latest. However, *1 Clement's* knowledge of 1 Peter is challenged.[12] Others look to Pliny's reference to Christians in his letter to Trajan as geographically and contextually overlapping with the addressees of First Peter. If we assume this is the context of the letter, this would "point

---

[9] There are scholars who maintain the position that the epistle was in fact written by Peter. As a result, they would date the text to the early first century since tradition holds that Peter died in Rome around 64 CE. For example, see: Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, and John H. Reumann, *Peter in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Prostestant and Roman Catholic Scholars* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1973), 20-21.

[10] Achtemeier, 4. Achtemeier concludes that such an assertion is "intended to strengthen its claim to be 'apostolic.' Holloway suggests the use of Peter's name is due to "the letter's emphasis on the historical suffering of Jesus called for someone who actually witnessed those sufferings" (Holloway, 17).

[11] See Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless*, 138-40.

[12] See Achtemeier, 48-9.

to a date some time between 80 and 100 CE."[13] Given the likelihood of pseudonymous authorship, I would concur with a date range of 80-95 CE. In short, First Peter was written in the late first century.

Audience

While a great deal of ambiguity surrounds the inscribed recipients of Hebrews, 1 Peter is expressly written to the "exiles of the dispersion" living in the Roman provinces of Asia Minor.[14] The recipients are most often understood to be Christian and/or Gentile.[15] However, I suggest that the audience is Jewish based largely on the language and character of the letter. Witherington similarly argues that the addressees were more likely Hellenized Jews. "Jews particularly those of a higher social status who were more

---

[13] Ibid., 50. A dating of later than 95 (e.g. during the reign of Trajan) has been refuted due to the acknowledgement that the suffering described in the epistle could refer to an earlier time period or more likely refers to increasing social pressure and unofficial persecutions. Achtemeier, 28-36 and Simon R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 123-124.

[14] The letter is written to communities in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (see 1 Peter 1:1).

[15] There are exceptions, e.g., Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza identifies the audience as Hellenistic diaspora Jews. She highlights their imperial context (and thusly, the power dynamics of the rhetoric of diaspora) by referring to the addressees as "those who live in Asia Minor as colonial subjects." Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 165.

Witherington reaches a similar conclusion. He writes: "In light of the highly Jewish character of 1 Peter anyway, it seems logical to conclude that, since in all the above references it is Jews who are called resident aliens, we should surely conclude that this is likely in 1 Peter as well." More precisely, he identifies them as Hellenized Jewish Christians. Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians Volume II: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1-2 Peter* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 24.

thoroughly Hellenized and indigenized into the local milieu, might have participated in temple feasts in some of these cities."[16]As such, the reasons often suggested for a Gentile audience ("you and your former ignorance" and "don't slip back into your old ways" 1 Peter 1:14-16) could just as easily been attributed to a Jewish audience. Moreover, traditional interpretations of 1 Peter understand the language of exile as "a metaphorical reminder to these Christians that on this earth they have no lasting home; their citizenship is in heaven."[17] However, in his social scientific study of 1 Peter, *A Home for the Homeless*, John Elliott suggests that the text is concerned with both social and religious estrangement. He concludes that *paroikos* (resident aliens), and *oikos* (household) are "sociological and theological correlates."[18] For Elliott, these terms are political designations that describe a particular social situation.

Other scholars argue for understanding the exilic audience as a marginalized group. For example, M. Eugene Boring argues that a "consensus is forming that the 'elect strangers of the Diaspora' (Elliott's translation of 1:1; NRSV 'exiles of the Diaspora') refers to people who have been marginalized socially, not people who consider this world as such to be foreign territory and heaven their true homeland. First Peter is not so otherworldly."[19]Edgar Krentz concludes that the audience is not literally in

---

[16] Witherington, 29. Witherington points to the following texts as internal evidence that has been used to make a case for a Gentile audience: 1 Peter 1:14, 18; 2:9-10; and 4:3-4. In each example, a convincing argument can be made for a Jewish audience.

[17] David L. Bartlett, "The First Letter of Peter," in *The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume XII*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 235-6.

[18] John Elliott, *A Home For the Homeless* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 35.

[19] M. Eugene Boring, "First Peter in Recent Study," *Word & World* vol. 24 (Fall 2004), 365.

exile. He writes: "It seems clear that they are not immigrants, but resident non-Jews and formerly worshippers of the locally recognized deities (1 Pet 1:14)."[20] While I disagree that the audience is solely non-Jewish, the language of exile makes clear that they are a marginalized group.

Social Context

Scholars continue to debate the social situation of the recipients of 1 Peter, specifically the extent to which the audience is exiled and experiencing suffering and/or persecution, as well as the degree to which the audience is conforming to/participating in the Roman imperial cult.[21] Concerning the audience's relationship to its neighbors, David Balch points to the household codes as a "movement toward peace and harmony with Greco-Roman society."[22] The acculturation process that Balch highlights stands in direct opposition to John Elliott's view that 1 Peter rejects Greco-Roman society. Elliott

---

[20] Edgar Krentz, "Creating a Past: 1 Peter and Christian Identity," 41.

[21] This is at the heart of the debate concerning the addressee's relationship to the Roman Empire. David Balch and John H. Elliott represent the two sides of this acculturation/accommodation debate. Balch argues that Balch, and specifically his work on the *Haustafeln*, concludes that 1 Peter calls for Christian conformity. See David Balch, "Hellenization/Acculturation in 1 Peter," in *Perspectives on First Peter*, ed. Charles H. Talbert (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), pp. 79-102. On the other hand, Elliott suggests that the letter is a call to resistance. See John H. Elliott, "1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy: A Discussion with David Balch," in *Perspectives on First Peter*, ed. Charles H. Talbert (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), pp. 61-78.

[22] David Balch, "Hellenization/Acculturation in 1 Peter," in *Perspectives on 1 Peter*, Charles H. Talbert, ed. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 85. For a summary of the Balch and Elliott debate see: David G. Horrell, "Between Conformity and Resistance" in *Reading First Peter With New Eyes: Methodological Reassessments of the Letter of First Peter*, Robert L. Webb and Betsy Bauman-Martin, eds. (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 111-43. Horrell concludes that the author of First Peter presents both conforming and resisting as options.

suggests reading 1 Peter as an act of resistance. It is because the audience is situated on the borders of these traditions that such debates continue.

Paul Holloway argues that the context of First Peter is a longsuffering associated with prejudice. He writes, "Actual persecutions may have been local and sporadic—as current histories of early Christianity are wont to remind us—but the social prejudice underlying them was constant, and it is on the basis of this ever-present threat that the lived experience of early Christians must be imagined."[23] I concur with Holloway's assessment and would like to extend his analysis to consider the ways that living under the ubiquitous presence of suffering affects the construction of identity. As a result of these societal pressures, the audience is mapped along the spectrum of assimilation and conformity to societal norms or to the other extreme resistance and social alienation. This oscillation between resistance to Roman imperial ideals and the acculturation to them upholds that identity is continuously negotiated in an imperial context and exposes its complex cultural milieu. Such communities are constantly negotiating identity, at times this may be seen as acculturation and at other times, it may appear to be resistance. I intend to call attention to the fact that similar negotiations occur *within* communities.

Themes in First Peter

Diaspora Space: Exile, Place, and Identity

It is the flexibility of diasporic identity that enables the author of First Peter to designate his audience simultaneously as insiders and outsiders. Just as they are a people,

---

[23] Paul A. Holloway, *Coping with Prejudice: 1 Peter in Social-Psychological Perspective* (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 233.

chosen and holy, they are also aliens and exiles. In his article, "The Rehabilitation of a Rhetorical Step-Child," Troy Martin identifies diaspora as "the controlling metaphor of 1 Peter."[24] For Martin, the metaphor designates "the recipients as the wandering people of God on an eschatological journey."[25] Yet the metaphor does more than point to an otherworldly future; it functions to put the audience in a specific place, or perhaps more accurately it locates them as *not* being in the home(land). Martin continues, "The spatial and temporal aspects of the diaspora enable this author to craft a rhetorical situation that locates the recipients both in a partial location that differs from their final destination and in a temporal moment of suffering and dishonor that contrasts with their subsequent vindication and honour."[26] As I have argued, diaspora identities are indeed, in-between, neither here nor there, and as such they are flexible, adapting to their environment. Howe similarly identifies diaspora as a significant metaphor in the letter and as an important way for understanding the audience's way of being, an audience who are not strangers in a strange land, but instead strangers in their home places.

This understanding of stranger in their homeland resonates with the construction of the New Negro identity that very much viewed America as its home. In spite of racial prejudice, violence, and disenfranchisement serving as constant reminders of an outsider status, despite the appearance of homelessness, the New Negro identity was very much

---

[24] Troy Martin, "The Rehabilitation of a Rhetorical Step-Child: First Peter and Classical Rhetorical Criticism," in *Reading 1 Peter with New Eyes: Methodological Reassessments of the Letter of First Peter*, eds. Robert L. Webb and Betsy Bauman-Martin (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 57.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 59.

rooted in America. Larry George compares 1 Peter to the African diaspora. He observes: "This salutation bears many parallels to the social status and plights of Africans scattered throughout the world. They, too, are considered strangers, aliens, and sojourners in strange lands apart from their homelands, culture, religions, and languages."[27] However, the great migration and the New Negro identity represent yet another displacement, a displacement of a second order, in which these same notions of alienation persist even though the people have been in a new home for as long as they remember. The New Negro motif will, once again prove instructive for understanding the complex identity negotiations in the first century Mediterranean world.

The themes of exile and exodus portray the audience as (dis)placed and connects them to a Jewish past.[28] First Peter expressly places the audience in exile: "Live in reverent fear during the time of your exile" (1:17). The themes of exile and exodus are explicitly related to the terms παροικοι (aliens) and παρεπιδημοι (exiles) (2:11). Earl Richards argues that the audience is "addressed first as political actors but also as social agents whose loyalty includes the religious sphere. Thus, 1 Peter calls the audience

---

[27] Larry George, "1 Peter," in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary* eds. Brian Blount, Cain Hope Felder, Clarice J. Martin, and Emerson B. Powery (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 479.

[28] Howe writes: "'Diaspora' is an important clue. In light of the schematic metaphor, The Church Is the New Israel, Peter's salutation makes a certain kind of sense. When he writes to 'exiles of the dispersion' he is not writing to literal diaspora Jews. No, he writes to Christian converts who are (mostly) non-Jews, people who until they joined the 'Christian' way belonged in the ordinary sense—whether or not they each had Roman citizenship—in their native land. But now that they belong to a new 'Nation,' they have become 'exiles' in their own country. It is as though they had become 'resident aliens' without having actually moved" (*Because You Bear the Name*, 269).

'political aliens' (παροικοι) and 'religious exiles' (παρεπιδημοι)."[29] I suggest that such a distinction is unnecessary because the audience can equally be understood as religious aliens (not participating in the Roman public cults) and political exiles (outsider status in the Roman imperial structure or not a Roman citizen). This language not only speaks to the audiences' status within the Roman imperial structure but it also connects them to a Jewish past.

The language of sojourning, when understood as part of constructing a Jewish past, emphasizes a sense of peoplehood. The audience is on a journey together moving from a past in which they "have already spent enough time doing what the nations like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and unlawful idolatry" (4:3) to a present condition of suffering even if "now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials" (1:6) to a future of "an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (1:4). 1 Peter, along with other contemporary discourses such as Hebrews, draws on similar language, metaphors, and images to (re)imagine identity. It is this language of "sojourning" that Paul Deterding highlights in his article, "Exodus Motifs in First Peter." Deterding argues that "numerous allusions to the exodus, the wanderings in the desert, and the conquest of Canaan are

---

[29] Earl J. Richard, "Honorable Conduct among the Gentiles—A Study of the Social Thought of 1 Peter," *Word and World* 24, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 417. He continues: "they have responsibilities that relate to their political status as residents and citizens of the Roman Empire and its regional civic communities, and, in the second case, they have duties vis-a-vis God, their religious communities and in their relationships toward their pagan neighbors." Ben Witherington asserts that *parepidemois* "should not be translated either 'exile' or 'pilgrim.'" Instead he suggests it be understood as resident alien. Ben Witherington II, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians Vol II: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1-2 Peter* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 24.

scattered throughout the Epistle."[30] Likewise, Reinhold Feldmeier maintains that the language in 1 Peter is the language of sojourning, is largely dependent upon biblical and specifically Jewish tradition, and should be understood metaphorically.[31] Moses Chin similarly contends that "the divine covenant with Abraham and the notion of a παροικια are inseparable…God's people were consistently known as παροικοι. Being παροικοι was not just an identifying mark of their nomadic way of life, but more importantly, marked their theological and covenantal status."[32] Chin suggests that the sojourning language connotes "a social and religious outlook that reflects travellers journeying towards a land they can call their home. Nationalism is equated with cessation of the journey, and yet ironically, the nation was formed only because it was on the journey."[33] The connection between movement and the formation of a people is elucidated by Chin's description. Likewise, in his monograph, *Temple, Exile, and Identity in 1 Peter*, Andrew Mbuvi relates the terms to Hebrew Bible references and concludes, "Not only were the believers in 1 Peter addressed as members of the lowest social stratum (foreigners/aliens and sojourners who could not own land or property), but the same terminology also denotes

---

[30] Peter E. Deterding, "Exodus Motifs in First Peter," *Concordia Journal* (March 1981): 58.

[31] Reinhard Feldmeier, "The 'Nation' of Strangers: Social Contempt and Its Theological Interpretation in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity," in *Ethnicity and the Bible,* ed. Mark G. Brett (Brill: Leiden and New York: 1996), 257. Feldmeier goes on to state: "[S]trangerhood is not understood from opposition to society, but from response to God."

[32] Moses Chin, "A Heavenly Home for the Homeless: Aliens and Strangers in 1 Peter," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42, no. 1 (1991): 102.

[33] Ibid., 104.

the characteristic of 'exile', both literally and metaphorically (1 Peter 1.17)."[34] Mbuvi goes on to argue that the addressees of the letter are not randomly scattered about; instead, these are "the designations of restoration, i.e. 'spiritual house', 'new Israel' which provide the bond of unity. That is why to simply understand the designation 'exiles' from a sociological point of view obscures the spiritual/theological significance of the metaphor's analogy of oneness—both with Israel of old and with other believers who also suffer (5.9)."[35] Therefore, the exile/exodus imagery specifically designating the audience as aliens and exiles not only connects the audience of 1 Peter with its past and its contemporary situation of suffering but it also clarifies that suffering is an anticipated part of the journey to becoming a people.

In 1 Peter, peoplehood is constructed by using the language of exile and exodus. The audience's marginal identity is underscored by being called aliens or strangers in their land. However, this marginality is supplanted by a new birth in the midst of their suffering. They are a new people. The New Negro similarly employed language of alienation and renewal in order to form a new identity.

---

[34] Andrew M. Mbuvi, *Temple, Exile, and Identity in 1 Peter* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 38–39. He observes "only two places in the Old Testament where the terms παροικος and παρεπιδημος are combined in a similar fashion to 1 Peter 2:11—Gen. 23:4 and Ps. 39:12 (LXX—38/13). Abraham applies both terms 'stranger' and 'sojourner' to himself. " Mbuvi also notes that the designation are comparable to those found in Qumran documents "which also combine elements of election, sojourning in a foreign land, and exodus/exile motifs" (42).

[35] Ibid., 43.

Reading First Peter through the New Negro Lens

The Negro Renaissance more frequently called the Harlem Renaissance is often described as a "movement" marked by a proliferation of black art and literature. Robert Park characterizes the renaissance as a nationalist movement and suggests that it is similar to other nationalist movements in Europe. The three commonalities of nationalist movements that he highlights are: (1) the struggles of a "predominantly rural population to maintain their cultural existences" (2) these struggles are of an "oppressed people attempting to emancipate themselves and gain status" and (3) the outcome is "a general expansion of the people."[36] Park describes this expansion as "geographical as well as cultural, accompanied by a marked elevation and intensification of the lives of the individuals and of the peoples as a whole. It is a perfectly accurate statement to say that these movements have invariably had the general character of a renaissance, a national, or racial *rebirth*."[37] However, this period of renewal and rebirth revealed significant distinctions within the black American community.

The (re)presentation of the New Negro in America had to maintain a delicate balance. Whose image most accurately epitomized this renewed people? Martha Gurening's critique of the literary movement highlights the tensions inherent to any representation. She writes,

---

[36] Robert E. Park, "Race Consciousness Reflected in Race Literature (1923)," in *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, African American Culture, 1892–1938* Henry Lewis Gates, Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett, eds. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 313.

[37] Ibid. Emphasis mine.

> What is obvious from them is that the long frustrated, ambitious, struggling Negroes of the upper and middle class still accept and jealously cherish the values of capitalistic civilization…It represents two generations of struggle and achievement away from slavery toward a promised land, a goal which as they near it has all the unsubstantiality of a mirage. One may even concede that the struggle was noble and achievement praiseworthy, and still fell that new day of the Negro Renaissance, if it comes, will not be made by those unable to detach their emotions from this mirage.[38]

Gruening's critique is not only of Jessie Fauset's *The Chinaberry Tree,* she also challenges some the "snobbery" evident in the black Bourgeoisie, as "sillier than the stale counter-propaganda to which it is a retort."[39] She asserts that the representation of the Negro, particularly the one sold to white readers should be more representative of the diversity of Negro experience. Gruening's pessimism concerning a true literary renaissance demonstrates how those who are able to tell the story control a narrative. Who controlled the representations of the New Negro? Did a rebirth simply reify the status and position of small minority who had the most to lose? Issues of class and status are not solely contemporary concern. These are questions that we can bring to text of First Peter. In addition to socioeconomic status, there are three motifs that the New Negro analytical lens brings to the fore in the text of First Peter: (1) The ethnic construction of the audience through kinship language and its related theme of new birth (2) The various work that internal and external naming does in influencing the formation of a new Jewish

---

[38] Martha Gruening, "The Negro Renaissance (1932)," in *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, African American Culture, 1892–1938* Henry Lewis Gates, Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett, eds. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 242.

[39] Gruening goes on to describe DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folk* as dated and "for all its beauty, a little Victorian, moralistic, and slightly rhetorical; but it is moving as its successors are not because it is passionate and militant, where they are merely complacent, because its author was in those days the leader of a forlorn hope…"

(Christian) identity and (3) The ethical imperatives outlined by the author asserts sameness while at the same time underscoring difference.

New Birth, New Family

The letter's writer attempts to assert group solidarity through kinship language. The birthing imagery in First Peter constructs the identity of the letter's addressees as one that is new. In 1 Peter 1:3–4, the writer explains that being born into these new familial ties results in an inheritance: "By his great mercy he has given us a new birth (ἀναγεννήσας) into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefined, and unfading, kept in heaven for you." Just as the inheritance is imperishable, so too is the seed of which they are born. "You have been born anew, not of perishable, but of *imperishable* seed, through the living and enduring word of God."[40] Buell reminds that ethnic reasoning can involve, "The common description of conversion as rebirth illustrates one central way in which Christians depicted Christianness simultaneously in terms of 'essence' and transformation."[41] This fixed (born of an imperishable seed) yet fluid (born anew) way of belonging makes it possible to bring together disparate groups of people under the label of Jewishness. In his article "'Race', 'Nation', 'People': Ethnic Identity-Construction in 1

---

[40] 1 Peter 1:24. The new birth imagery is also part of the larger cultural milieu. Paul Holloway states: "Rebirth is a concept familiar from the Hellenistic mysteries and certain non-Palestinian forms of early Christianity" (*Coping with Prejudice*, 233). Holloway notes as examples Sallustius, *De deis* 4; cf. Tert., *De bapt*. 5.1; Hippolyt., *Ref.* 5.8.10, 23; *Corp. Herm.* 13.1, 3, 7. In Christian texts, in addition to 1 Peter 1:3, 23, see John 3:3, 5, 7; James 1:18; and Titus 3:5 as well as John 1:13 and 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18.

[41] Buell, *Why This New Race*, 3.

Peter 2.9," David Horrell argues that the "stress upon the addressees' new birth, from imperishable seed with God as father...constructs a particular sense of common (divine) ancestry (cf 1.2–3, 17, 23; 2.2)...and the sense of solidarity, evident in a number of ways in the letter, is perhaps best eptiomised in the kinship language of 2.17 and 5.9 (αδελποτης), the positive counterpart to the dislocation and alienation indicated by the addressees' description as παροικοι και παρεπιδημοι (1.11; cf. 1.1, 17)."[42]

Although the audience is to embrace a new identity, it is at the same time connected to an ancient past. They were "foreordained before foundation of the world" (1:20). As Krentz observes, "Peter thus adapts a standard stress in ancient national identity, the antiquity of a people."[43] While the past, more specifically a history, is significant for developing peoplehood and hope for the future is important for sustaining them, the present is where meaning-making is continuously done, where identity is negotiated. Thusly, there is equally an emphasis on living and suffering—their present situation.[44] They are not just living; they are portrayed as living as outsiders. Eugene Boring, underscoring the way the audience is portrayed as outsiders, writes: "This sense of 'acute homelessness and feeling of not belonging' is addressed by 1 Peter's root

---

[42] David G. Horrell, "'Race', 'Nation', 'People': Ethnic Identity-Construction in 1 Peter 2.9," *New Testament Studies* 58 (2011): 140.

[43] Krentz, "Creating a Past," 46. Krentz continues: "Peter has given his readers a fictive history that dates their beginning in the mind of God. Peter in a sense regards God as the colonizer of Peter's readers in a strange land. Their beginnings in the mind of God almost equal their being αυτοθοωος, like the Athenians."

[44] Some example of the emphasis on ζωσαν (living) include "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1:3), live in reverent fear (1:17), you have been born anew…through the living and enduring word of God (1:24), "Come to him, a living stone…like living stone, let yourself be built into a spiritual house (2:4–5).

metaphor for the church, the family of newborn brothers and sisters in the household of God."[45] Having always been in God's thoughts, they are (re)born into the household of God. The familial language (children, brothers, and sisters) emphasizes one way of belonging ascribed in the letter.

Another way of belonging is found in the explicit formation of peoplehood, as in Hebrews (Heb. 8:10), they are God's people. In addition to rebirth and kinship, the text asserts that "once you were not a people, but now you are God's people" (2:10). Not only were they foreordained or chosen, but they are also a people. It is in chapter 2 that the audience's peoplehood is most overtly constructed, and it is done utilizing ethnic terms. They are a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's possession." (2:9) The terms γενος, εθνος, and λαος, translated as "race," "nation," and "people," respectively, are all found in this one verse. Horrell observes: "This is the most explicitly ethnoracial description of Christian identity in the whole New Testament, and one that initiates an influential discourse about ethnicity and 'race' in early Christian writing."[46] If the description is ethnoracial, then what ethnicity or race is being described

---

[45] Boring, "First Peter in Recent Study," 365–66. See also John H. Elliott's "The Rehabilitation of an Exegetical Step-Child: 1 Peter in Recent Research," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 (1976): 253.

[46] David G. Horrell, "'Race', 'Nation', 'People': Ethnic Identity-Construction in 1 Peter 2.9," *New Testament Studies* 58 (2011): 134. Horrell contends that "1 Peter marks an early and crucial step in defining Christian identity in this way, with its uniquely emphatic description of members of the Church as a race, a nation, and a people." He concludes: "In drawing on the specific traditions of Judaism—a form of ethnic identity with religio-cultural practices at its heart—the author of 1 Peter, along with other early Christian writers, was able to construct just such a form of identity, without a focus on specific (geophysical) territorial attachment or biological (human) kinship links" (141). I disagree, as the author of 1 Peter specifically designates a territory for his audience. It is here, in Asia Minor, that they are aliens and exiles.

in the text? I would suggest that it is Jewishness, a "born-again" Jewishness, based on the language of exile and peoplehood and the (re)birth into God's family as God's own people that is deeply rooted in Jewish tradition.

Describing the audience with specifically ethnic terms undermines universalizing claims of "Christianity," as Buell effectively argues, but it also, as this study expresses, underscores the significance of place to the construction of identity. That is, these "diaspora Jews" in Asia Minor are exiles, resident aliens, away for the center, away from home. Despite the vast geographical area outlined by the text, it is nonetheless bound. The borders that are drawn in the text are borders of ethnicity. As Bonnie Howe explains in her monograph, *Because You Bear the Name*, "The ethnic boundary drawn entails a container concept; there is a metaphorical bounded space within which the People dwell."[47] The author places the audience in Asia Minor in exile and with echoes of the Hebrew Bible calls them, a chosen race, a royal priesthood and a holy nation. As such, the author constructs not simply God's own people, but a Jewish people.

Although many scholars suggest that the author is applying Jewish language to his Christian audience, I contend that he simply constructs his audience as Jewish. As ethnic reasoning instructs this very rigid, fixed language of peoplehood can be understood as equally fluid. For even as a nation and a people, they are also aliens and exiles. Likewise, they are chosen but at the same time rejected by those around them (maligned as evildoers 2:12). A seemingly exalted status of priests is immediately deconstructed by an assertion of subservience as slaves of God. After addressing them as chosen, royal, and

---

[47] Howe, *Because You Bear This Name,* 268.

holy, the author encourages them as "aliens and exiles" to "conduct yourselves honorably among the nations" (2:11–12). They are reminded to be "obedient children" (1:14), like "newborn babies" (2:2), even "free slaves of God" (2:16). They never escape their outsider status. The author keeps them in their (designated) place.

All of the aforementioned constructions of identity (peoplehood and nation) are examples of internal naming. That is, as fellow Jesus follower, the letter writer ascribes these titles to his audience. Horrell contends that the "description of Christians as γενος seems to have arisen as a facet of Christian self-definition, even if similar language also came to be used by outsiders."[48] If γενος is a self-appellation, then Χριστιανος is the name applied to the group by outsiders. Before turning to the term Χριστιανος and its significance in the text, it is important to note, as Horrell does, that the context of identity negotiation is one of suffering:

> γενος comes to prominence in Jewish self-identity discourse precisely in a context of 'hostility and attempted annihilation.' Similarly, 1 Peter use of γενος language, and the rich depictions of Christian identity in the passage in which it appears, comes in a context of evident hostility and suffering. The letter's overall strategy, in which the identity-designations of 2.9 play an important role, is—put in terms of social identity theory—to develop a positive sense of in-group identity, of the status and honour that acrue to membership of the community, in the face of negative evaluation and stigmatization on the part of outsiders.[49]

[48] Horrell, "'Race', 'Nation', 'People'",134.

[49] Ibid., 141–42.

Given this context, the audience cannot simply be understood as outsiders, living in exile. They are a "marked" group because they bear this name, Χριστιανος.[50]

Naming

One way that group identity is solidified is through naming. Naming is an act of creation that not only brings a person or people into existence but also simultaneously orients and differentiates. For example, a surname (Kaalund) or ethnic group (black) is shared with family members or a larger community with commonalities, while a first name or race (African American) often differentiates. In other words, naming asserts sameness and difference at the same time. Social theorist Pierre Bourdieu reminds of the power of the naming. He writes that "the act of naming helps to establish the structure of the world, [and] does so all the more significantly the more widely it is recognized i.e., authorized. There is no social agent who does not aspire, as far as his [sic] circumstances permit, to have the power to name and to create the world through naming."[51] The author of 1 Peter names his audience throughout the letter. In fact, the letter is addressed to "the elect exiles of the Dispersion" (1:1). The opening verses of the letter locate its audience in diaspora space. This name, exile, positions them away from a particular place (a

---

[50] 1 Peter 4:16 reads: "Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because *you bear this name*." Although the Greek (δοξαζετω δε τον θεον εν τω ονοματι τοτω) glorify God in/by this name, the addition of bear indicates association with the name was to be carried, as if a weight or burden.

[51] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991), 105. Bourdieu continues: "gossip, slander, lies, insults, commendations, criticisms, arguments, and praises are all daily and petty manifestations of the solemn and collective acts of naming, be they celebrations or condemnations, which are performed by generally recognized authorities… But what both [common and qualifying nouns] have in common is what may be called a performative or magical intention."

home/land) and also illustrates their difference in their social context. An exile is a stranger, someone who is out of place. Yet what is not clear is whether the addressees would consider themselves exiles. How do we know that they do not feel "at home" in Asia Minor? It is important to remember that this letter is a world created by its author, not one that is necessarily accepted by its recipients. It is the (letter) writer who wields the power to name. Exile is the first of many designations used to describe the addressees of the letter.

In addition to internal group identities, such as a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God's own possession, the epistle's addressees are also called χριστιανος, *Christianos* by outsiders. *Christianos* is an appellation that represents how the audience is recognized by its neighbors, is an external naming.[52] Just as the Alexandrian Jews in Philo's *In Flaccum* were interpellated, designated as foreigners and strangers (see chapter 3), these communit(ies) of Jesus followers are called into being by this name. The term *Christianos* is widely understood to have been pejorative.[53] It follows the labels of "murderer, thief, criminal, and mischief-maker" (4:16) and thus can be understood as

---

[52] χριστιανος appears in the New Testament three times: Acts 11:26; 26:28; and 1 Peter 4:16. John Elliott attests to the fact that each is an external designation. He writes: "Of the three NT examples of the term, two are in Acts—both on the lips of outsiders. The third example, 1 Peter 4:16, is implied to be an outsider slur" (*1 Peter* AB 37, 791). Elliott translates *Christianos* as "Christ lackeys"—that is, "shameful sycophants of Christ," highlighting its negative connotation (791).

[53] Thomas Caulley asserts that "continued Roman denigration of Christians in various Roman writings, using the same pejorative descriptions widely used against Jews from earlier times, seems to imply Roman uncertainty about the distinctions between the groups. The eventual identification of the Christians as a separate group opened the way for persecution of this new group, an illicit religion that no longer enjoyed even the limited protection afforded the Jews." Thomas Scott Caulley, "The Title *Christianos* and Roman Imperial Cult," *Restoration Quarterly* 53 no. 4 (2011): 196.

analogous. David Horrell surmises that the reference in 1 Peter 4:16 "represents the earliest witness to the crucial process whereby the term was transformed from a hostile label applied by outsiders to a proudly claimed self-designation."[54] Naming distinguishes this group from the larger community and will eventually come to distinguish them from the Jewish community. The writer exhorts: "Yet, if any of you *suffer as a Christian*, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name" (4:16). Here, the writer attempts to refashion the label, suggesting it an honorable burden to bear, though a burden nonetheless.

Although the author of First Peter assures his audience that they should not be ashamed to suffer as a *Christianos,* it is clear that this encouragement is necessary only because it is, indeed, a cause of shame. The result is a negotiation of identity. Horrell defines a stigma as an "identity-defining mark" and aptly describes the appellation in First Peter as a form of stigma.[55] He explains: "In the case of the label χριστιανος, 1 Peter makes it clear that those who bore this 'mark' were subject to both informal hostility and to official censure, negative responses that could combine in the accusatorial process to bring about physical suffering and death."[56] Although he does not accept the name

---

[54] David G. Horrell, "The Label χριστιανος: 1 Peter 4:16 and the Formation of Christian Identity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126 (2007): 362.

[55] Ibid., 377. He defines stigma as: "a mark that defines him or her as deviant, flawed, limited, spoiled, or generally undesirable. The forms in which stigma is indicated and felt through the process of social interaction vary widely."

[56] Ibid., 376. Horrell argues convincingly that Rome is the origin of the term, further bolstered by the fact that it is a Latinism. Other scholars suggest Antioch as its birthplace, following Acts 11:26: "And when he (Barnabas) had found him (Saul), he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called 'Christians.'"

Christianos, the author seems to encourage the addressees of the letter that suffering *for the name* is commendable. Horrell observes that "1 Peter thus provides the earliest Christian evidence of suffering for the *nomen ipsum* in which the specific Latinism by which the Romans identified these criminals appear."[57] To counter such shame, the author of 1 Peter further instructs his audience to "Honor everyone. Love the family of believers (or more specifically the brother/sisterhood). Fear God. Honor the emperor" (2:17). The familial language is noteworthy, as is the command to honor the emperor, I will further examine these instruction below. Honor is returned to the audience when they show honor in ways similar to those in the dominant culture.

The term, moreover, is not simply an outsider designation; it is an imperial designation, or in the words of Bourdieu, it is an authorized name. Horrell explains: "Reports of Nero's actions against the Christians after the fire of 64, however, provide the first explicit indication that the adherents of this new superstition were labeled *Christiani* in Rome. Therefore the name is available to, and used by, Roman officials to designate members of this movement, which had now come to imperial attention."[58] As we have seen, imperial designations are often interpellations that necessitate clarifying what it means to belong to this group. As such, it is not surprising that both Horrell and Caulley contend that 1 Peter is a "document of passive resistance to Roman religious

[57] Ibid., 374. Horrell states other New Testament references to suffering for "the name," but concludes that none is strictly comparable because they do not have the name χριστιανος in view but rather the name of Jesus and/or Christ.

[58] Horrell, "The Label χριστιανος," 367.

demands."[59] I would contend that it neither resists or accommodates but oscillates between these extremes. It represents instead a negotiation, much like the New Negro. After all, the letter both upholds the social order and proclaims "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him" (3:22). This claim can be read as a challenge to Roman imperial power in the same ways that "honoring the emperor" can be read as accommodating. Recalling the internal and external naming of Alexandrian Jews in chapter four, it is clear that naming works in myriad ways to create and challenge identity.

Christianos is a name that seeks to aggregate a diverse group under one rubric. This is evident not only from the large geographical territory that the letter intends to influence but also from the fact that the term is found in other early Christian documents. Negro, as I have maintained in chapter 1, is also a name that both aggregates a diverse group of people and distinguishes them from white Americans. The stereotypes or stigma that were associated with Negroes, such as laziness and ignorance, served to remind them of their ex-slave status. First Peter similarly characterizes its audience in relation to their previous behavior—"you have already spent enough time doing with the nations like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and unlawful idolatry" (4:3). Calling a race of people "alien" and a "problem" marginalizes them. Black Americans carry a stigma. Yet, the New Negro rejects these stereotypes and affirms positive attributes of the race. The New Negro identity enables us to problematize

[59] Caulley, "The Title *Christianos*," 194.

any reading of *Christianos* that does not call into question who names and who, if any, responds to this name. The community could have simply rejected the name or embraced it as part of their new identity and this could have varied in different contexts.

The term *Christianos* is, from its inception, associated with suffering.[60] That is, the name *Christianos* is so strongly associated with criminality that it follows that someone who is called the name is subject to punishment. The author of 1 Peter makes it clear that the audience has experienced trials: "even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials" (1:6) and should anticipate physical suffering: "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourself also with the same intention" (4:1). Recall that in Philo's *In Flaccum*, it is in the context of hostility, that internal and external naming collide and self-understanding becomes crucial to survival.

Suffering for the Name

In 1 Peter, the author not only instructs the audience of the inevitability of suffering; he also connects their suffering to "all your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering" (5:9). As such, this born again new (Christian) Jewish identity is formed in the context of suffering and portrays the experience of suffering as universal, as, in fact, unifying. In his article "Honorable Conduct among the Gentiles," Earl Richards affirms: "Jesus is offered to the reader then

---

[60] Caulley maintains that "The term *Christianos* in the second and third centuries is almost always tied to martyrdom. Persecution accelerated in the third century, spreading to North Africa, and finally in the fourth century we hear Eusebius use the title *Christianos* in a seemingly 'everyday' (non-martyrdom) and positive sense—a time coinciding with Constantine's protection of the church" (The Title *Christianos* and Roman Imperial Cult, 194).

as the model of suffering and glory. Indeed, Jesus the innocent sufferer, not the dying Messiah, is the example (υπογραμμος) approved by God and given to the Christian who is 'to follow in his steps' (2:20-21). Thus the author stresses both the soteriological function of the Christ event and its paradigmatic value to console those who are suffering 'for a little while' (1:6; 5:10)."[61] Although the author underscores the transitory nature of the suffering, this likely offers little consolation when enduring suffering, particularly if it is unto death.

That suffering in any form is to be willfully accepted is both problematic and misguided. Suffering is a ubiquitous human experience to the extent that oppressive power structures are universal.[62] As such, suffering should be approached as a call to action to dismantle hegemonic systems that portray suffering as a necessary evil. Kathleen Corley writes: "Of all Christian texts, the message of 1 Peter is the most

---

[61] Earl J. Richard, "Honorable Conduct among the Gentiles—A Study of the Social Thought of 1 Peter," *Word and World* 24, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 416.

[62] My understanding of suffering is informed by a womanist theology of suffering that distinguishes pain and suffering. Raquel A. St. Clair writes: "Rather than distinguishing between evil and suffering, Emilie Townes appeals to Audre Lorde's distinction between pain and suffering. Lorde defines pain as 'an event, an experience that must be recognized, named and then used in some way in order for the experience to change, to be transformed into something else. Pain, then, is a 'dynamic process.' Pain leads to transformation because by definition, it is recognized and named. Therefore, pain 'promotes self-knowledge, which is a tool for liberation and wholeness.' Individuals who experience pain are aware of themselves and their situation and can fight against that which causes the pain. Suffering, on the other hand, is 'unscrutinized and unmetabolized pain' It is 'reliving pain over and over again when it is triggered by events or people. Consequently, suffering is a static process because it does not lead to transformation but oppression. Suffering, then, can be used as a tool of oppression rather than one of liberation….Consequently, Townes advocates for the 'inevitability and desirability of suffering [to be] challenged.'" Raquel A. St. Clair, *Call and Consequences, A Womanist Reading of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 27-28.

harmful in the context of women's lives. Its particular message of the suffering of Christ as a model for Christian living leads to precisely the kinds of abuses that feminists fear."[63] Perhaps even more striking than the "call" to suffer even as Christ suffered (2:21) is the fact that the anticipated suffering was physical, for as Jesus "suffered in the *flesh*, arm yourselves likewise" (4:1). One could even suffer for "doing what is right" (3:14)—and who determines what is right? Again, it is my contention that the presence of this kind of suffering is indicative of the presence of systems of oppression, systems that must be resisted, confronted, and ultimately destroyed.

As a sermon from Great Migration demonstrates, an analogous expectation for suffering existed in the early twenieth century. Rev. Charles Tindley stated: "The apostles all suffered great afflictions and most of them martyrdom. Oh, no, my friends, just because you have religion does not mean that you are going to heaven on flowery beds of ease, but I am happy to tell you that there is promise of sweet peace to all the children of God."[64] Like the epistle, the sermon points to a future that transforms suffering into peace. The movement from suffering to pain proposed a womanist theology of suffering can lead to liberation, as well. In fact, Raquel St. Clair concludes: "This movement is necessary not simply because it liberates African Americans but because suffering is sinful."[65] In the face of a persistent threat or evil, suffering must be presented alongside

---

[63] Kathleen E. Corley, "1 Peter," in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary*, ed. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, vol. 2 (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 355.

[64] See Appendix A.5.

[65] St. Clair, *Call and Consequences* ,28. St. Clair continues: Townes contends that suffering is sinful for two reasons. First, 'the gospel message calls for transformation.' Suffering is not transformative. Second, suffering prohibits individuals from 'act[ing]

the hope for a future of peace and/or restoration. That is, a migration must occur; a transformation has to happen, a transfiguration.

The author's desire to seek peace would represent a change from their current situation of suffering. One way that the author suggests alleviating suffering is by living peaceably with their neighbors. As a result, whether First Peter accommodates to Roman imperial culture or resists it is often debated. Earl Richards concludes: "The debated issue might best be described in terms of 'social separation versus acculturation.'"[66] Social separation, as well will see from the voices in the book of Revelation is a potential form of resistance. I would suggest, however, that an assumption that accommodation will eliminate the possibility of suffering in an imperial context is simply an illusion. On the other hand, "separation" and other forms of resistance can serve to further accentuate a community's differences, making them subject to more suffering. Therefore, those who are on the margins must continuously negotiate their identities. Mbuvi argues for understanding the moral codes in relation to threats of acculturation. He writes that the author's concern for their "conduct (αναστροφη—1.17) has to do with their status as 'exiles' (παροικια)…The danger of assimilation is a constant threat that they have to live with occasioning focused scrutiny (2.12)."[67] What is this "danger" that is posed when one assimilates? Does assimilation simply expose the facade of a pure identity? I would

---

through [their] liberation from sin to justice.' Rather than evoking the desire to fight against injustice, suffering produces a malaise in which injustice is tolerated and accepted.

[66] Richard, "Honorable Conduct among the Gentiles," 416.

[67] Mbuvi, *Temple, Exile, and Identity in 1 Peter*, 41.

suggest that the danger is the concept of a pure identity. Assimilation, viewed as a loss, exposes how cultural exchanges flow in all directions. As such, the negotiations between the audience and the dominant cultural influences cannot be easily mapped onto such dichotomies as they occur continuously. Internal group identities negotiations ensue simultaneously. The household codes, declaration for how they are to live, elucidate the audience's internal identity negotiations. We will now turn to an examination of the household codes.

How, Then, Shall We Live?

The author rhetorically creates a people not only by naming them, but also by telling them how they are to live. The community is to "for the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution" (2:13). Slaves are to accept the authority of their masters with all deference (2:18). Wives are to "accept the authority of their husbands," as the "weaker sex" (3:1, 7) and elders are to "tend the flock of God that is in our charge" (5:1–2). Many of these instructions are detrimental and injurious. In addition to instructions for how to relate to one another, the author In her commentary, Sharyn Dowd suggests this of the author's instructions: "The recipients of 1 Peter are encouraged to walk the tightrope of being radically different from the surrounding culture because of their Christian identity but at the same time affirming the best values of that culture for the sake of acceptance and witness."[68] As Howe astutely observes, "'As Christians' (ως χπιστιανος), they can expect to suffer, but they must not bring dishonor upon the national

[68] Sharon Dowd, "1 Peter," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, eds. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 370.

household (A Nation Is a Household): 'let none if you suffer as a murder, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker.' (4.15) Their honor consists in 'bearing this [family] name' (εν τω ονοματι τουτω, 4.16), and *behaving* accordingly."[69] While acknowledging their negative impact (reception history makes this clear), it is important to also situate them within their given social context. In doing so, perhaps what these imperatives highlight most clearly is the diversity *within* the community.

Interrogating power relations within a marginalized community helps us to better understand the moral code outlined in First Peter. James C. Scott examines the stratification of power both within and outside subjugated groups in terms of public and hidden transcripts.[70] Building on the work of Michel Foucault, Scott asserts, "Power relations are ubiquitous. They are surely different at opposite ends of the continuum, but they are never absent" [71] Using the example of prisoners, Scott states:

---

[69] Howe, *Because You Bear the Name*, 269. Emphasis mine. Stephen Fagbemi surmises that "the readers' identity as the elect and how they are to live within their pluralistic society is a matter of central importance in 1 Peter. It constitutes a hermenutical key for understanding the overt ethical nature of 1 Peter...we shall stress that primary importance of the identity of the elect resides not in privileges of election or in eschatological vindication, but mainly in the newness that characterises the believer's lifestyle as a result of his spiritual encounter and rebirth." Stephen Ayodeji A. Fagbemi, *Who are the Elect in 1 Peter? A Study in Biblical Exegesis and Its Application to the Anglican Church of Nigeria* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 20.

[70] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 2, 4. Scott defines public transcripts as "the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate" (2). A hidden transcript, on the other hand, refers to "discourse that takes place 'offstage,' beyond direct observation by powerholders (4).

[71] Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 26. He continues: "The difference in power relations toward the hidden transcript segment of the continuum is that they are generated among those who are mutually subject, often as peers, to a larger system of domination."

> Power relations among subordinates are not necessarily conducted along democratic lines at all…In this domination within domination the subordinate prisoner must measure his words and conduct perhaps more carefully before dominant prisoners than he does before prison officials. Even if relations among subordinates may be characterized by symmetry and mutuality, the hidden transcript develops in this case may be experienced as no less tyrannical despite the fact that all have had a hand in shaping.[72]

Scott's analysis is instructive as it acknowledges the possibility that within an oppressed community, an author, who makes claims to apostolic authority (5:1) may be "no less tyrannical" than Roman imperial authorities. The moral code in 1 Peter should be read with this understanding.

For the New Negro, there were various ways that the trope functioned to relay or transmit behavioral expectations. Many of the warnings about moving North can be attributed to a perceived notion of urban centers as places of depravity. The image of the damnation train stopping in Northern cities serves as an example. The passengers on the train are described as "drunkards, robbers, street singers, and gamblers."[73] The implication was clear; anyone engaging in these behaviors could anticipate hell as their eternal home. While Southern pastors were concerned about losing their parishioners, respectable middle class blacks that lived in the North and West were, at the same time, were leery of the uneducated southern blacks moving into their cities and neighborhoods. Letters, essays, and sermons were used to convey messages of "proper" or "appropriate" behavior by either creating fear and/or regulating behavior.

---

[72] Ibid.

[73] See Appendix A.1.

Many sanctified churches exhorted their members to live holy lives. Holiness was construed in various ways and for women in particular it was as much an outward expression as it was a silent fortitude. In her book, *Women in the Church of God in Christ*, (COGIC) Anthea Butler addresses cleansing as a part of consecration for these women. She writes: "Cleansing also addressed the outward manifestations of worldliness. Dress, hairstyle, and bodily discipline became important in navigating the nexus between body and belief."[74] Butler goes on to explicate the expectations for women in this denomination. She states, "COGIC women's manner of dress stood out in stark contrast to styles popular among most African American women. Mother Robinson's call to 'dress as becometh holiness' became important to COGIC women in the migratory period. They were expected to wear plain, modest clothing…pants were off-limits to women and hats were expected to be plain, with no ribbons, bows, or feathers to adorn them."[75] The meaning for this manner of dressings was multivalent. While it signified belief it at the same time served as a connection to the women's Southern roots. For the COGIC, an annual convocation was held in Memphis Tennessee. Butler explains, "The convocation was also a time to remember what had been left behind, including Jim Crow, segregated railway cars, and meager housing. The poor treatment of African American women on public transportation necessitated their careful comportment and modeling of holiness through dress and demeanor, thus the annual convocation reinforced the Southern Holiness and Pentecostal practices that made COGIC members stand out in

---

[74] Anthea D. Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 69.

[75] Ibid.

urban setting."[76] Modest apparel may have marked the women as different in the North, but in the South it also served as form of protection. Butler reminds, "For many COGIC members, the Great Migration was not a one-directional move away from the South but a process of shifting back and forth from the North and West to Memphis each year."[77] I would suggest that this oscillation is present in all diasporic identities, whether one physically "returns" or not. As an attempt to transcend dichotomies, diasporic identities complicate any definitive notions of identity. What appears to be unjust regulations of women's bodies can equally be read as a woman's prerogative to protect herself in a manner of her own choosing. Like the audience of 1 Peter, while these women were distinctive in a particular (urban) setting they seemed to assimilate in another context.

The New Negro identity demonstrates how aggregating diversity can highlight and perhaps even facilitate inequality. The struggle for gender equality is at times obscured by efforts to gain racial equality. For example, the Women's Department of COGIC while independent and influential ultimately was still under the watchful eye of male leadership. Just as the New Negro is an elite construction of blackness, the *Haustafeln* and the moral code in First Peter elucidate a similarly hierarchical construction of New (Christian) Jewishness. That is, within these communities there are women and men, free people and slaves, leaders and subordinates. The *Haustafeln* represent one leader's attempt to manage diversity within communities, while

---

[76] Ibid, 71. Butler's opening question concerning the Women's Department of the Church of God in Christ, "Could they use womanhood to become empowered to wield power through a traditional office in subversive yet spiritual ways," can be applied to the issue of regulating women's appearances. This example illustrates that codes of ethic can have multiple meanings for different people.

[77] Ibid.

maintaining peace with those outside the community, a delicate balance to be sure. People who live on the margins are constantly negotiating their identity, and internal debates within the community are omnipresent—lurching under the surface of a unifying identity marker.

Therefore, First Peter's ethical imperatives can be understood as an authoritative male perspective on how to live in first-century Asia Minor. Witherington suggests, "One could even say that the social function of this discourse is to encourage the sense of alienation from the macroculture and thereby aid the integration with the microculture of early Christianity."[78] Yet the code of ethics exhorted seems to reflect the macroculture. Is it possible that some in the community rejected these instructions? Coming from a leader who was purportedly in Rome, at the center of power, the author writes from a place of authority to his audience of exiles and aliens; it is likely that some of the communities rejected his suggestions while others may have found them acceptable.[79] Clarice Martin's womanist interpretation of the *Haustafeln* addresses the "hermeneutical paradoxes, issues, and tensions in the slave-woman regulation."[80] She concludes: "If it is true that the regulations in the *Haustafeln* are provisional; if it is true that they are 'wineskins' and not 'wine,' if it is true that the codes should not be 'absolutized,' 'universalized,' or

---

[78] Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 25.

[79] The author's reminder that he is "as an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed" (5:1) is also an assertion of his authority.

[80] Clarice J. Martin, "The *Haustafeln* (Household Codes) in African American Biblical Interpretation: 'Free Slaves' and 'Subordinate Women' in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1991), 228.

'eternalized' either with regard to slaves or women, the African American believing communities need to assume a new and more profoundly integrative praxis that moves women 'from the margins' of the church and ecclesial structures 'to the center.'" Martin's suggested move may be occurring in places such as the Women's Department in COGIC in subversive, yet transformative ways. As Larry George, in his commentary on 1 Peter, reminds: "This epistle provides themes and motifs that could offer signifying elements to be employed for the liberation of the marginalized."[81] History has demonstration that these same themes and motifs can be utilized to oppress an already marginalized group. Resistance is multivalent and just as external resistance occurred, internal resistance likely did as well. It is this internal communal identity negotiation that I have attempted to elucidate. These negotiations are example of a few of many voices. Similar identity challenges, with different articulations can be found in other texts. With that, we will turn to the book of Revelation.

(An)Other First Century Voice

The book of Revelation was likely written in the late first century, around 95 CE.[82] It is addressed from John to seven churches in Asia (Rev. 1:4) covering the same

---

[81] George, "1 Peter," 477.

[82] The dating of Revelation is debated and falls largely into two groups: Neronian or Domitianic dating. Following scholarly consensus, I suggest a Domitianic dating of Revelation, based especially on the description of the beast in chapters 13 and 17 and the use of the word "Babylon" for Rome. For a detailed discussion of this debate see: David E Aune, *Revelation 1-5* WBC 52a (Dallas: Word Books, 1997), lvi-lxx; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 54-83; Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 135-51;

general geographical area as is mentioned in 1 Peter. The context in which both texts are written have traditionally been assumed to be during times of intense, systematic imperial persecution[83] however, as we have assessed with 1 Peter, the context of suffering does not necessarily require violent persecution, it could result from an oppressed people's ongoing dissatisfaction and sense of alienation.[84]

Scholars propose that the occasion for Revelation was likely a power struggle between John and other teachers. John is intent on convincing his audience that while his rival teachers were of Satan, God was on his side.[85] In the letters in chapters 2-3 John calls rival teachers "Jezebel," (2:20) "Balaam," (2:14) and the hated Nicolaitans (2:6, 2:15). Possibly the "synagogue of Satan" (2:9, 3:9), that is, "those who say they are Jews and are not" (2:9; 3:9 adds, "but are lying") is yet another group of competing teachers. This struggle for power concerns the leadership of seemingly disparate groups that are yet connected. It is an internal struggle. This struggle is not to be overshadowed by John's critique of the imperial cult. This power struggle is related to the audience's relationship to the Roman Empire. It reveals differences within these communities of Jesus followers.

George H. van Kooten, "The Year of the Four Emperors and the Revelation of John: The 'Pro-Neronian' Emperors Otho and Vitellius, and the Images and Colossus of Nero in Rome," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 30 (2007): 207-8; and John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976), pp. 221-53.

[83] Robinson, 231. Here he writes, "One thing of which we may be certain is that the Apocalypse, unless the product of a perfervid and psychotic imagination, was written out of an intense experience of the Christian suffering at the hands of the imperial authorities…That violent persecution has already taken place and cries aloud for vengeance is an inescapable inference from [certain] texts."

[84] Friesen, 145.

A major issue of contestation that demonstrates differences among the teachers is the eating of sacrificed meat (ειδωλυθυτα). What appears to be a simple dietary concern, in fact had significant political, social, and economic ramifications. John demands his audience to abstain from this eating sacrificed meat. Choosing to follow John's teachings would mean the audience disengaging from "professional and civic life."[86] Friesen argues, "John's critique was not aimed at particular cults or institutions; it was directed at an imperial way of life."[87] As such, if his audience heeds John's call to "withdraw and separate" as true faithfulness to God, such a response would have material implications for them.[88]

The religious cults of Asia "provided a sense of community" and were important for political and social connections, and were crucial to the local economy.[89] Thompson states, "In that economically and politically stable province – especially in the cities diverse in ethnicity, wealth, and religion – Christianity flourished."[90]Although John appropriately focuses the audience's attention on religious, cultural, economic, and political aspects of the empire, his scathing critique could have been met with a degree of

---

[86] Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 123.

[87] Friesen, 151.

[88] Ibid., 140.

[89] Wes Howard-Brook, and Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999, 102, 109.

[90] Leonard L. Thompson, "Ordinary Lives: John and His First Readers", in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students*. David L. Barr, ed. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 39.

resistance from his audience. Sections of the text like "no one can buy or sell who does not have the mark…of the beast" (13:17) and the beast "was given authority over every tribe and people and language and nation" (13:7) and the list of luxury goods in 18:11-13 are indicative of John's concern with the audience's political, economic, and social engagement with imperial ideology. As a counter point to the empire's "idolatrous, solar and universal ideology,"[91] John provides an alternative way of living for these communities. In Revelation 21 he presents his vision of a new heaven, a new earth, and a new Jerusalem. This inheritance is available to "those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children" (Rev 21:4). For a people who are experiencing alienation, John attempts to influence behaviors with the promise of another way of belonging, of peoplehood in a world that is to come.

The audience's response to John's teaching cannot be known with certainty. However, engaging in dialogical imagination with the addressees of 1 Peter, one can envisage Revelation's audience responses. Perhaps they could have had a favorable view of the empire (as 1 Peter 2:13-17 suggests), or they may, in fact, view it with ambivalence. John's anathematizing of his enemies may have been a result of his own struggle for powers. Those who disagreed with John's teaching could have chosen to follow a rival teacher. What comes into view is a diverse and contested Jewish identity that is being negotiated on different terms by different leaders.

---

[91] Van Kooten, 224.

Conclusion

Reading First Peter through the lens of the New Negro invites the diverse communities into a dialogue that presents only one side of the story. The author establishes an ethnic people through kinship language and birthing imagery. He calls them by various names, a royal priesthood, a chosen generation and God's own people, but those outside their community also slander them when they are called *Christianos*. The author implores the audience to accept this shame as honor and their current sufferings as a temporary, though seemingly necessary means to a promised inheritance in Christ. Yet, their voice may reveal the problematic mimetic construction that can be derived from "sharing Christ's suffering" (4:13) and debunk a positivist view of suffering. Listening to their voices, we may hear challenges to claims of authority, particularly those that dictate their behavior and endanger their freedom and equality. The various forms of resistance are made clear (Revelation is another example). It is equally possible that the audience accepts their circumstances and the author's teaching. It is most likely that both were occurring concomitantly. The struggle for the communities are not only external, they are internal, as well. Joel Green surmises the communities' circumstances thusly: "For 1 Peter, Christian communities must struggle with how to maintain a peculiar identity as God's people in the midst of contrary cultural forces. This is accomplished by identifying with Christ, both in his suffering and in the promise of restoration and justice. Through maintaining their allegiance to God the Father; theirs is a *living hope* certified by the resurrection of Jesus to life and animated by the Holy

Spirit."[92] The author does not leave the audience hopeless. The hope upon which they build their futures ignites their ability to create new lives.

In the midst of suffering, there is hope. In the development and renegotiation of identity, the significance of possibility is what concurrently binds a group together while freeing them from external pressures. Hope should not be undervalued, particularly for oppressed peoples. Judith Butler writes, "Possibility is not a luxury; it is as crucial as bread. I think we should not underestimate what the thought of the possible does for those for whom the very issue of survival is most urgent"[93] Survival is essential for those who are suffering. Suffering and hope are presented together in the text. Yet it is not simply freedom from suffering for which they long; it is also restoration. "And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself *restore*, support, strengthen and establish you" (5:10). The hope of restoration serves as a catalyst for living with—and more importantly through—suffering.

The productivity of suffering, if suffering can be construed as productive once it is transformed, is closely related to creativity. Virginia Burrus explains, "Divine creativity exercised in genuine freedom is ever attended by suffering and alienation."[94] A parallel

---

[92] Joel B. Green, *1 Peter* The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 11.

[93] Judith Butler. *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 29. Although this is Butler's response to the query (What is the use of increasing possibilities for gender?), I find this approach applicable to considerations for increasing the possibilities for various social constructions of identity (gender, religious, ethno-racial, etc.).

[94] Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 69. Here, Burrus is exploring

can be drawn here between the genuine freedom that divine creativity necessitates and the crucial role of freedom in creating a sense of wholeness. With hope, suffering people create new circumstances. Recall that the Negro Renaissance contained notions of creativity, suffering, contestation, movement, and renewal. For those struggling to (re)create themselves as born again new (Christian) Jews, the author of First Peter provides an example of how hope births the future even when there is contestation and ambivalence.

Origen's understanding of the cosmos and Scripture as "ambivalent realms." I, too, see the biblical text as an ambivalent space and specifically here in 1 Peter where issues of honor (shame) and suffering are important considerations for the author's construction of Christian identity.

CONCLUSION

CENTERS AND MARGINS:
PUTTING CHRISTIANS IN THEIR PLACE

At the heart of questions of resistance lie questions of spatiality – the politics of lived space. Steve Pile, *Geographies of Resistance*

This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we meet in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer. Marginality is the space [site] of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators. bell hooks, *Marginality as a Site of Resistance*

Hebrews and First Peter establish their audiences as displaced suffering strangers, resident aliens, and exiles – diaspora identities away from a center and separated from a home(land). These identities emerged in a hostile and at times violent Roman imperial context. These New Jewish/Christian identities are not only constructed, they are also contested. These contestations elucidate internal diversity and debate concerning how to make meaning in their political environment and reveal that any presentation of a "pure" and unified collective identity is an illusion.

The New Negro is a diasporic identity trope constructed and contested during the Great Migration in the early twentieth century. Like the emerging identity "Christian," the New Negro materialized in an inimical and yet also changing context. Exploring the formation of the New Negro identity makes clear how the rhetoric of place, gender, and race were integral to a process of inventing a way of being in the world that was at the same time resistant and assimilating. Put into dialogue with Hebrews and First Peter, the New Negro trope allows for a reading of the construction of a New (Christian) Jewish identity that develops through the creation of a past, provides instructions for maintaining

peoplehood in an oppressive environment, and proposes a utopic vision for the future. As a result, an identity that is flexible and responsive to its context emerges.

Borders and Borderlands[1]

I have attempted to read a nascent Christian identity beyond the Jew/Gentile divide. This divide is a border and borders are places of contestation. Borders demarcate and distinguish one space from another. Though borders appear to be tangible and definitive on a map, they are, in reality, arbitrary and dynamic. The work of boundary marking is almost always accompanied by violence. We have seen examples of forced (dis)placement of Jewish people in first century Alexandria (as described in Philo's treatise *In Flaccum*) and black Americans in northern ghettos in the early twentieth century. [2] Each example not only demonstrates how space is employed to affirm identity, each example also represents an identity negotiation on the borders of Jewishness/Romanness. In the example from the Great Migration, it is Negro/(northern) American identity that is contested.

---

[1] Here, I use borders and borderlands as described by Gloria Anzaldúa observes: "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition." Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* Third edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 25.

[2] The physical space of Rome is an example of a changing landscape in antiquity. In the Augustan era, "the new political order was conceived and imagined by the Romans within the *physical and symbolic setting* of the *city of Rome*" Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome: Volume 1- A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1998), 168. In this way, the definition of what it meant to be Roman expanded. In other words, as the empire expanded, it was no longer necessary to live in Rome in order to be considered Roman.

I suggest that movement, such as these migrations, facilitate identity negotiation, affecting both those who stay and those who move. In a contemporary context, the Mason-Dixon line is an example of a border that continues to influence identity formation. Since the Civil War, the Mason-Dixon line has been known as the boundary that delineates the North and the South in the United States. For slaves, this line represented the difference between freedom and captivity (a change in status). During the Great Migration, for migrants, black and white alike, this border marked the possibility of new opportunities (education, enfranchisement), a life different from the one they experienced in the rural South. The legacy of the Mason-Dixon line is most frequently associated with the Civil War; however its history is complex and also attended by violence. In his book, *Drawing the Line: How Mason and Dixon Surveyed the Most Famous Border in America*, Edwin Danson describes the impetus of the border making as a "violent boundary dispute between two seventeenth century aristocratic, colonial families."[3] Surveyors Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon may have settled a land dispute, but the boundary marker that bears their names continues to participate in the creation of distinctive identities in the United States (Northerners versus Southerners).[4]

---

[3] Edwin Danson, *Drawing the Line: How Mason and Dixon Surveyed the Most Famous Border in America* (New York: Wiley Publishing, 2001), 1. Danson begin his exploration of the history of the Mason-Dixon Line with the inscription from a monument in southwest Pennsylvania dedicated to the demarcation. It reads: "MASON-DIXON LINE made famous as line between free and slave states before War Between the States. The survey establishing Maryland-Pennsylvania boundary began in 1763; halted by Indian wars 1767; continued to southwest corner 1782; marked 1784" (1).

[4] Danson places the ground breaking work of Mason and Dixon within the context of the fields of geography and engineering. He writes: "Mason and Dixon measured the first degree of latitude and tool the first scientific gravity measurements recorded in America. The professional standards set by Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon were followed and

Borders not only demarcate national space, they also are thresholds at which people hesitate. By definition, thresholds are spaces pregnant with possibilities, a space where, I would suggest, identity is negotiated. This contemporary example of a border elucidates how within national borders distinctions are made apparent. That is, there are differences, beyond geography, between northern and southern American identity (e.g. speech patterns and food).

American identity is defined and challenged by its diversity. For black Americans, specifically, and perhaps for others, the struggle to be considered fully American persists. Writing in the early twentieth century in the context of the Great Migration, W.E.B. DuBois describes this struggle as "double-consciousness." DuBois writes, "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One feels his two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."[5] DuBois' poignant description of "two-ness" can be extrapolated into the first century cultural milieu where one's Jewishness/Romanness/Greekness and/or other identity affiliations could have also resulted in a similar "multiple-consciousness" that attempts to bring together at times complementary at time conflicting notions of being not only for an individual, but also for a people. Yet, it is imperative to recognize that these categories

---

improved upon by subsequent surveyors through the centuries" (4). However, the symbolic meaning of this invisible line overshadows these important contributions to science.

[5] W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam Classic, 1903), 197.

are not separate and unrelated. In fact, it is their very connectedness that creates a struggle.

I have posited that diasporic identity and diaspora space attempt to transcend binary constructions and hold difference in a creative tension. Diaspora space, as defined by Avtar Brah, represents the entanglement of staying put and dispersion.[6] This web of relations makes clear the "messiness" of diasporic identity that can be hidden under the tidy rubric of "Christian." Considerations of ethno-racial, gender, and socio-economic influences on identity serve to further complicate how categories of peoplehood are negotiated. In her book *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Greco-Roman World*, Judith Lieu examines how Christian identity was constructed in this complex cultural milieu. Lieu suggests that Christians engaged in the "binary pattern of thinking which the negation of the collective other serves simultaneously to assert the self."[7] Lieu indicates, "If, in these ways, 'Christians' emerge out of the existing opposition between Jew and Gentile, they could be positioned differently in relation to those other categories of opposition, barbarian and Greek."[8] In other words, if they did not identify themselves as Jew or Gentile, Christians could potentially position themselves as being something other than an "other." The "choice" of otherness is demonstrated in how early "Christians" employed the motif of the stranger and alien as one way of thinking about how to fashion themselves as an "other."

---

[6] Brah, "Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities," 614.

[7] Judith Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 271.

[8] Ibid., 292.

As we have seen, the assertion of difference is one of the ways the authors of Hebrews and First Peter construct identity. In the article "What a Difference a Difference Makes" religious historian Jonathan Z. Smith posits a theory of the other. Smith's theory brings three major aspects of otherness to the fore: the power dynamics and interrelational nature of difference, the political aspect of difference, and finally the role of language in constructing difference. Smith begins by highlighting the power dynamics inherent to the construction of the other. He writes, "Difference is seldom a comparison between entities judged to be equivalent. Difference most frequently entails a hierarchy of prestige and the concomitant political ranking of superordinate and subordinate."[9] As such, difference, for Smith, is an "ambiguous category" and "necessarily a term of interrelation."[10] Based on this observation, Smith concludes, "'Otherness' is not so much a matter of separation as it is a description of interaction."[11] Underscoring the ambivalence of otherness, it is significant that the authors of both Hebrews and 1 Peter construct their audiences as exiles and strangers. Their identity constructions are inextricably linked to a Jewishness from which they attempt to distinguish themselves. Smith concludes, "More frequently, 'difference' supplied a justificatory element for a variety of ideological postures, ranging from xenophobia to exoticism, from travel, trade and exploration to military conquest, slavery and colonialism."[12] If the authors are in

---

[9] Jonathan Z. Smith, "What a Difference a Difference Makes," in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, Others in Late Antiquity* Jacob Neusner and Ernst Frerichs, eds. (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 5.

[10] Ibid., 10.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

positions of authority over their audiences, as I have asserted, their writings present *their* "ideological postures." These positions attempt to control or regulate behavior and diminish difference.

The authors of 1 Peter and Hebrews act as cultural mediators or "middle men" between Romanness and Jewishness and among various forms of Jewishness, occupying a space of ambivalence. Bhabha reminds that "colonial mimicry is the desire for reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say that, the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*, in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference."[13] In an attempt to present their audience as distinctive from their environment, they demonstrate how they are "almost the same, but not quite" in both their Jewishness and Romanness. Their positions of authority, however, are mediated by their still nominal position within the Roman Empire. It is in these spaces of ambivalence that the discourse of displacement is situated and its slippages, excesses, and differences are made more apparent. It is not simply the relationship of a community to the outside world that results in a seemingly cohesive group identity; one must understand the negotiations that occur within the group.

As a result of interrogating intra-group power dynamics, I conclude that nascent Christian identity (the "New Christian/Jew") should be understood as representing a diverse group, both rich and poor, men and women, citizens and foreigners, urban and rural. The master narrative of Christianity maintains that the Jesus movement consisted of outsiders, those who occupied the margins of society and while that may be true, it is

[13] Ibid., 122. Emphasis original.

nonetheless, not the complete truth. There was diversity among these communities. The household codes in First Peter make this clear. The very mention of slaves, masters, wives, husbands, and women assert their presence in the community. My reading of Hebrews and First Peter has disrupted any notion of "Christians" as an out-of-place persecuted minority group translocally connected as an otherworldly community. While the authors make use of eschatological or apocalyptic images, they at the same time clearly depict the audience's current and very real suffering.

Furthermore, a distinction should be made between those in power and the elite, particularly the elite within a minority/persecuted community. Philo is an elite male in a marginal group. Does his elite status result in an accommodationist stance or does his marginal status lead to resistance? Both are viable and probable conclusions. The diversity within marginalized groups should be interrogated in order to prevent the perpetuation of unchallenged characterizations. Depictions of the elite as conduits of hegemonic ideals reinforce a master narrative that presents groups as monolithic.

I have attempted to demonstrate that the response to negotiating dis/placed identities in diaspora space in an imperial/hegemonic context can range from acceptance and acculturation to rejection and resistance or both depending on the circumstances. However, all too often, anti-imperial and conversely readings that accommodate the empire only take into consideration the author's implied relationship to the authorities. That is, it is the author's position(ality) that is considered. The author creates a discourse that is either resistant or not, but that does not necessarily reflect the position of his audience. By giving voice to an implied audience, I have attempted to decenter a focus solely on the author and raise the possibility that these nascent Christian communities did

not passively receive these messages, but actively participated in negotiating their own identities. As such, they, too, could resist or acquiesce to the author's intended message. The amplification of the many voices over the singular highlights the contradictory and often dangerous nature of diasporic identity.

Being attentive to the audience underscores the power dynamics *within* these communities. These are, at times, sites of resistance, and as Pile describes in the epigraph, they represent the "politics of lived space." Reading the biblical texts through the lens of the New Negro enables me to assert that the audiences of 1 Peter and Hebrews can be read as potentially resisting communities, that is, these communities resist their internal authorities, as well as, at times, the external ones. Reading these identities as diasporic locates them in an in-between or third space and highlights the resultant constant negotiation that must occur.

Diasporic identity is inherently "other." Never at home, but always connected to it, the identities of strangers, exiles, and foreigners should be read/interpreted responsibly. To the extent that marginality is a choice, Christians continue to employ the motifs of being pilgrims/strangers as a way of making meaning. Identifying oneself as an "other," provided nascent Christians with a way of talking about themselves. However, the caricature of the other that is often developed in such a discourse inflicts a type of violence that all too often accompanies naming/interpellation, creation of boundaries, and marking distinctions. The reality of being (an)other is dangerous and as we have seen there are material implications for such a designation. The in-between spaces (neither Jew nor Gentile, for instance) prove to be equally precarious and the suffering that accompanies marginality should not be diminished by staking claim to such an identity.

The apparent suffering that looms large in both Hebrews and First Peter amplify the dangers of the margins and make clear the desire for stability and the hope for a future that transforms suffering into justice.

The invitation that bell hooks' extends in the epigraph is not simply an invocation to identify with those on the margins. She describes the margins as a space of creativity, power, and resistance. Yet, marginality is rarely a choice, as hooks acknowledges. Like Hebrew's author's exhortation to come outside the city gates, such a movement to these margins would result in a reorientation of centers and margins and would underscore how these positions, in the end, are relative. One can only see from where they stand. Movement and specifically migration (most often as a result of threats, violence, and loss), in antiquity as well as contemporaneously, are catalysts for change. While these factors extend beyond the control of those who move the result is a negotiation of identity enables the creation of hope.

In conclusion, how one understands their place in the world affects not only how they live, but also the ways in which they envision community, justice, and peace. This is one of the contributions that I hope this project make clear – place matters. In order to realize such a vision, I think that one must be willing to move to the margins, to transgress borders, to stand on edges, decenter power, and to question authorities. The paradox of ἐκκλησία, is that the assembly, its connotation, literally means, "called out."[14]

---

[14] This term is found in both Hebrews and 1 Peter. 1 Peter 2:9 – But you are a *called out* race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own possession so that you may express the virtues of the one who *called you out* of darkness into his marvelous light.
Hebrews 12:23 - And to the *assembly* of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.

Is it possible that to participate in the assembly of Jesus believers, one is called out of oneself in order to come together in community? This is where I would place Christians.

I have reached my conclusions by centering an African American experience. Wimbush describes this centering as "a defiant intellectual and political act."[15] If this is true, this dissertation is a defiant act. It acts as "a rupture, a disruption, a disturbance or explosion"[16] in biblical interpretation suggesting that if hermeneutics is always contextual, as I posit that it is, then no one context should be privileged over another. Reading from this *place* can be just as illuminating, challenging, and beneficial as reading from (m)any others. As biblical scholars, perhaps we, too, can move from singular approaches to interpretation and enable a renegotiation of our identity and thusly continue to open up diverse and creative approaches to the biblical text.

---

[15] Wimbush, 9. Wimbush continues, "The focus upon such a people will force the study of the Bible to begin with some fundamental self-inventorying, phenomenological and sociopolitical, sociopsychological questions and issues; it will not allow the study of the Bible to begin – as is typically the case in the field – in the middle, with much taken for granted about the Bible as phenomenon, as holy book, about what is done with the book, for whom and why and to what end."

[16] Ibid.

Appendix A

Excerpts of Sermons from the Great Migration 1900-1930

A. 1. "Hell Bound Express Train" by J. M. Gates, October 1927[1]

> All aboard for the hell bound express train. It makes some stops….I can hear the damnation bell ringing. I hear it moving through the land. All persons getting on board. Drunkards getting on board. Highway robbers—they getting on board. Those who don' smoked getting on board.
> Some getting on from round Fourth Street in New Orleans. Some getting on upon Beale Street in Memphis, Tennessee. Some getting on board from Eighteenth Street, Birmingham, Alabama. Street singer, gambler is getting on board on Decatur Street, Atlanta, Georgia. The midnight rambler getting on board from Church Street in Norfolk, Virginia. Some are getting on board on an express hell bound train. She's going lightning speed through State Street in Chicago, Illinois, and down Taylor Street in Detroit, Michigan, and onto Harlem, New York, through Harris up to the burning city of hell. I can hear the damnation passengers when they cry: *Woe is me*. The hot fire of eternal damnation awaiting them in the burning city of hell. I see black smoke rushing as she is moving down the road. I can hear them when they cry: [singing] *Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy!*[2]

A. 2. "The Wounds of Jesus" C.C. Lovelace, May 3, 1929

> I heard de whistle of de damnation train
> Dat pulled out from Garden of Eden loaded wid cargo goin to hell
> Ran at break-neck speed all the way thru de law
> All de way thru de prophetic age
> All de way thru de reign of kings and judges
> Plowed her way thru de Jordan

[1] Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, eds. *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to Present* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010), 390. It is believed that the popularity of this sermon "spawned sermons by others that contained similar titles and ideas." Simmons and Thomas describe J.M. Gates as "the most prolific black sermonizer of the early 1900s." This sermon, recorded in October 1927, was "emblematic of the use of the metaphor of a train."

[2] Ibid.

And on her way to Calvary when she blew for de switch
Jesus stood out on her track like a rough-backed mountain
And she threw her cow-catcher in His side and His blood
Ditched de train…
For in dat-mor-ornin', ha!
To dat judgment convention, ha!
When de two trains of Time shall meet on de trestle
And wreck de burning axles of de unformed ether
And de mountains shall skip like lambs
When Jesus shall place one foot on de neck of de sea, ha!
One foot on dry land
When His chariot wheels shall be running hub-deep in fire
He shall take His friends thru the open bosom of a unclouded sky
And place their hands de hosanna fan
And they shall stand round and found His beatific throne
And praise His name forever.
Amen.[3]

A. 3 "Receive Ye the Holy Ghost" William Joseph Seymour, Spring 1906

The first step in seeking the baptism with the Holy Ghost is to have a clear knowledge of the new birth in our souls, which is the first work of grace and brings everlasting life to our souls…The next step for us is to have a clear knowledge, by the Holy Spirit, of the second work of grace wrought in our hearts by the power of the blood and the Holy Ghost. "For by one offering, He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified, whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us" (Hebrews 10:14,15). The Scripture also teaches, "For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one; for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Hebrews 2:11). So we have Christ crowned and enthroned in our heart, 'the tree of life.' We have the brooks and streams of salvation flowing in our souls, but praise God, we can have the rivers. For the Lord Jesus says, "He that believeth on me as the Scripture hath saith, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water. This spake He of the Spirit, for the Holy Ghost, was not yet given." But, praise our God, He is now given and being poured out upon all flesh. All races, nations and tongues are receiving the baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire, according to the prophecy of Joel.[4]

---

[3] Ibid., 400.

[4] Ibid., 376.

A. 4 "Work, Business, and Religion" Mordecai Wyatt Johnson, August 1924

> I hope to say two things that are the essence of the Gospel and the truth of religion: A man's work is the expression of his religion; the relationship between a man's spirit and his body. Again the first doctrine I want to preach to you out of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that there cannot be any separation between business and work and religion, and for this simple and perfectly commonsense reason: The same man who sits in the pew on Sunday morning and listens to the sermon is the same man who is behind the bank counter yonder, the same man who works in the ditch, the same man who organizes politics, the same man who attends to the labor union yonder. There cannot be any separation between his business and his religion because it is the same man who has both the business and the religion. My friends, it is such good news that slaves who have been living under the worst conditions in the world have discovered it, and many of them have been content to suffer in slavery by seeing the glory of hard work. There is nothing wrong about common work—the truest end of work and not the accidental end of it—because God made everyday work and business….It is of the very nature of the wicked and perverse generation not to want to hear the truth about its work and business because it is right there that the issues are…There is no conflict among work and business and religion, for the fundamental reason that God himself can dwell in a good man's work and in a good man's business. Religion is not in this world to sanctify laziness, slothfulness, the possession of nothing, and the want of nothing. Religion is not in this world for ability and genius, which are needed in the building of this world. But, religion is bounded to cry out against all of those parasites and hucksters who would take the whole fabric of work and chuck it to the dogs."[5]

A. 5 "Heaven's Christmas Tree" Charles Albert Tindley, 1913

> I see another package higher still; it is marked Peace for the Troubled Soul…The apostles all suffered great afflictions and most of them martyrdom. Oh, no, my friends, just because you have religion does not mean that you are going to heaven on flowery beds of ease, but I am happy to tell you that there is promise of sweet peace to all the children of God. What peace we have in this world is not instead of things, but in spite of things. I say to all of you who are troubled, there is coming a day of absolute and glorious peace, a peace that will take away all the gray hairs from your head, all the

[5] Ibid., 418–21.

wrinkles from your face, all the tears from your eyes, and all the pangs of sorrow from your heart. When these heavy burdens and tight straps shall have been taken off your heart and from your soul you will shout in the vigor of the new morning and with life and joy of happy childhood in the land that knows no sorrow…On this top-limbed package are the words Home for the Homeless…That dreaded monster death has carried your loved ones to the grave; your homes are broken up and you are homeless wanderers…Some of you are living with strangers whose treatment of you is according to the money you pay. Some of you have scarcely a home in this world. I want you to fix your eyes toward that top limb of the package which is near enough to the homeland of the soul to catch the light of that eternal sun, oh sing with me

My heavenly home is bright and fair;
Nor pain nor death shall enter there;
Is glittering towers the sun outshine,
that heavenly mansion shall be mine.

I rejoice with you in the prospect of that great homecoming in the sweet by and by, where no children will mourn the loss of mothers, no funeral dirges are sung, no farewell tears are shed, and nobody will ever say good-bye. I bid you in God's name and in the light of yon heavenly dome and within hearing distance of the songs of the redeemed and the hallelujahs of the ransomed, bear your crosses and endure your pain a little longer, for

Beyond the smiling and weeping
we shall be soon;
Beyond the walking and sleeping
we shall be soon…"[6]

A. 6 "Transfigured Moments" Vernon Jones 1926

It is good to be the possessor of some mountain-top experience. Not to know life on the heights, is to suffer an impoverishing incompleteness…The luminaries of humanity were familiar with elevated ground. Moses, Elijah, Mohammed and Jesus all had mountain traditions…the religious history of the Hebrew people is inseparable from the topography of their country. The mountains round about Jerusalem are tied up with the vision of God and the vision of life, which Israel gave to mankind. It is good to be present when the ordinary is transformed; when the dull plain garments of a peasant becoming shining white, and the obscure 'mountain place, apart,' comes into the gaze of centuries. It is good to see the

[6] Ibid., 473–74.

commonplace illumined and the glory of the common people revealed. On the Mount of Transfiguration, there is no representative of wealth, social rank, or official position. The place could boast in the way of population only four poor men, members of a despised race, and of the remnant of a subjected and broken nation. But, it is here, instead of Jerusalem or Rome, that the voice of God is heard. It is here, instead of Mount Moriah, where the mighty temple stands, that the cloud of glory hovers. Out there, where a carpenter and three fishermen kept vigil with the promise of a new day, God is a living Reality and life is charged with meaning and radiance Out there in a deserted place, the meek and lowly are enabled…Make tents if we must, but we will illumine the old task with a radiant new heart, and, with our tent making, make a shining new earth. If toil be confined to the same old field, keep a land of promise shining in the distance and call down angels to sing until the drab turns golden…Let us light up the commonplace and make the ordinary radiant. Let us make seamless peasant garments shine like the sun…Jesus kindled the consciousness of human brotherhood in the most self-conscious and provincial of all races. His character was so dramatically free from all class and national and racial hatreds and prejudices that no follower could long mistake him. To mistake him would have been to cease following! 'There is no difference between Jew and Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, but all are one in Christ Jesus.' 'I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation they that fear God and work righteousness are acceptable with him.' 'Out of one blood hath God created all nations to dwell upon the face of the earth.' This is the language of men who had kindled their lives at the feet of Jesus for the wise and noble adventure in human brotherhood. It is good to be present when the great, distant peaks of history join hands to point the way of life: when seers, standing in different ages come together to speak to us out of the wisdom of the ages concerning the way and the meaning of life. All this is the privilege of those who frequent the heights! Up there we can read history with our eyes instead of our prejudices…On the heights, too, there is hope for the world!…on the mountain-top, perspective is possible; above the confusion of the plains, the visitant beholds Moses in one age, Elijah in another, Jesus, Luther and Lincoln, each in another; all joining hands across the Ages and moving humanity in the direction of the 'one far off, divine event to which the whole creation moves.' 'It is good for us be to here.'[7]

[7] "The Best Sermons of 1926" See: http://www.bestsermons.net/1926/Transfigured_Moments.html (accessed January 12, 2013).

A. 7 “God Ahead for 1926” Lacy Kirk Williams 1926

In Hebrews 11:8–10, Abraham expected much…But what Abraham expected his heirs got. Of the patriarchs it is said: ‘They all died without having received the promise’…The New Year has a new number, but it shall be very much like the old. The same old sunshine shall characterize it. The same old winds shall fret, calm and frequent it; and in it the same dews shall distill; and upon it shall descend the same old rains…We shall find ourselves motivated by the same old prejudices, passions and affections. This being true, the New Year is wrongly labeled, and we are deceived and disappointed. Beside this, it is a voyage and a period of uncertainties as was last year…Social service workers talk much about the power and influence of environments, but the Bible stresses God as the most formidable environment. It deals with our past, a treacherous, tormenting environment, and announces the comforting truth: ‘God is your reward,’ gathering up the fragments, and that He has beset you from the rear. God is our environment…You talk about family backgrounds, but God is the best one. He has beset us from the rear, and for the present He says: ‘My presence will go with thee.’ ‘I will take you over.’ Behind us and with is the unseen, loving, powerful God…The meaning here is that we have an unknown way and future, but have a constant God going on ahead of us. It means that your paths for 1926, by Divine hands, are already prepared…The heart longs for love, and it can find it in homes and society. The home is more than a house and an enclosure; it is a fold, the harbor, the fortress, the sanctuary and the hall of Heaven. In it we learn the value of love and being loved. It is the reflection of Heaven on earth…It means God is between you and all future dangers, and there are many old and news ambushed in the unfolding cycles of 1926 and the future. I call attention to what it means to be thus assured. It should banish all your fears and discomforting feelings; for you are safe. Nineteen hundred and twenty-six may be your hardest year, but for you it is a prepared season and stretch of time. In it you will have pressing duties and burdens, but likewise, a sustaining grace. This should lead you to be courageous and faithful; for the outcome is assured. Right dreams come true, but in God’s way and time…So there is here discipline and training. Many of you have for years been in quest of the intangible and the unforeseen, but you have not realized your hopes; you did not last year.
Soon the Old Year of Time will pass into the numberless years of Eternity. Soon your pilgrimage between two eternities will be ended…For you who are tired, footsore and depressed; for you who are lonely ones not remembered with a gift by anyone at Christmas; for you who are homeless; for you who have been looking upward the past years through blinding tears; for you who have the bitter

memory of sweet homes dissolved by the cruel blows of death; for you who trust Him, He is fitting up your mansions. And you shall get them, you shall win, shall conquer, for 'The Lord, He it is that goeth before thee.'[8]

A. 8 "The Battle Royal: A Contention for the Faith Once Delivered to the Saints" (Jude 25) Charles Price Jones August 24, 1930

To the Bishops and Deacons, Elders and Servants, and Fathers and Mothers in Israel; to the pastors and teachers, prophets and evangelists, constituting the Holiness Convention and Convocation of the Churches of Christ; to the Saints and Faithful Brethren, blood-washed, Spirit-filled, sanctified by God the Father and called; sons and daughters of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus; heroes of the faith that takes up the cross and walk, as strength is supplied by an indwelling Savior, the way called *The Way of Holiness*; saved by grace so as to exclude boasting; living, standing, and walking by the faith of Christ who loved us and gave Himself for us; living and yet not living, since Christ liveth in us; citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven; children of the Most High God; members of the Royal Household of God; Kings and priests; princes and judges; witnesses to the Eternal One; the new creation in Christ Jesus who have tasted the power of the age to come: I greet you this day in the Name of God our Savior; in the Name of Jehovah, the God of Abram, Isaac and Jacob; in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for the church that He might sanctify it, having cleansed it with the washing of water by the Word; in the name of the One God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost (Ephesians 5: 1-33; 2 Corinthians 13:14).
Nor is it with enticing words of men's wisdom that I would speak to you; but repudiating all human eloquence and strength, I would speak in the demonstration of the Spirit and power, holy words of truth and of soberness, peace, and purity, God and salvation; words that are pregnant with grace and scintillating with the holy brilliance of heavenly wisdom; words that chime with heavenly music like the bells that jingled on the High Priest's robes; words that are redolent with odor of the Holy Anointing that was on the High Priest's head.[9]

[8] Simmons and Thomas, 476–83.

[9] Ibid, 426-7.

Appendix B

Excerpts of Letters from the Great Migration 1900-1930

B.1 Dear Editor:

As I was reading the Defender to some male members of the Race Sunday afternoon as I returned from a short service, they say the Defender is all bull and it is only some white man putting you all up to that. The Preacher of the Big Zion Church is in the pulpit preaching in the members of the Race telling them not to come North, that they cannot work for those people up there and they'd better stay here. He is telling them when the train puts you off in the North you all have got no place to put us and nothing for us to eat till we can get something, are part of them that are gone there have frozen to death for the want of fire. He said he saw it in the paper…I heard some talk of the prejudices saying that all the members of the Race should not come North. Before they would stand for it they would have blood. Well, that shows no freedom and if they are going to do that, it shows that we are still under the bonds of slavery.

I take the Defender and I think it is the only paper in this whole world. I used to take plenty of southern papers, but now give me the Defender. For my sake and for the sake of others, please put it in the paper explaining to the nuts that the train that's taking members of the race from the South is not carrying them away to starve and freeze. But I have been talking to some of them and they say just as soon as the train hits old Pensacola, they are gone. These prejudices are telling us that we better study ourselves and stay away from the north; that we will be glad enough to get back here if we can make the money to get back with. Try to give the nuts the understanding in the paper if you all can.

(Signed) From an unknown party, but a member of the Race.[10]

B. 2 Published on August 27, 1917, in the *Chicago Defender*

Dear Sirs:
Being desirous of leaving the South for the beterment of my condition generaly and seeking a Home Somewhere in Ill' Chicago or some other prosperious town I am at sea about the best place to

[10] Malaika Adero, ed. *Up South: Stories, Studies, and Letters of This Century's Black Migrations* (New York: The New Press: 1993), 52–53.

locating having a family dependent on me for support. I am informed by the Chicago Defender a very valuable paper which has for its purpose the Uplifting of my race, and of which I am a constant reader and real lover, that you were in position to show some light to one in my condition.
Seeking a Northern Home. If this is true Kindly inform me by the next mail the best thing to do Being a poor man with a family to care for, I am not coming to live on flowry beds of ease for I am a man who works and wich to make the best I can out of life I do not wish to come there hoodwinked not knowing where to go or what to do so I solicite your help in this matter and thanking you in advance for what advice you may be pleased to Give I am yours for success.
P.S. I am presently imployed in the I C RR. Mail Department at Union Station in this city.[11]

B. 3 "Read This Before You Go North"

The great mistake that some of our people are making in their moving to the North is going without any definite place to go and with no definite employment in sight. There is enough risk when there is a bona fide offer of good positions in the North of the work that is congenial and work which our people can do, but it is a little less than foolhardy because some of our people are moving North for others to go in a harem scarem way. Those who go without a definite employment are making trouble. Going into the cities of the North they have been forced to go into temporary camps, there having been no provision made for them, housing facilities being inadequate and no immediate employment to be had….There is another thing to which attention should be called, in perfect frankness. Our people who move North should not expect to find everything rosy. There will be considerable disappointment if they think they will not encounter prejudice in the North. There is less prejudice there of a kind. There are better opportunities for education, and there is better protection, but there is the more intense prejudice on the part of Labor Unions against skilled workmen who are Negroes. We give warning note to our people against this foolhardy pulling up and moving into the complications of city life without knowing definitely what awaits them.

Moreover, the city with its allurements is no place for our people who are not accustomed to city life. Many Negro boys and girls who have otherwise been innocent in the South will be victims of all sorts of schemes and pitfalls and influences for degradation in the

[11] Eric Arnesen, *Black Protest and the Great Migration: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's: 2003), 65.

cities. It is well, therefore, when our people contemplate moving North, before they start, that they get in touch with some of the pastors of the churches of whatever denominations in the city where they expect to go…[12]

B. 4 August 24, 1919, editorial

Plenty of farm and mill work, better wages than ever before paid and improved living conditions await southern negroes who have gone North and who now are said to be clamoring to return to the South, according to employers here. Southern farmers and plantation owners want the southern negroes back. If there were some method of getting in touch with them it is declared the expense of their return to Dixie would be willingly borne. This will hold especially true for the next few weeks, because there is need of negroes who know how to take care of the cotton crop. But these employers say they do not want northern-born and reared negroes. They would prefer to bring in foreign labor, they assert.[13]

B. 5 Oct 5, 1919, editorial, "Find the Southern Negro Prosperous,"

Exceptional happiness, contentment and prosperity among the negroes of Mississippi is reported by a committee of Chicago white and negro men after an investigation of conditions in that state….A written statement prepared by the committee said: "The happiness, contentment and prosperity among the colored race in Mississippi is much greater than the committee expected to find. We know no place where greater happiness and prosperity prevail among them." School facilities were found to be good, churches adequate, housing conditions being improved rapidly and race relations good, according to the report, while the industrious negro is afforded excellent opportunities to become a landowner. No police oppression, imposition or 'lawlessness' was found. Negro workers in the sawmill districts were reported happy and contented…[14]

---

[12] Ibid., 74.

[13] Ibid., 182.

[14] Ibid., 183.

B. 6 July 21, 1917 *Fort Worth Record*

The self-respecting Negro throughout the South that owns his home, his farm, his ranch, having his truck, garden growing his fruit orchid, are here and are here to stay. They are not moving, they are not thinking about going North; they have no dream in that direction. It is a mistaken idea that the good Negroes of this country who are worth anything, who are willing to work and make an honest living, will even leave their homes.

The South is our home. The southern white man is our friend. We are acquainted with him; he is acquainted with us and our interest is in the South. There never was a time that a Negro who stands for anything, should not reach the southern white man in every respect, financially and otherwise. He has made it possible here in the South for Negroes to own from fifty to ten thousand acres of land, so much so until the Negroes have accumulated wealth in Texas to establish five Negro banks, several real estate businesses, more colleges operated in the state by different Negro denominations, free orphanages and several other business interests that the Negroes themselves are very much interested in.

Any Negro in Texas, Louisiana, or Arkansas that is so ignorant and so illiterate and so of no account and so insignificant that he will allow any man from the North to come through the southern states and buy his ticket and lead him on the cars and then ship him to Pennsylvania or anywhere else in the East, is that class of Negroes that are no account when they are here, shiftless, helpless and ignorant. They should be unloaded somewhere in the North where they think there is much love for the black man, because he is black.

We must have patience, wait and trust God and work until God in His own way will unravel the great bulk of ignorance that we are so heavily burdened with. Those who want to go North without a dime, without railroad fare thinking they are so much loved, let them go.[15]

B. 7 July 3, 1917, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

A mob is passionate, a mob follows one man or a few men blindly; a mob sometimes takes changes. The East St. Louis affair, as I saw it, was a man hunt, conducted on a sporting basis, though with anything but the fair play which is the principle of sport. The East St. Louis men took no chances, except the chance from stray shots, which every spectator of their acts took. They went in small groups, there was little leadership, and there was a horribly cool deliberateness and a spirit of

[15] Adero, *Up South*, 140–41.

fun about it. 'Get a nigger,' was the slogan, and it was varied by the recurrent cry, 'Get another!' It was like nothing so much as the holiday crown with thumbs turned down, in the Roman Coliseum, except that here the shouters were their own gladiators, and their own wild beasts.[16]

B. 8 July 22, 1920, *Buffalo American*

There is another mighty exodus of the Negro from the South. The chief cause this time is not economic, although practically all who come are able to get work, but the movement is due to an epidemic of intimidation and lynching. Since the first of July there has been an astounding epidemic of murder and lynching in several sections of the South. Scattered newspapers, speak out against lynching, but it goes merrily on, and the people do not know what the next day will bring. 'There is never any justification of lynching,' says the Raleigh Observer, and 'Where the law is respected, and it should be respected everywhere, there is no reason for mob,' says the Anniston, Ala., Star. The big fact is: The Law is Not Respected. The Albany (N.Y) Press declares: 'Primarily the weakness and incapacity of local officers of the law are to blame for lynching. Thirty seconds' use of a machine gun might cost some lives, but it would enforce respect for law and for civilization, and it ought to be applied.'[17]

B. 9 July 1918 *Messenger*,[18]

The Negroes have come from the South in large numbers and they are still coming. Before the movement is stopped it is not improbable that from three to four million Negroes may come into the North, East, and West. Let them come! As they leave the chief 'land of the lynching bee and the home of the slave' they secure better industrial opportunities, education for their children and political power. From states in which they were disfranchised they go into states where they have a man's right to vote—the right to be freedmen in fact. With better industrial opportunity the Negroes secure wealth. They have something to fight about. With better educational opportunity the Negroes secure information. They then have light to see how to fight—a lamp for guidance. With the possession of the ballot the Negroes have political power—

---

[16] Arnesen, *Black Protest and the Great Migration,* 83.

[17] Ibid., 189–90.

[18] Ibid., 106. This publication was known for espousing racial equality and socialism. This editorial, written by A. Phillip Randolph, is found in vol. 2 no. 7.

> ammunition. They then have something to fight with. Men don't fight very strongly unless they have something to fight with. As the Negro migrates North and West he secures political power to help himself in his new abode and at the same time to strike a blow for his less favored brothers in wicked 'old Dixie.'[19]

B. 10 November 29, 1919, editoral "Why Southern Negroes Don't Go South[20]

> An anticipated result has followed the wholesale migration of Negroes from the South. Negro labor is seriously in demand, and the South is trying to get it back…Realization of this has prompted organized efforts to develop a replacement scheme and, through the use of persuasion, suggestion, and subtle diplomacy, to stimulate a tide of return…Accordingly an effort was made by the Chicago Urban League to ascertain the precise state of affairs as viewed by the people most concerned. This was done through questioning hundreds of Negroes living in the South as to their opinions regarding improved relations. Replies to this query are of this nature:
> I fail to see any improvement.
> There has been no change for the better.
> Why, conditions are worse than ever…
> Ain't all the judges, all the police and constables, all the juries white men as ever? Does the word of a Negro count for more than it did before the war? Don't white men insult our wives and daughters and sisters and get off at it, unless when we take the law into our own hand and punish them ourselves, and get lynched for protecting our own just as often as ever?
> How much more schooling from public funds do our children get now than they got before the war? How much more do we have to say now than we had to say before the war, about the way the taxes we pay shall be spend for schools, or for salaries, or for anything connected with administration and government?...It is ridiculous, not to say absurd, for any Negro to say he finds conditions better here. Don't you remember that Negroes answering an invitation to meet the welfare committee of white men not long ago were told as soon as they got into the meeting place that the committee was ready to hear what Negroes wanted, but that the question of the Negro's right

---

[19] Ibid., 106–07.

[20] Ibid., 184. The Urban League is a civil rights organization whose focus at this time (the early twentieth century) was primarily black employment issues. This editorial was written by T. Arnold Hill, secretary of Chicago's Urban League.

to exercise the right of voting would not be allowed to be discussed at all, and that that must be agreed to before any discussion whatever would be entertained, and the Negroes left the meeting place without a chance to demand the one main thing that they wished to enjoy?[21]

B. 11 Editor of the Chicago Defender:
I notice that the town is flooded with representatives from various parts of the South trying to persuade our people to return. They are offering good housing conditions and high salaries as an incentive. For twenty years, I taught school in the state of Mississippi and with all things equal, would return there again to leave, but my twenty years of experience taught me that even those who are supposed to enforce the law in that state had no conception of its functions and were themselves its greatest violators.
After twenty years of seeing my people lynched for an offense from spitting on the sidewalk to stealing a mule, I made up my mind that I would turn the prow of my ship towards the part of the country where the people at least made a pretense of being civilized. You may say for me through your paper, that when a man's home is sacred; when he can protect the virtue of his wife and daughter against the brutal lust of his alleged superiors; when he can sleep at night without the fear of being visited by the Ku Klux Klan because of refusal to take off his hat while passing an overseer, then I will be willing to return to Mississippi.

Signed A Subscriber[22]

B. 12 August 11, 1917, *Dallas Express*

The strangest think, the real mystery about the exodus, is that in all the southland there has not been a single meeting or promoter to start the migration…Who knows, then, what the providence of God is in this exodus. This exodus is not by any means confined to the worthless or the ignorant Negro…To tell the truth more fully, the Negroes generally throughout the South are dissatisfied with conditions and they have been for several years and there are just reasons why they should be. Every Negro newspaper and publication in this broad land, including pamphlets and books and the intelligent Negro pastor with backbone and courage are

[21] Ibid., 184–87.

[22] Ibid., 188.

constantly protesting against the injustices done the Negro. And possibly these agents have been the greatest incentives to help create and crystallize this unrest and migration.

Therefore let this country, the South in particular, reform its customs, practices and habits of race prejudice and give the Negro a square deal and conform the Christian religion in its dealings with the Negro. Let the white Christian extend to his brother black Christian a warm, fellowship handshake, good will, and justice, remembering that God has no respect to person…And no one but the inferior man will deny, in summing up the requisites which make a superior man or a superior race, that courtesy, politeness, unselfishness and sympathy cannot be left out; but they must be so regarded as the very rock bottom upon which superiority and the Christian religion are based.

Many of the Negroes who are betaking their abode to the North and the West immediately assimilate their new conditions and demean themselves as good citizens such that will reflect creditably upon the great mass of Negroes who will indefinitely remain in the South.[23]

[23] Adero, *Up South*, xviii-xix.

Bibliography

Achtemeier, Paul J. *1 Peter*, Hermeneia Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996.

Adero, Malaika, ed. *Up South: Stories, Studies, and Letters of This Century's Black Migrations*. New York, 1993.

Aitken, Ellen Bradshaw. "Portraying the Temple in Stone and Text: The Arch of Titus and the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *Sewanne Theological Review* 45:2 (Easter 2002), 135-151.

Alston, Richard. "Philo's In Flaccum: Ethnicity and Social Space in Roman Alexandria," in *Greece & Rome* 44:2 (Oct 1997), 165-175.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza, Third edition*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds. *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Arnesen, Eric. *Black Protest and the Great Migration*. Boston and New York: Beford/St. Martin's, 2003.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. London and New York: Routledge, 2007.

Asumang Annang and Bill Domeris, "Ministering in the Tabernacle: Spatiality and the Christology of Hebrews," in *Conspectus, The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* vol 1 (2006), 1-26.

Attridge, Harold. *Hebrews,* Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989.

Aune, David E. *Revelation 1-5* WBC 52a. Dallas: Word Books, 1997.

Balch, David. "Hellenization/Acculturation in 1 Peter," in *Perspectives on 1 Peter*. Charles H. Talbert, ed. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986, 79-101.

_____. "Household Codes," in *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament: Selected Forms and Genres*, edited by David E. Aune. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988, 25-50.

Bailey, Randall C., Cheryl A Kirk-Duggan, Madipoane J. Masenya and Rodney S. Sadler, "African and African Diasporan Hermeneutics: Reading the Hebrew Bible and Journey, Exile and Life Through My/Our Place" in *Africana Bible,* edited by Hugh R Page, Jr.(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 19-24.

Barnes, Kenneth C. *Journey of Hope: The Back-to-Africa Movement in Arkansas in the Late 1800s*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

Bartlett, David L. "The First Letter of Peter: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 12. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998.

Bauckham, Richard, Daniel Driver, Trevor Hardt and Nathan MacDonald, eds. *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in Its Ancient Contexts*. London and New York: T&T Clark, 2008.

Beard, Mary, John North, and Simon Price. *Religions of Rome: Vol. 1 A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Berlin, Ira. *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations*. New York: Penguin Books, 2010.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. New York and London: Routledge, 1994.

Boring, M. Eugene. "First Peter in Recent Study," *Word and World* 24 (2004): 358-367.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, trans. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.

Boyarin, Daniel. *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

_____. *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity.* Berkeley: University of California, 1994.

Brah, Avtar. "'Diaspora, Border, and Transnational Identities'," in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, eds. New York: Routledge, 2003. pp. 613-634.

Braziel, Jana Evans and Anita Mannur. "Nation, Migration, Globalization: Points of Contention in Diaspora Studies," in *Theorizing Diaspora*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003, 1-22.

Buell, Denise Kimber. "Race and Universalism in Early Christianity," in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10:4 (2002), 429-68.

_____. *Why This New Race? Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

Calhoun-Brown, Allison. "What a Fellowship: Civil Society, African American Churches, and Public Life," in *New Day Begun: African American Churches and Civic Culture in Post-Civil Rights America.* R. Drew Smith, ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 39-57.

Callahan, Allen Dwight. *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.

Campbell, Barth L. *Honor, Shame, and The Rhetoric of 1 Peter*. Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1998.

Caulley, Thomas. "The Title *Christianos* and the Roman Imperial Cult," *Restoration Quarterly* 53 no. 4 (2011): 193-206.

Chin, Moses. "A Heavenly Home for the Homeless: Aliens and Strangers in 1 Peter," *Tyndale Bulletin* 41 no 1 (May 1991), 96-112.

Claassen, Joe-Marie. *Displaced Persons: The Literature of Exile from Cicero to Boethius*. Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1999.

Cockerill, Gareth Lee. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012.

Cohen, Shaye J.D. *Beginnings of Jewishness*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Cohen, Shaye J. D. and Ernest S. Frerichs, eds. *Diasporas in Antiquity*. Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1993.

Collins, Adela Yarbro. *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984.

Cone, James. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011.

D'Angelo, Mary Rose. "Hebrews," in *Women's Bible Commentary*. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminister John Knox Press, 1998, 455-459.

Danson, Edwin. *Drawing the Line: How Mason and Dixon Surveyed the Most Famous Border in America*. New York: Wiley, 2001.

Davids, Peter H. *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentaries. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990.

DeSilva, David A. *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews.*" Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000.

_____. *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, SBLDS 152. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995.

DuBois, W.E.B. "The Talented Tenth," in *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative Negroes To-Day*. New York, 1903.

_____. *The Souls of Black Folk.* New York: Bantam Classic, 1903.

_____. "The Migration of the Negroes," in *The Crisis* (June 1917): 63-66.

Dufoix, Stéphane. *Diasporas*, William Rodarmor, trans. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Dunning, Benjamin H. *Aliens and Sojourners: Self as Other in Early Christianity.* Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 2009.

_____. "The Intersection of Alien Status and Cultic Discourse in the Epistle to the Hebrews." In *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods – New Insights.* G. Gelardini, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 213-37.

DuRocher, Kristina. *Raising Racists: The Socialization of White Children in the Jim Crow South*. Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press, 2011.

Ellingworth, Paul. *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.

Elliott, John H. *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.

_____. *1 Peter. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 2000.

_____. *Conflict, Community and Honor: 1 Peter in Socio-Scientific Perspective*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2007.

Eisenbaum, Pamela M. *The Jewish Heroes of Christian History: Hebrews 11 in Literary Context*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997.

_____. "Father and Son: The Christology of Hebrews in Patrilineal Perspective," in A Feminist Companion to the Catholic Epistles. Amy-Jill Levine and Maria Mario Roberts (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 128-146.

_____. "Locating Hebrews with the Literary Landscape." In *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods – New Insights.* G. Gelardini, ed. *(*Leiden: Brill, 2005), 213-37.

Feldmeier, Reinhard. "The 'Nation' of Strangers: Social Contempt and its Theological Interpretation in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity," in *Ethnicity and the Bible*. Mark G. Brett, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 241-70.

Fordham, Signithia. *Blacked Out: Dilemmas of Race, Identity and Success at Capital High*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Friesen, Steven J. *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Gaertner, Jan Felix, "The Discourse of Displacement in Greco-Roman Antiquity," in *Writing Exile: The Discourse of Displacement in Greco-Roman Antiquity*. Jan Felix Gaertner, ed. Leiden: Brill, 2007, 1-20.

Gates, Jr. Henry Louis. "The Troupe of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black," in *Representations* 24 (1988): 129-55.

Gates, Jr. Henry Louis and Gene Andrew Jarrett, eds. *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, African American Culture, 1892-1938.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

Gelardini, Gabriella, ed. *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods – New Insights*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005.

George, Larry. "1 Peter," in *True to Our Native Land: An African American Commentary*, Brian K. Blount, Cain Hope Felder, Clarice J. Martin and Emerson B. Powery, eds. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007, 476-87.

Giesen, James. *Boll Weevil Blues: Cotton, Myth, and Power in the American South.* Chicago: University of Chicago, 2011.

Gilbert, Kenyatta R. "A Time to Preach, A Time to Cry: An Investigation into the Nature of Prophetic Preaching in Black Churches during the Great Migration period, 1916-1940." Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2007.

Glaude, Jr. Eddie S. *Exodus! Religion, Race and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Gomes, Peter J. *Strength for the Journey: Biblical Wisdom for Daily Living*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003.

Gordon, Lewis R. *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1995.

Greer, Rowan. "Alien Citizens: A Marvelous Paradox," In *Civitas: Religious Interpretations of the City*, Peter S. Hawkins, ed. (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986), 39-56.

Gregory, James N. *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2005.

Griffith, Shelia. "The Epistle to the Hebrews in Modern Interpretation," *Review and Expositor* 102 (2005), 235-254.

Gruen, Erich S. *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Guthrie, George H. "Hebrews in its First-Century Contexts," in *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*, Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne, eds. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic Press, 2004), 414-443.

Harland, Philip A. "Pausing at the Intersection of Religion and Travel," in *Travel and Religion in Antiquity* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), 1-26.

Harris-Perry, Melissa. *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes and Black Women in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

Harrison, Alfdteen. *Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South*. Jackson and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1991.

Harvey, Paul. *Through the Storm, Through the Night: A History of African American Christianity.* Lantham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011.

Hays, Richard B. "Here We Have No Lasting City: New Coventalism," *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, Richard Bauckham, et. al. (eds.) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 151-73.

Hingley, Richard. *Globalizing Roman Culture: Unity, Diversity and Empire*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2005.

Holloway, Paul A. *Coping with Prejudice: 1 Peter in Social-Psychological Perspective*. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2009.

Hoppin, Ruth. "The Epistle to the Hebrews Is Priscilla's Letter" in *A Feminist Companion to the Catholic Epistles and Hebrews,* Amy-Jill Levine with Maria Mayo Robbins, eds. (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 147-170.

Horrell, David. "The label *Christianos*: 1 Peter 4:16 and the Formation of Christian Identity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126 no 2 (Summer 2007), 361-81.

_____. "'Race', 'Nation', 'People': Ethnic Identity-Construction in 1 Peter 2:9," *New Testament Studies* 58 (2011): 123-143.

_____. " Between Conformity and Resistance: Beyond the Balch-Elliott Debate towards a Postcolonial Reading of First Peter," in *Perspectives on 1 Peter*. Charles H. Talbert, ed. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986, 111-143. Howe, Bonnie. *Because You Bear This Name: Conceptual Metaphor and the Moral Meaning of 1 Peter*. Leiden: Brill, 2006.

Hurst, Lincoln. *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Background of Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Huskinson, Janet. "Elite Culture and the Identity of Empire" in *Experiencing Rome: Culture Identity and Power in the Roman Empire*. New York: Routledge, 2000. 95-124.

Isaacs, Marie E. *Sacred Space: An Approach to the Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1992.

Johnson, Luke Timothy. *Hebrews: A Commentary*. Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

_____. *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress), 1999.

Johnson, Paul Christopher. *Diaspora Conversion: Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2007.

Johnson Hodge, Caroline. *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul.* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Jones, Darryl L. "The Sermon as 'Art' of Resistance: A Comparative Analysis of the Rhetorics of the African American Slave Preacher and the Preacher to the Hebrews," *Semeia* 79 (1997), 11-26.

Käsemann, Ernst. *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews*. Roy A. Harrisville and Irving L. Sandberg, trans. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984.

Kerkeslager, "The Absence of Dionysios, Lampo, and Isidoros from the Violence in Alexandria in 38 CE," in *The Studia Philonica Annual* XVII (2005) 49-94.

Kim, Lloyd. *Polemic in the Book of Hebrews: Anti-Judaism, Anti-Semitism, Supersessionism?*" PTMS (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick), 2006.

Koester, Craig R. *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Koester, Helmut. 'Outside the Camp': Hebrews 13:9-14," *Harvard Theological Review* 55 no 4 (October 1962), 299-315.

Krentz, Edgar. "Creating a Past: 1 Peter and Christian Identity." in *Biblical Research* 53 (2008), 41-57.

Laansma, Jon C. and Daniel J. Treir, eds. *Christology, Hermeneutics, and Hebrews: Profiles from the History of Interpretation*. New York and London: T&T Clark, 2012.

Lange, Fabian, Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode, "The Impact of the Boll Weevil, 1892-1932, " in *The Journal of Economic History* 63 (September 2009): 685-718.

Lane, William L. *Hebrews 1-8,* Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47A. D. A. Hubbard and G. W. Barker, eds. Dallas: Word, 1991.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*, Donald Nicholson-Smith, trans. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996.

Lemann, Nicholas. *The Promised Land: The Great Migration and How it Changed America*. New York: Vintage, 1992.

Levine, Amy-Jill and Mario Mayo Robbins, eds. *A Feminist Companion to the Catholic Epistles and Hebrews*. London and New York: T&T Clark, 2004.

Levine, Amy-Jill. "Matthew," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998, 339-349.

Levine, Lee. *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998.

Lieu, Judith. *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Lindars, Barnabas *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews,* New Testament Theology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Locke, Alain, ed. *The New Negro, An Interpretation*. New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925.

Marable, Manning and Leith Mullings. *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal: An African American Anthology*, 2nd ed. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009.

Martin, Clarice J. "The Haustafeln (Household Codes) in African American Biblical Interpretation: 'Free Slaves' and 'Subordinate Wives' in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1991, 206-231.

Martin, Troy. "The Rehabilitation of a Rhetorical Step-Child: First Peter and Classical Rhetorical Criticism," in *Reading 1 Peter with New Eyes: Methodological Reassessments of the Letter of First Peter*, Robert L. Webb and Betsy Bauman-Martin, eds. London: T&T Clark, 2007, 41-71.

Mason, Eric Farrel. "The Epistle (not necessarily) to the 'Hebrews': a Call to Renunciation of Judaism or Encouragement to Christian Commitment?" *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 37 no 1 (Spring 2010), 7-20.

Massey, James Earl. "Hebrews," in *True to Our Native Land: An African American Commentary*, Brian K. Blount, Cain Hope Felder, Clarice J. Martin and Emerson B. Powery, eds. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007, 444-60.

Mbuvi, Andrew M. *Temple, Exile, and Identity in 1 Peter*. London and New York: T&T Clark, 2007.

McKittrick, Katherine and Clyde Woods, eds. *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007.

Moatti, Claudia "Translation, Migration and Communication in the Roman Empire: Three Aspects of Movement in History," in *Classical Antiquity* 52 no 1 (April 2006), 109-140.

Modrzejewski, Joseph Meleze. "How to be a Jew in Hellenistic Egypt?" in *Diasporas in Antiquity,* Shaye J.D. Cohen and Ernest S. Frerichs, eds. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993, 65-92.

Motyer, Stephen. "'Not apart from us' (Hebrews 11:40): Physical Community in the Letter to the Hebrews" in *Evangelical Quarterly* 77 no 3 (July 2005), 235-47.

Muir, Steve. "The Anti-Imperial Rhetoric of Hebrews 1.3: Χαρακτηρ as a 'Double-Edged Sword'" in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in its Ancient Contexts*. Richard Bauckham, Daniel Driver, Trevor Hard and Nathan MacDonald, eds. (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 170-186.

Niehoff, Maren. *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*. Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2001.

Noy, David. *Foreigners at Rome: Citizens and Strangers*. London: Duckworth, 2000.

Neusner, Jacob. "Exile and Return as the History of Judaism," in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish and Christian Conceptions* Leiden: Brill, 1997.

Okpewho, Isidore, Carole Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazuri, eds. *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999.

Painter, Nell Irvin. *Creating Black Americans: African American History and Its Meanings, 1619 to the Present*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Patterson, Christine. "The Land is Mine: Place and Dislocation in the Letter to the Hebrews," *Sino-Christian Studies* no 4 (December 2007), 69-93.

Pearce, Sarah. *The Land of the Body: Studies in Philo's Representation of Egypt*. Tubingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2007.

Perkins, Judith. *Roman Identities in the Early Christian Era*. London and New York: Routledge, 2009.

Pickens, William. "The New Negro," in *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, African American Culture, 1892–1938.* Henry Lewis Gates, Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett, eds. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007, 79-84.

Portalatín, Antonio. *Temporal Oppositions as Hermeneutical Categories in the Epistle to the Hebrews.* New York: Lang, 2006.

Pui-lan, Kwok. *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

Punt, Jeremy H. "The Letter of First Peter," in *A Postcolonial Commentary of the New Testament Writings*, edited by Fernando Segovia and R.S. Sugirtharajah. London and New York: T&T Clark, 2007, 338-68.

_____. "Hebrews, Thought-Patterns, and Context: Aspects of the Background of Hebrews," *Neotestamentica* 31 no 1 (1997): 199-58.

Raboteau, Albert J. *A Fire in the Bones*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.

Richard, Earl J. "Honorable Conduct among the Gentiles: A Study of the Social Thought of 1 Peter" in *Word and World* 24 no 4 (Fall 2004), 412-20.

Rossbach, Stefan. “The impact of 'exile' on thought: Plotinus, Derrida and Gnosticism,” *History of the Human Sciences*. Vol. 20, No. 4 (2007): 27-52.

Rutkoff, Peter M. and William B. Scott. *Fly Away: The Great African American Cultural Migrations.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

_____. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Saldarini, Antonio J. “The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish-Christian Conflict,” in *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross- Disciplinary Approaches*. David Balch, ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991, 38-61.

_____. “Breaking Away: Three New Testament Pictures of Christianity’s Separation from the Jewish Community,” in Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs, “*To See Ourselves as Others See Us.” Christians, Jews, “Others” in Late Antiquity*. Chico: Scholars, 1985, 108-114.

Schenck, Kenneth. *Understanding the Book of Hebrews: The Story Behind the Sermon*. Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox, 2003.

Scholer, John. *Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews.* Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1991.

Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

_____. “The Letter of First Peter,” in *A Postcolonial Commentary of the New Testament Writings*, edited by Fernando Segovia and R.S. Sugirtharajah (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 380-403.

Schwartz, Seth. *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200BCE to 640CE*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

Scott, James M., ed. *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish and Christian Conceptions*. Supplements to the *Journal for the Study of Judaism*. 56. Leiden: Brill, 1997.

Segovia, Fernando F., and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds. *Reading from this Place, volume 1: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.

Sernett, Milton C. *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and The Great Migration.* Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.

_____. "Re-Readings: The Great Migration and the Bible," in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, Vincent Wimbush, ed. New York: Continuum, 2000.

Sheldrake, Philip. *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity*. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

Simmons, Martha and Frank A. Thomas, eds. *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to Present.* New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2010.

Smallwood, E. Mary. *Philonis Alexandrini Legation ad Gaium*. Leiden: Brill, 1970.

Smith, Jonathan Z. *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007.

Soja, Edward J. "Thirdspace: Expanding the Scope of the Geographical Imagination," in *Human Geography Today*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1999, 260-278.

Spivak, Gayathri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *The Postcolonial Studies Reader,* Bill Ashcroft and Gareth Griffiths, eds. New York: Routledge, 1995. pp. 24-28.

_____. "Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World," in *Class Issues: Pedagogy, Cultural Studies, and the Public Sphere*, Amitava Kumar, ed. New York: New York University Press, 1997.

St. Clair, Raquel A. *Call and Consequences, A Womanist Reading of Mark*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

Thiessen, Matthew. "Hebrews 12.5-13: The Wilderness Period, and Israel's Discipline" in *New Testament Studies* 55 no 3 (July 2009), 366-379.

_____. "Hebrews and the End of Exodus," in *Novum Testamentum* 49 (2007): 353-369.

Tolnay, Stewart E. and E.M. Beck. *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992.

Trotter, Jr. Andrew H. *Interpreting the Epistle to the Hebrews* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1997.

Trotter, Jr. Joe William. *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991.

_____. "The Great Migration" in *Organization of American Historians (OAH) Magazine of History* 17:1 (October 2002), 31-33.

Tweed, Thomas A. *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Van de Horst, Pieter. *Philo's Flaccus: The First Pogrom*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003.

Walzer, Michael. *Exodus and Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 1985.

Watts, Eric King. *Healing the Hurt: Rhetoric, Aesthetics, and Politics of the New Negro Movement*. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2012.

Webb, Robert L. and Betsy Bauman-Martin, eds. *Reading First Peter with New Eyes: Methodological Reassessments of the Letter of First Peter*. London and New York: T&T Clark, 2007.

Weitzman, Steven. *Surviving Sacrilege: Cultural Persistence in Jewish Antiquity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.

White, Deborah Gray. *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999.

Wilkerson, Isabel. *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*. New York: Vintage, 2010.

Witham, Larry. *A City Upon a Hill: How Sermons Changed the Course of American History*. New York: HarperCollins, 2007.

Witherington, III. Ben. *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2007.

_____. *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians Vol. II: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1-2 Peters*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007.

Wolfe, Gregory. "Polis-Religion and its Alternatives in Roman Provinces," in *Roman Religion*, Clifford Ando, ed. Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2003, 49-54.