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The Abeng Submission Guidelines

Article and essay submissions may address any pertinent problem, topic, practices or phenomena in any historical period, including the contemporary situation. They may focus on any social-cultural complex or domain, including, but also going beyond, "religion." Any disciplinary or field or transdisciplinary discourse may characterize a submission, as long as it reflects critical engagement of the framing ISS agenda. Please acquaint yourself with our ongoing research agendas prior to submission.

Articles

Word count: 5,000 (approximately)
Abstract: 150 words

Review Essays / Comments / In the News

Word count: 1,000 to 2,000 (approximately)
Abstract: 50-75 words

File Format: Microsoft Word (Times New Roman, 12 point, Left Justified, Double-spaced)
Citations Format: Endnotes
Citations Style: Chicago Manual of Style (latest edition)

Materials must not have been submitted elsewhere.

For all other types of submissions (alternate media formats including audio and video, interviews, etc) please contact the editor.

Send submissions and inquiries to:
C. Travis Webb – editor@signifyingscriptures.org

Editorial Mailing Address:
Institute for Signifying Scriptures
P.O. Box 2091
Decatur GA 30031

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Marriott Courtyard Blackstone, Downtown Fort Worth, TX.
Site of the Third Annual Meeting.

"THEY'RE RUINING THE GAME": (MIS)READERS OF THE NATION-STATE

DIRECTOR'S ADDRESS 2018

INSTITUTE FOR SIGNIFYING SCRIPTURES THIRD ANNUAL MEETING

FEBRUARY 22, 2018

FORT WORTH, TX

Vincent L. Wimbush

Americans have made themselves notorious by the shrillness and the brutality with which they have insisted on this idea [of white supremacy]…. that white men are the creators of civilization…and are therefore civilization's guardians and defenders. Thus it was impossible for [them] to accept the black [folks] as [being like] themselves, for to do so was to jeopardize their status…. But not so to accept [them] was to deny [their] human reality…human weight and complexity, and the strain of denying the overwhelmingly undeniable forced Americans into rationalizations so fantastic they approached the pathological.

— James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*

Wouldn't you love to see one of those NFL owners—
when somebody disrespects our flag—say,
"Get that son of a bitch
off the field right now;
he's fired, fired…, that's a total disrespect of our heritage…
total disrespect for everything we stand for…"
NFL ratings are down massively…[because]
Today if you hit too hard…
(They say) "15 yards…Throw him out!"…

(I say) they're ruining the game…

But what's hurting the game more than that…when

You see those people taking the knee when they're playing

Our great national anthem…

—Donald Trump, Rally, Huntsville AL, September 22, 2017[1]

Often noted about Donald Trump's speech is its registration and promotion of confusion, in that sense of lack of clarity in terms of choice of words and structure of logic. There is always plenty enough evidence of his confusion in this popular sense of the term. But I draw attention here to the registration of con-fusion in that original sense of the term—from the Latin confundere/confuses (ppt.)—meaning "to pour together, mingle, juxtaposition, place alongside or in relationship" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). How I wish setting up the critical analysis needed were in this case only a matter of and occasion for the typical scholarly gnashing on etymological and rhetorical-critical fine points, with little or no immediate real-world resonance. Alas: there is poignancy and no little amount of real, even palpable, concern felt in noting the intended or unintended (as in reflexive) con-fusion (in the sense of juxtapositioning) in Trump's spitfire rhetoric quoted above. In other words, an analysis of the sort I should like to invite us all to join is no laughing matter, no mere professional academic performance or game; it is a matter of discerning and coming to terms with the United States as a nation being manipulated and—given the office of the one who speaks—made, along with much of the rest of the world, anxious and fearful.[2]

So I should like to ask for your patience as I try to fathom and engage Trump's rhetorics; there is some profit and challenge for us in the effort. "Confusion" in the sense of the more popular and narrow (and mostly U.S. English) meaning having to do with the perplexing may always obtain even when "con-fusion" in the sense of the second, originary meaning, is evident. For the sake of deepening and widening our critical theorizing and analysis, including possible liberation from the thicket or mire created by Trump's rhetorics, focus is placed here on the second meaning in order to expose a rhetorical sleight-of-hand and advance an analysis that has serious discursive implications and social-political ramifications.

[1] http://www.cnn.com/2017/09/22/politics/donald-trump-alabama-nfl/index.html (last accessed October 1, 2018).

[2] Trump's confounding 2017 address to the United Nations ("Little Rocket man…") is only one powerful example of the palpable impact of his rhetorics on the rest of the world. This event was found to be almost immediately disturbing by the world, even as it represented the traditional modern world platform and format in contrast to his usual exploitation of the rather late if not post-modern mediatization and connectivity of the world in the form of tweeting.

Our theme for this year's Annual Meeting—"Interpreters"—is at the heart of this rather deadly game. Note the following: Trump makes reference both to the kneeling protest act associated with the player Colin Kaepernick—deliberately and dishonestly trying to make of the gesture (only) a charged symbol of unjustifiable and inexplicable disrespect for the flag and nation—and to football as a game of violent contact, intended to be played (only) by violent characters. There is certainly in Trump's comments—whether made or received (heard or read) separately or together, the usual confusion (-making), as in deliberately making non-sense or causing bewilderment. But there is something more—the two references in the same political red-meat rally speech in football-drenched Alabama suggest that at issue is something that may cast a bright light on or open wide windows onto our theme for this year's meeting.

Consider: what does it mean to declare, pretty much in absolute terms, in the screeching fashion of one with absolute power, that footballers—most, but not all of whom are persons of color, registering in the popular U.S. mind as big black males—are "sons of bitches" who, in turning their backs or sitting or kneeling during the playing of the national anthem and the hoisting of the flag, should be fired? The name-calling rings alarm bells; it is resonant of a long history of names/descriptors created by white dominants to secure and maintain what in the modern world has become (according to the inaccurately but now poignantly translated English title of Foucault's Les Mots et Les Choses) "the order of things."[3] In the context of Trump's rally speech we clearly have to do with the modern nationalist racial order of things. The gestures on the part of the players—gestures that are normally popularly seen as quite passive poses, gestures imitative of historically pacifist or ascetical movements: the shrinking of the body, the vocal quiet(ism), completely opposite any kind of violent assumption of territory—are ironically amazingly and pointedly and immediately among some, including Trump himself, denied legitimacy, made illicit, even defined as threatening.[4]

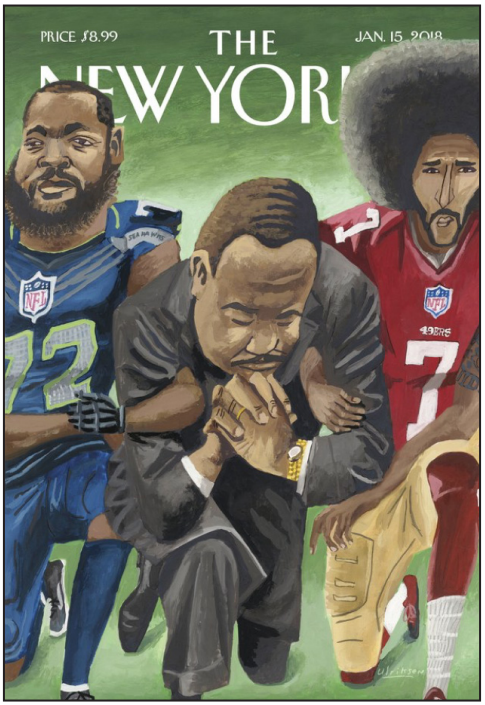
Note how the cover (Fig. 1)[5] of *New Yorker*, Jan 15, 2018, with the inclusion of M.L. King, Jr., alongside Colin Kaepernick and Michael Bennett (of the Seattle Seahawks), captures the real point—the footballers' collective message of passive

[3] See his *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1970).

[4] See for historical and cross-cultural perspectives on ascetical, world-renunciatory gestures and some of their meanings: *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, ed. V. L. Wimbush (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990); Asceticism, ed. V. L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (Oxford University Press, 1998).

[5] The cover, created by Mark Ulriksen, was entitled "The Creative Battle."

Fig. 1



resistance in their bodily poses and gestures. They were channeling those who were the non-violent (male) warriors of the civil rights movements and in fact imitating their bodily gestures. And often—when not singing and praying and marching—these historical figures of the civil rights movement practiced an *askesis* of silence. The imitative silence on the part of the protesting players—during the singing of the national anthem, a most strategic point of timing—is paradoxically heard and responded to as alarming destabilizing noise, as though it were nothing other than the shrill fear-inducing strains of urban boom boxes. (Radio Raheem *redivivus*!)

Further, with a jarring, neck-snapping rhetorical transition or bizarre turn in logic, even for him, what does it mean for Trump to proceed in the same speech to go on—in a manner that I dare say would have embarrassed even René Girard—to extol the virtues of U.S. style football as the high performance spectacle of violence, defined by "hard-hitting"? First we have the weird focus on the players' passive resistance as refusal (to engage in nationalist ritual play) as seemingly shocking displays of anti-Americanism. Then we have the turn to the defining and extolling of the game of U.S.-style football as a (good old) tradition of violent clashing. What goes on here?

Make no mistake—notwithstanding the halting, simple/simpleton's ungrammatical, inelegant speech, the president of the United States was in this situation poignantly and not at all innocently *con-fusing*, in that more originary and more layered meaning of juxtaposition-ing, throwing two seemingly unrelated things alongside each other. The two things here are the popular notions of football as violence, on the one hand, and social protest (in various forms or gestures of signification), on the other. Of course, we can discern confusion of both types of meaning at work here. But it seems most important to Trump to plant in the listeners' ears the association of playing football with on the one hand the crunching/clashing sound of hard hitting of mostly black male bodies; and on the other (rhetorical) hand, there is the reminder that there is the long-standing assumption among all those who follow the game that players are assumed and expected to be silent—and crunch other bodies. Not silent, mind you, only in the absolute sense that there is no speaking, but silent in that liquid sense of there being no meaningful articulation of any sort, no signification of anything beyond that which players as players signify and within the boundary markers on the "field" of the game of football.[6]

So players who are *not* "hitting hard" or facilitating hard hitting are of course thought and argued by Trump to be "ruining the game." But of course no player, no team has actually ever renounced hard hitting. This rhetoric is therefore rather shifty and disingenuous; simply by referencing concern about hitting hard alongside the act of taking the knee or sitting down or not gesticulating in some conventional manner assumed to be right for the public ritual, Trump was planting the idea that the one thing cancels or undermines the other: Those players who protest in any form at any time during the game—the playing of the national anthem being very convenient—are according to Trump's world of logic presumed to be not focused on hitting hard, thus, they are "ruining the game."

Now a bit about what in the speech was un/veiled about "the game": There is indeed a game being played, but in the most fundamental terms it is not being played on the football field. The game of real interest to Trump, and to those who are a part of his base, is played on the field of nationalist discourse. It involves meaning-making and meaning-control. It is the nation—represented, sometimes officially, at other times furtively, in the moves of the appointed guardians or elected officials in the domains of politics, jurisprudence, the academy, religion, the

[6] But not only football: Recently, conservative pundit Laura Ingraham's row with superstar professional basketballer Lebron James, deemed by many to be the best in the game. She admonished him to "Shut up and dribble!" This suggests a wider attitude about athletes of color that is fairly popular in U.S. culture. (A documentary series inspired by these words—and with exact title, on basketball and social history—has recently been produced.)

media, entertainment, business, and so forth—that is invested in and committed to (a certain structure of) meaning.[7] Critical histories or deep excavations of social formations inform us that most human beings for most of human history have not been invested in or committed to the establishment of meaning, but have historically tended to be oriented rather differently—when not mostly just playing or mostly just surviving.

The "vision thing," as a former U.S. president used to put it—or the quest for meaning, as elites in general might put it—is, if not a relatively recent phenomenon, certainly a more pressing and widespread concern in the modern world of nation-states. Among the latter it became important, in order to better manage polities, societies, nations. And having *scriptures*, that is, center-ing nationalist writings, myths, origin-stories, songs, declarations, etc., that serve as vectors of the nation's meaning/meaning of the nation, have been critical to nation-building and maintenance throughout the modern world. Some nation-building efforts can be deemed efficient or successful, some others less so, particularly in connection with the "vision thing," what I prefer to call and have conceptualized as scripturalization in the interest of nationalization.[8] In point of fact, all modern nations (and perhaps many if not most of its pre-modern precursors) are more or less reading formations, scriptural economies.[9] Navigation of such economies requires facility for reading, the capacity for interpreting the (particular or relevant dominant/national) reading formation or the nation as or in terms of the scriptural.

In his Alabama stump speech Trump seems to me to have re-presented, regurgitated, performed, if you will—whether badly or artfully may depend on your sensibilities if not politics, but I maintain he did so persuasively before his audience, a part of his base. He performed not over against, some criticism from progressives notwithstanding, but an accurate reflection of part of the U.S. as (nationalist) reading formation. We must take care not to be *confused* (in that second sense of the meaning of the term), that is, to mistake Trump's audience as mere oddballs, "deplorables" (so Hillary Clinton), as only the bible- and gun-clinging folks (so Obama), as only those who are outside the national reading formation. No, Trump's crowds are very much the mirror of the U.S. as nation, precisely insofar as they reassert, crudely, some of us might think, one of the pillar

[7] This was part of the discussion of the first ISS seminar (2016)—the topic on "Meaning." This in turn led us to focus the following year on the topic "Nation/State."

[8] See my *White Men's Magic: Scripturalization as Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), esp. chap 4.

[9] Michel de Certeau, *Writing of History*, tr. Tom Conley (Columbia University Press, 1988), esp. chaps. 3 and 4, with focus on France, but with a great deal of application to European modern nations more generally.

assumptions on which the nation has been built—that official interpreters/handlers of national scriptures/managers of national meaning cannot be (historically and normally, by practice and tradition; at times by laws, always in terms of natural default) con-fused with, reflected by, except by special permission or qualification, non-white flesh, that is, black bodies.

The game that is being played and is threatened with possible ruin is that game played even before the establishment of the modern nation. There has long been a game all about the politics, the management, of meaning, about the at times necessary re-assertion or obfuscation of what is real and natural and of significance (and its opposites). And management of such is accomplished only through the offices of authorized interpreters. In some cases and domains these interpreters are found to be those who are officially and superficially designated as such—with titles, degrees, and other certifications, and symbols of office. In such a situation are to be found pedigreed teachers, scholars/professors, doctors, lawyers, jurists, heads of organizations/corporations, media moguls, journalists, and so forth. In some other cases, persons may be assumed to be unofficial, extra-institutional avatars, instantiations, of the nation's meaning. There may not be—probably never has been—broadly understood clear-cut or explicit statements or rules about who can be tapped as authorized interpreters of the nation. Yet history provides plenty of evidence about who—in terms of social background and training—has been and who has not been accorded such privilege or authority. The full truth about who has been allowed to interpret has not been told; it has mostly not been said or has been denied.

What is also absolutely clear is that the reigning ideological assumptions Trump ever so haplessly but truthfully articulates is that some groups of persons have been and continue to be excluded from being considered legitimate readers or interpreters of or for the U.S. as nation. In an effort to defend the nation and one's complicity in what the U.S. as nation has wrought, some may disingenuously deny that such exclusion is now is or has ever been the case. On the other side of Obama's presidency, such denials are hollow. Among the myriad explanations that attempt to account for the rise of Trump, the mere appearance of Obama is one that cannot be denied. The b(l)acklash is clear and obvious, palpable, virulent, violent. The originary white-dominant, slave-holding nation did not retreat, was not fundamentally denaturalized or undermined, even in the aftermath of social unrests and degrees of advancements on the part of non-white, especially black peoples. Neither the post-Civil War reforms that the formerly enslaved in the 1860s

and 1870s helped usher in nor the social protest and laws that the persistently segregated of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s provoked resulted in a differently-defined, differently-oriented nation. B(l)acklashes followed with a vengeance.

Then of course there followed the issue and the moments of immigration among non-whites—legal and not legal—from the early twentieth century to our times that threatened to further roil or disrupt the spin of the myth of the white nation. In response, the white nation has emerged again most recently as defiance at fever pitch in connection with the election of Trump. History teaches that the default orientation, the canonical myth, revolves around, persists with, the white nation.

With Trump's bombastic and in many respects all too revealing rhetoric we are reminded of the complexity of the politics of authorization of readers or interpreters of the nation. The authorization does not turn strictly or exclusively or bluntly around race or ethnicity. It is a convenient truth (for many) that most of the resisting footballers are black. And we know, because he tells us so, that Trump is "the least racist person" we've ever encountered. But beyond the matter turning around Trump's particular sensibilities, it is not strictly about the racial identification of this or that player; within and far beyond Trump's circle, throughout most of the nation, persons of color are likely to be said to be welcome; what matters is less whether Omarosa or Ben Carson or any other spokesperson is black; what matters is their orientation, subjugation, the willingness to comply, to be sent to the "sunken place" and to undergo the experience of the "coagula,"[10] the phenomenon of self-emptying, into the order (of things).

So the matter of determining who can be legitimized as interpreters is not about the race of the person per se, but about *race-ing and racializations*, meaning who is authorized or made legitimate to speak. The footballers are said to be "ruining the game" because they appear to be self-possessed as black persons and they were resisting. They were black and independently signifying, signifying about something different from that relating to the game involving "hard hitting"; they were "ruining" the "game" of nation-state construction and maintenance—*pax Americana*—in arrogating to themselves the right to be independent interpreters of/about the nation, that is, apart from the acceptance of the system of ventriloquism and mimetics expected in which the national foundation or canon is assumed to be white. With Trump as the self-chosen authoritative voice in the

[10] The terms in quotation marks come from Jordan Peele's well-received and disturbing 2017 movie *Get Out* in which some black characters are made to undergo the experience of having their true inner selves vacated from their bodies and made to host "white" selves.

matter of the perceived arrogance/arrogation on the part of the black (for so they were all read) footballers to signify in regard to the epidemic of anti-black police brutality and inequality in the nation, the players were deemed out of place. Their critique was deemed insufferable because it exposed the violence of the lie of the nation—about its origins, how it was forged, who built it, how it has been maintained.

The resisting football players did indeed present themselves as interpreters of the nation. But the type of interpretive gesture or play or real work of critique coming from these (mostly) black bodies was felt by many to be clearly intolerable. The footballers and their kind have historically been deemed *mis*interpreters, *mis*readers. Some will recall here the title of the volume that was the culmination of the ISS multiple-year collaborative research project on the scriptural practices of U.S. communities of color, entitled *MisReading America: Scriptures and Difference*.[11] Limited as it was in scope, the project—originally conceptualized by me around the problematic of modern scriptural fundamentalism, with these communities providing disturbing analytical windows—could not possibly have been considered definitive; nonetheless, it demonstrated the potential of and need for more ethnographic and ethnological research and critical analysis focused on these communities. And it challenged us to work on a reconceptualization of the phenomenon of scriptural fundamentalism into the politics of modern national and transnational forms of scripturalism, as well as social-cultural mimetics. As important—as I indicated in the Introduction—we were with the final title of the volume channeling literary critic Harold Bloom's too narrow and oddly apolitical concept here of misreading—the phenomenon of alternate readings of a commonly-held, taken for granted/unproblematized, "text." With such channeling we were provoking and reflecting the problematic of "influence" and the assertion of what Bloom calls a "strong" reading as difference.[12]

I see in Trump's excoriation of the footballers more to think with about these matters having to do with misinterpretation. As Barack Obama was, as president—perhaps, especially, as president—viewed by some (if internet blather as well as State of the Union eruptions are taken into account) as not quite a reliable, legitimate, or authorized interpreter/reader of the nation, as someone who does not "get" America—because according to those who constitute the cult/ure called the

[11] Ed. V. L. Wimbush (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013)

[12] See his *Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997 [1973].

"birthers" he is not originally from the U.S.—so the footballers who signified on or resignifed the flag/national anthem are seen as *mis*interpreters and as such are suspect as "Americans." This is different from the difference that Bloom conceptualizes in mostly intellectualist apolitical terms.

But our taking-the-knee, silent footballers are part of a rich tradition of black circum-Atlantic-world signifying runagates, maroons. They are those who in the context of modern world violence that is slavocracy and jim-crowism resist, fight back, run away, march, sit down, and set before themselves the task of inventing with resolve, discipline, and imagination a new mix of signs, sounds, images, symbols, and gestures for the sake of constructing alternate identities and worlds in terms of what Houston Baker has characterized as psychic marronage.[13] They are the interpreters who distinguish themselves from the other two types of interpreters I have previously isolated—the enslavers, who cannot, because they do not have to, see, acknowledge, and address their own ways in the world (yet make others invisible as Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man* put it, to their "inner eyes"); and the enslaved, who having been made invisible by those of the modern Coagula cult—as filmmaker Jordan Peele imagined the workings of white dominance in *Get Out*—are cast in the "sunken place" whence they are rendered imprisoned, without capacity to hear or speak about themselves or address or even recognize (fully or consistently) their own plight. (Such persons are not always and only to be identified with the black enslaved.) As those who are made to be and remain invisible and silent, they cannot possibly be considered anything but mis-interpreters of the nation or of the world.[14]

Of course, it is very possible that the "game" that Trump referenced is another example of his shocking unwitting truth-telling, as well as his strange penchant for making accusations about others that actually reflect his own and his tribe's onus and sin. The game he plays is a scam not without serious consequences; it is obfuscation about the order of things, including how the white fantasy of supremacism and the correlative non-white, especially black, suppression, works in all domains in all parts of the nation that is the U.S. and throughout much of the modern world. It is a game ultimately about keeping up the appearance of a colossal fiction, insuring that the lies about things that matter are not addressed.

And what is found to be most unsettling is the recognition that those most readily and easily accused of being mis-interpreters of this game that is nonetheless

[13] See his *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

[14] See my SBL presidential address, "Interpreters—Enslaving/Enslaved/Runagate," in *JBL* 130, no. 1 (2011) 5-24. Also see note #9 above, in re: Peele's film.

about a real and deadly serious regime are thought in a rather twisted way actually not to be so, that is, are not deemed mis-interpreters at all, but deemed authentic, strong—with all the ramifications, fears and, as James Baldwin argues (in the epigraph above), the pathologies appertaining thereto. Perhaps, the fact that the charge that, in this case, the footballers—a stand-in of a sort for articulate voices with nonwhite bodies (male and female), they might just as well be any among those around the world who must be silent or must gesture according to script—women who have cause to bring accusations against powerful men; dalits, kaffirs, niggers, and so forth—these are those who are "ruining the game" as played on different national fields and in different social-cultural spaces. We are confronted here with nationalist and/or pan-European white supremacist ideology—with whiteness here serving as synecdoche for the dominance and violence. And Trump's fretful rally cry is nothing short of a confession of the palpable fear that the historically silent non-whites and females—whatever their station—may once again be arrogating to themselves roles as interpreters in/of the world.

What for so long has prevented such assertion or protected the silence and control is also made clear in Trump's panicky but also arrogant rally speech with which I began this essay. The game endures because of the nature of the rules, so to speak, or the order of things, for speech. Such ordering is powerful and multi-faceted, hard to recognize, even harder to grasp and engage. So whether understood as the "racial contract" that subtends the western social contract by which white societies order themselves, pointedly involving the subjugation of nonwhite peoples;[15] whether in the terms of the *translatio imperii et studii* that sums up the agenda and *modus operandi* of the founding legend of western civilization as a complex of marauding peoples (social-cultural and political Trojans) who persistently compel the colonization of others via culture translation, making the others think through European language and categories;[16] whether seen in terms of the "sexual contract," the mystification of embodied-ness along lines of gender, for sake of the interests and advantages of patriarchy;[17] or whether—as I prefer to name it—it is understood as scripturalization, that is, the regime of language and communication refracted into the media (signs, symbols, gestures, discourse, or language)—all these dynamics and situations among so many others point to types of control and violence.

[15] See Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

[16] See Richard Waswo, *Founding Legend of Western Civilization: From Virgil to Vietnam* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), passim.

[17] See for elaboration Carole Portman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).

Over time and in various controlled situations some others beyond the originary natural circle of those in control—white men in the modern world—can be taught to read and interpret the scripts of control, the "script-ures." Even black footballers may read these scriptures; but only when that reading reflects recognition, gestures, and performance, viz., appropriate translation or mimetics of the authoritative voice is it deemed proper and acceptable. To try to speak otherwise or outside this order is a serious problem and challenge. The independent interpreter (a type of Nat Turner or Sojourner Truth from one world situation or discursive space) will face charges of insanity and inanities, psychosis and pathology, with execution always a possibility. So according to Baldwin the cultural-ideological-political maroon registers the sad and pathological situation:

> … even if I could speak, no one would believe me. And they would not believe me precisely because they would know that what I said was true.[18]

The rhetorically violent eruption from Trump certainly does register in a sick—as in Baldwin's pathological—sense: How could the footballers be allowed to "speak," to be articulate, to project their views? Too much is at stake, too much at issue.

Philosopher Charles Mills, drawing on Habermas's notion of "the ideal speech situation"—which might be aptly summarized as "a sober dialogue among equals characterized by scientific detachment and institutional reason"[19]—poignantly describes the politics of interpretation in the modern white-dominated world in relationship to black subjects. The situation, he argues,

> requires our absence, since we are, literally, the men and women *who know too much, who…know where the bodies are buried* (after all, so many are our own).[20]

Yet as represented by the footballers, such people who "know too much," or know enough, are not absent or silent; they are very much present, and have spoken and continue to speak, continue to project their images, visions, and ideas, continue to misinterpret the nation and much of the world.

I turn to a summarizing of arguments here with two breath-taking examples recently unveiled at the National Portrait Gallery—part of the Smithsonian Institution and, as such, as a public memorialization institution, it is an institution of the

[18] See his *The Fire Next Time, in Baldwin: Collected Essays* (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 317.

[19] Charles Lipsitz, "Afterword: The Black Body as Proof: Black Heroism in the Transatlantic Imagination," in Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Characters of Blood: Black Heroism in the Transatlantic Imagination* (Charlottesville VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 372.

[20] Mills, *Racial Contract*, 132 (italics his)

canonical, to be sure. The examples: the "official" portraits of Barack and Michelle Obama, these two national if not now world symbols, as rendered/interpreted by Black artists known to be sensitive to "the politics of race" in their works. (Fig. 2)[21]

I have not the space here to linger and dig deeply in analysis of the sort required for in-depth transdisciplinary thinking and conversation. But it may be helpful as I draw to a close here to point to a few observations from critics—and my own summarizing ones—about the paintings:

Fig. 2

There is of course the striking fact that Black faces are inserted into what we should consider the "canon," in official portraits or portraits of officials and unveiled and placed in a museum, no less. I agree it is important to ask: Was the interest on the part of the commissioned portraitists—savvy, politically-conscious readers/interpreters both by their own admission and as reflected in their previous works, but certainly so under these circumstances—to remedy the obvious historical exclusion (of blacks from the canon) or to destabilize the (standard white) tradition?

[21] See portraits and discussion in Philip Kennicott, "The Obama Portraits are Not What You'd Expect, That's Why They're Great," *Washington Post*, February 12, 2018 https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/obamas-portraits-unveiled-for-americans-presidents-exhibition/2018/02/12/d9f3691a-1000-11e8-8ea1-c1d91fcec3fe_story.html?utm_term=.36b626795e57

Barack Obama's face—note that intensity of gaze, with the absence of the smile, how it contrasts sharply with the tradition of presidents' faces and their general bearing reflecting the expected "bland propriety," "expressionless and composed" (Kennicott), the "uninflected dignity" (Cotter).[22] Might President Obama's difference here suggest not so much the feigned (self-) or national satisfaction and accomplishment that the stances in the portraits projected but instead something approaching expectation and aspiration of if not impatience for something? Further, we note that he is depicted full-bodied and seated, not just a head, not on or near a horse, not framed as though transcendent, but leaning "tensely forward, frowning, elbows on knees, arms crossed, as if listening hard. No smiles, no Mr. Nice Guy. He's still troubleshooting, still in the game"(Cotter). His "engaged and assertive demeanor" does not project detachment, but the professorial-statesman leading the seminar (like our own?) about problems of the nation or the world, listening, probing, arguing, taking matters seriously, even as he is "embedded in…flowers" from worlds—Kenya; Hawaii; Chicago—that betray the basis or perspective from which he listens and opines and the springboard that makes him an authentic man.

Michelle Obama—what is at first so striking is that her body is not part of the long ugly racialized tradition of overexposed fetishized black female bodies. Although she does not—I wonder can any female public figure?—escape being a "couturial spectacle," I agree that she here "projects rock-solid cool." The chalk-grained face draws attention away from the usual color-fetish, color-anxiety. She seems comfortable and utterly self-possessed, natural (Cotter). She seems to be of the world we know.

I agree that both figures carried so much of the collective fantasy and hopes of a rather different United States (as a different "America") with them to Washington years ago. This hope was premature and unrealistic; only now it is clear how powerfully it "animated [the] meanest impulses of those who reject it." Yet these portraits will likely remind generations to come just how much "wish fulfillment" was embodied in the Obamas, and "how gracefully they bore that burden" (Kennicott).

Just as the body-gesturing on the part of the footballers signified, so the projection of these images of the Obamas in provoking particular sentiments through one medium signified critical and provocative and reflective interpretation. And

[22] According to Holland Cotter, New York Times, February 12, 2018—https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/12/arts/design/obama-portrait.html

within the larger context of Trump's babbling confused truth-telling about what was at issue, we have a clearer sense of the larger stakes and issues of the "game." Trump had his way of putting the matter; I like how a couple of critics summarize the situation and the stakes: In his provocatively titled book *Rage for Order* Joel Williamson, although naming the chief problem on terms that Trump could never do, nonetheless actually elaborates on our situation by eerily using the same terminology Trump uses:

> Race…is a problem of the mind and not …the body. It assumes… white people have the power to make scapegoats of black people, to manage them sufficiently to create the illusion that they want to see… The uses to which white power put black people in this fashion [are] virtually limitless. Once the *game* started, the Negro could be made the scapegoat of any number of ills, either of body or the mind…[23]

Although not specifically named as such, this "game" that has begun is understood by another critic, Lindon Barett, as positioning "blackness…as excess in relation to a more 'legitimate' and significant presence known as whiteness," and further chillingly understood in terms of "riddled intramural relations" for the sake of safeguarding the "valued form of whiteness." The latter is challenged by "equally unsettling extramural dynamics":

> In the same way that valued whiteness must struggle to occlude its internal mechanism—the originary and ongoing violences that maintain its privileged status—so too it must struggle to occlude competing formations of value sponsored by and within the 'excessive' communities designated as black.[24]

On such a fraught and dangerous field the deadly games are played.

Of course, these are simply some of my examples to think with, about human/social practices, politics, and pathologies in terms of the dynamics of ongoing modern racism/racialization in terms of the dynamics that I call scripturalizing/scripturalization. Each of you may begin elsewhere or use other examples as windows onto the field of analysis. But let us agree that our charge must be to stay focused on explaining "the game" being played on the field—who's on first, who's

[23] Quoted in Lindon Barrett, *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 31.

[24] Barrett, 56-57.

dribbling, who hits whom hard; and the state of play and of bodies—including damaged ones, haunting/haunted buried ones!—and minds—at any given time. Further, that all these matters pertaining to the game should be examined in terms of the mechanisms/orders that are scripturalizing/scripturalization. The "real" and consequential "game" has always been and is now nothing if not about the scriptural and its authorized interpreters or proclaimed or positioned mis/interpreters and the value projected onto or denied such figures. We are all implicated in this game. The worst sin is to proceed with the play as though it were natural and pacific. Here lies a compelling reason for our gathering, our conversation, our excavation work as the work of free agency and resistance.

A CONVERSATION WITH TOMMY J. CURRY

Tommy J. Curry, whose comments on race set off a furor in 2017, was in conversation with Vincent Wimbush at the closing session of the Third ISS Annual Meeting on Saturday, Feb 24, 2018. Riffing broadly on the seminar topic of "Interpreters," Curry unpacked autobiographical details and how they informed what he theorizes as "segregational logics" and the interpretations of violence palpable in the current cultural politics of the U.S. Attendees extended the conversation with Curry to explore the logics intersecting with, among others, gender issues, digital media, academia, and civic engagement.

Vincent L. Wimbush (VLW): I'm pleased that we have with us for this closing session Prof. Tommy J. Curry, who is on the faculty of Philosophy and Africana Studies at Texas A&M University. We are so pleased to have you, Prof. Curry—Tommy, if I may. We are delighted to have this time with you as we close out our Third Annual Meeting in Fort Worth. I'll come back to the theme we have been circulating in these discussions. But I thought we could begin by asking you to make a self-introduction: tell us a little about yourself, where you are from, interests, struggles, whatever you are of a mind to talk to us about and allow that to be a springboard for a few minutes of discussion about issues we've talked about. I'll come back at the end to the matter of our theme for this year: "Interpreters." Then we'll allow time for exchange with this circle of friends. So, tell us what you're wrestling with? What's going on?

Tommy J. Curry (TC): For those of you who do not know, my name is Tommy Curry. I am a professor in Philosophy and Africana Studies at Texas A&M. I come from Lake Charles, Louisiana. I am actually southern. I deliberately came back to the south as a professor. I am first generation—I am one generation removed from illiteracy. Brilliant people in my family but [they were] people who were not allowed the same benefits of education that I was [given]. I was born in 1979, so my city [including my school] was segregated in the second grade to the mid-80s. So I have very vivid memories of whites and colored-only signs. I tell people this story—nobody believes it now. There was laser printing, like there is now. There was this nasty white sticky tape that they used to put on windows. After a while, this (tape) would turn yellow. So when you removed it, you could still see the letters. There was an old world-war store and my mom used to take me there to pick up things and I remember it so vividly. I always wanted this red fire-truck because they used to make them out of iron, back then. Every time we'd go in,

there'd be an ice-cream counter at the back at the old world-war store, and it would say "no coloreds." So I grew up as a child, maybe up to about 25, before they tore it down. I have very vivid memories of that. A lot of the ways I think about the world is still framed in how I think about that. I constantly refer to my work as [theorizing against] "segregational logics."

Being first-generation [college-trained], black and male in Lake Charles, there weren't too many opportunities to see role models that were in education. I didn't see a Black professor [during] the time I was in Lake Charles. The men in my family were preachers, intelligent men who certainly set me on the right path and emphasized the importance of education. But you didn't see the same kind of representation in teachers. So my mom told me one day: "You get your education cause that's one thing white people cannot take from you." And I went all the way through as quickly as possible. So, I left from Lake Charles and [my way was] paid through college because I was a debater, won a few national championships. I was the first black person to hold a national championship. I am very proud of that; I was very young but very proud of it because that conditioned me, brought me into a world where philosophy, critical race theory, reading—these were issues I was socialized into since I was 12–13 years old. So I went to grad school and I wanted to focus on Black people. It was one of the first times in my life, moving out of the South, [that] you recognize that even in the North—where things are supposed to be freer and better – there is a [strange] complex not only among some Black people [concerning how they] think about their relationship to other Black people but also [among whites] in terms of how white people manage, reward, and incentivize Black people.

So when I got out [of grad school], I said [to myself that] I am going to start taking the world on my own terms. I started writing mostly on the work of [Derrick] Bell and the methodological problems of Africana thought in philosophy. There was such a resistance and I found it strange: philosophy is a relatively conservative discipline. Black people aren't really accepted there. Black people… are more welcome for the political postures rather than their actual interventions

into knowledge. So, hiring, prestige, public displays are measured more in terms of whether or not white philosophers can endorse the sentiment behind the work rather than the actual research about [Black people] pushing fields forward. I fell out of favor very quickly because I identified very structural things: citations, the ways in which all Africana thought seemed to end up in the same place, which is integrationism. In philosophy, there are no current conversations about the research that challenges [the argument about] whites' ability to be anti-racist—given what we know now—with [the notion of] implicit bias. Everything seemed to rest on the idea that if you speak to white people long enough, they'll give you something or they'll change their minds. I found out that's not the best way to actually empower the minds of racialized people: the [best way involves] confronting the whites, not trying to lull them to sleep. I think [this way has] changed a lot.

Over a few years, after I got tenure, I started taking on the problem of Black men. I thought that the reaction to some of the stuff I was doing on race and racism was bad. When I started defending the humanity of Black men, whole new problems emerged. These ideas that Black men could not be victims of certain kinds of violence, could not be victims of rape, could not be victims of domestic abuse, did not have a history [as victims] of rape and sexual violence—these ideas] should not be [accepted]. It was all these denials and the idea that someone could dare attack feminism for not paying attention to these previous kinds of abuses, allowed people to levy certain kinds of criticism against me: being anti-woman, misogynistic, etc., because my focus was on men. In this constellation of things, my work has primarily been about: why do black people take on/interiorize some of the complexes of white supremacy; and how does interracial/intra-racial violence become a way to perpetuate genocidal logics amongst Black people? These are the questions addressed in my research.

Last year, I was attacked by a white supremacist blogger who, I think, has only a bachelor's degree in journalism. He decided that he was going to take up a phrase that I was using. I was talking about the movie *Django (Unchained)* and I said I was really disappointed—I still stand by what I said to this very day. I was disappointed at the way we framed it as a spectacle. *Django* was [thought to be] a good movie because it was a spectacle of a Black man being able to kill white slave owners. Then, I said that I had no problem with that aspect of how we look at it. But there [are strange twists] in [our] history about the conversations of violence—revolutionary and self-defense—[and] that I was disappointed that we hadn't contextualized the idea and the celebration in *Django* of Black folk having the power to kill white

people. Look, slaves did not have that power. It wasn't just that you had the lone Black male slave picking up guns, killing all the white people, then riding away with his beloved. It was a situation where Black people died. Unlike white violence, Black violence always led to casualties. Often, it's been exercised when everyone who emphasized violence died. So I made the comment that we have grappled with the fact that throughout our history and tradition some Black people believe that in order for us to be free, some white people had to die. So he (the blogger) took just that snippet and not all the analysis that gets us there and framed it as if this was, of course, the angry Black guy saying let's go and kill white people.

VLW: And I'm sure you said it quietly, but that sparked the controversy at Texas A&M. Some know that I had discovered you through the extensive *Chronicle of Higher Education* focus on your comment on violence. Could you say a bit more about that? Update us on what's going on at your school, department, and surroundings now in terms of these kinds of issues.

TC: The department hasn't really made any specific argument related to race. It's been the general "We support academic freedom" comment and stance. I think the university, on the other hand, hasn't really considered the realities or how minority faculty and students feel. I think it's kind of a thing which will "just… run its course." But you have lots of students, lots of faculty, that now feel under attack because, I think, when you have a situation where a university throws its faculty under the bus and sides with a blog-writing white supremacist, there are no ways to control these types of things. We run a very, very serious risk of not only freezing free speech but actually demonizing it when it comes from specific groups that have been historically marginalized. It is important to note that it is not just that administrators are not defending their faculty. There's a way in which they are enabling violence because these threats are not coming just because we disagree. These threats are coming with: "We'll kill you, we'll kill your family!" So as a response to that, we had something to say. I pulled my daughter out of school 2 or 3 weeks early. So these are the types of action that you have to be prepared to do when you are attacked by the Alt-Right. The administration doesn't really see that as a negative; it's just like business as usual.

VLW: Do you have friends, colleagues, in the department, in other programs in the university, for support?

TC: Yeah. I was very happy with the support from the department. But again—it's basically an all-white department—the way [the issue] was processed was [in terms of] academic freedom. And that's not to say I don't appreciate the

support. But that is a very different level. In Africana Studies, it was immediately read as a racial attack. The question is how does a full professor who has a somewhat national reputation writing about political violence, writing about questions of armed self-defense, or even about revolutionary violence, become dismissed or distanced for doing the work they hired him and promoted him to work on. I have an important thing to note—I published all this stuff, I've published pieces on the revolution, on armed self-defense—the irony is that most of my work now looks at the militant civil rights tradition, because that has been the dominant tradition that Black people utilize and have spoken through in the United States. But the academic aspect doesn't protect you from the fanaticism of white supremacism. The idea is that any attempt by Black people, any attempt by people that are not white, to defend themselves from white violence, becomes akin to violence. I think that says something very interesting and scary about the world we are in right now. We are talking about mid-twentieth century questions of self-determination: that certain groups still don't have the right to self-determination. You can't protect yourself from very visible threats; and this comes not only in the sense of silencing speech or scholarship; this comes from the fact that if you say something that's unpopular, it will get you killed. This is what's being empowered by universities today and these conversations are accumulating around questions of race, specifically, blackness; of course, in terms of religion Islam—and immigrant status.

So part of the project of the ethno-nationalist backlash we see under Trump is a kind of a cleansing of any kind of perspective or paradigm that will challenge the idea of white supremacy. This is extremely dangerous because the problem that we have with how we talk about race and racism now amongst Black people is that we've trained generations of scholars to focus on inequality. We've constantly focused on what we are missing. What biases, what forms of knowledge have we missed that aren't allowing us to fulfill the civil rights goals? We've had tons of scholars that have taken this approach. Even when we're talking about critical race theory in education or if we're talking about contemporary theories of Afro-pessimism, these things focus on identity, discourse, these small gaps in grammar, but that's not what white people are talking about. That's not what white supremacists are talking about.

White supremacists are talking about how to build a white republic that's been poisoned by racial and ethnic diversity. The brute focus of their ideology is: how do you rebuild a white supremacist society where you have religions like Islam, ethnicities like Mexicans, and citizens like Black people. That's what their violence is being used to do. So we fundamentally misunderstood this [articulation of

racism] because the way they talked about race is not based on civil disagreements, not about civil rights. The way they are talking about race is based on a civilizational discourse: what culture, what civilization, and what land is going to define the rest of the world into the next century. This is a vastly different perspective than what we've been trained in. That's the perspective you get in the 1900s. That's what you get when people talk about the "Yellow Peril," the ""Black Peril," and the "White Peril," because they're arguing about what happens when white bodies come in contact with the worlds of racialized beings. We haven't trained people to think that way. We thought that was then. We thought the Civil Rights movement and desegregation was a turning point in how we thought about race relations. And now we come back to find out: "Oh my god, these ethnological theories we thought were merely misunderstandings of cognitive bias are actually still alive and well." This is why they want their monuments.

When you read white philosophers like Josiah Royce, the subject of one of my books, you are told how to build a white supremacist society. And here is the crazy thing: you have philosophers championing Royce because he's talking about communities, beloved communities, and memorials, and loyalty.... I read it as: this guy is giving you an architecture for a white supremacist society. He's telling you if you build a community, build monuments, so foreigners come in and worship the monuments and take on your culture. He says if you want people to be part of your community, they have to lose their culture and language. It tells you how to deal with Black people in the South alone. It's a program written in the 1900s that you see constantly reimagined and reinforced in various [symbols and discourses] that we take on. Instead of us pointing that out, we still have these conversations about identity, which is why I am so critical of a lot of the work that is coming out with the pretense of radicality or the pretense of true reflection on race and racism in America. It's a dereliction of our duty, so to speak.

It's a serious thing to investigate what are the underpinnings of white supremacy. I do say that as a cliché; we reference many terms now that they don't have any meaning. When I refer to white supremacy I am talking about all the concurrent logics that accompany the presence of white people in America that allow them to constantly position themselves not only as voices of authority but also as agents that direct certain histories, civilizations, and discourses toward their superiority. These white people were in the streets shooting at people, these white people were in the streets saying, "We're going to vote for Trump" or "We have voted for Trump," or "We want him again." These people are still agents. We can think they are ignorant but the world is moved by ignorant people. Because those ignorant

people are the first to die in wars that changed the direction of history. And instead of us understanding that, we're much too tame and civilized to ever believe that bodies and violence actually change things. We're still having conversations about how to negotiate with people who see themselves as indifferent, at best, and reformers, at worst—I'm talking about white liberals here! Violence is becoming the rule of the day. We're accepting death threats against professors. We're accepting white supremacists with AR-15s marching in the streets, and we're protecting them. We laugh at what Trump's doing in the White House but…Trump is empowering a discourse and [providing a] political platform to the KKK, Neo-Nazis, and fascists. And we have not caught up in our thinking yet. I think that's what distinguishes a lot of my work from others—the criticism is not just on the routine aspects of white supremacy or paleo-conservatism, it's also about how the intellectual projects we embrace don't hold any power because they haven't really identified the problem and motivations behind this resurgence.

VLW: It's kind of hard for us to see how you could alienate anybody (laughter).

TC: Imagine that (laughter).

VLW: Let me ask you—it's sort of a side question—I want to use it as a bridge to get to this issue of interpreters. So your institution is a well-known state institution, a well-heeled/endowed state institution. Do you think—it's sort of a minor question as a bridge—do you think the response/s, the whole situation, would be different in a different kind of school? I don't necessarily mean out of Texas but I mean in a non-state institution? Because there's something about, it's worth thinking about, how the legitimacy, the linkage to the "state" in this respect, may condition or embolden certain responses: "You work for us! You're supposed to comport yourself in this way, orient yourself on certain terms." I'm trying to get at, what may have been part of the psychologics of the parties affiliated with the state institutions.

TC: I think, to a certain extent, Texas A&M is a little different because of the conservatism there. It is a conservative university and was one of the first stomping grounds when people like Richard Spencer and other white supremacists were going to recruit and spread their message. I think that given the political parties, they're extremely comfortable with, if not constituted by, many of the Alt-Right ideologues. So that puts it in a unique position because it is supported by those who try both to discourage and strengthen the agenda and activism of antiracists and anti-white supremacists.

VLW: You have to give voice to everybody.

TC: Right. Notice how academic freedom is used in that case. Some of the work that was done—you have this group called the Texas Ags and they released [personal information that was part of special campus case problem]. It's an open record state, so they released sensitive information—and you can see various people, some administrators, some from the communities, celebrating that my claim to self-defense was the same as Richard Spencer's claim to white supremacy. This is the false parallel here: that a Black man that says Black people have a right to defend themselves from white supremacists is the same as a white supremacist. I don't know if anyone has heard the speech—you may read the transcript all over the internet if you really care for it—but what's fascinating about it all is that the whole speech is about how in similar situations today of white vigilantism, white people arming themselves, how cops come into Black neighborhoods policing and surveilling them. I simply said that the 2nd Amendment gives Black people the right to protect themselves the same way it does for any other peoples. And that was so outrageous!

In the talk, I actually said that any time Black people actually speak about defending themselves from white violence, they're accused of advocating violence. The exact same thing literally happened. It's funny, there were comments on the web to the effect that Curry is making…the point that when he talks about self-defense against violence, you're going to accuse him of advocating violence. And this is what is fascinating to me: that it puts you in a position that really highlights what is the problem of the Black academy. We can't both accept that there is repression of thought and then keep lifting the thought that's coming out as if it is the best and most exemplary Black thought. If we're not having conversations about freedom that involves political violence, either as being opposed to or reacting against that imposition, then we're not really having conversations about the history of liberation throughout the world. Every liberation movement has utilized some form of violence. That doesn't mean advocating just going out and killing everybody. But it means self-defense, guerilla warfare, tactics, boycotts…there's some imposition of force. And I think that the school ignores this Black tradition.

VLW: I was just going to say that what's pretty astounding here is that it is made clear you are not given the freedom to explore certain topics, certain issues, nor given the range of possibilities that a free-thinking person should normally and naturally have to range widely. What if Black people were to take up arms and liberate themselves in South Texas or wherever?

Here I want to pivot toward—I know colleagues are anxious to chime in on—our theme having to do with "Interpreters." That may not be the language you've been playing with, but you have nonetheless touched on it throughout your conversation with us so far. It's what struck me about the *Chronicle* article—I said, "Aha! They don't want him to play! They want him to play on a very small and limited field. He can't move out in this direction. He can't even opine about possibilities." So there's a sense in which you were being constructed as an interpreter on someone else's terms. And there's nothing new about that, although seeing it, having this be in the high academy's journal this way, happening in this way at this point in 2017, was really quite disturbing. And so we resonate with your thinking about these issues insofar as we've been taking up the issue of the interpreter, who constructs the interpreter, who shapes the interpreter, by what authority are you made an interpreter? I hope that makes sense.

TC: Actually, I'm a fan of [Zygmunt] Bauman (1925-2017). I remember his piece in *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987) where he is talking about why we can't see the new poor, because the academy is structured in such a way that the way we perceive poverty we can never imagine the people that actually possess it. But we have the limited interaction with what we take to be the negation of our situation. We're middle-class intellectuals. We are bourgeois. We utilize tools that say, "Ah, [these are] the things that we are against, that are negations, like not having access to certain services, to X, Y, and Z…" But the new poor who are at the bottom, the wretched, these people are devoid of humanity, too. They're devoid of the very possibility of recognition. Sylvia Wynter (1928—) picks up his work in this sensibility when she is talks about Black men in *No Humans Involved* (2015). So, you ask this question: What is the limitation? The thought resonates from a group of people that are fundamentally at the bottom. For Black people, especially for Black people who are suffering to speak about the possibility of political liberation through violence, [this is] so far out of the bourgeois conceptualization of knowledge production because you are threatening not only the order of knowledge—the order of knowledge that suggests we are rational, discourse is the way we assimilate knowledge, but that assimilation of knowledge leads to better behavior, because we are rational moral individuals. For someone to say: you are not rational, or if you're rational, then your reason is fundamentally corrupt, because it constantly produces racism, that your investment in the status quo is not ignorant but your substantiation of violence to keep social order, and that people who are oppressed by that social order may need to take up arms militantly in order to break it--that's what they have a problem with. They want to frame it as "white genocide" but the issue

is: when I write about violence, my argument is that violence fractures, ruptures, the ontology of whiteness, which is thought to be invulnerable to Black action.

Black agency, this is what Ida B. Wells talks about: the idea that a white life is superior to a Black life, so white lives will never risk being extinguished by Black people. They think of themselves as Gods. That's why there are these harsh punishments. A Black person kills a white person, you already know what's going to happen. [Black people killing white people]—that's something we could never allow to happen; the social order is built on that fact. And here you have a guy, well, what if Black people took up arms to protect themselves from white vigilantes, what if white life becomes contingent? These are the questions my research asks. How does that fracture the ideas of whiteness? Remember, what makes Black people, what makes immigrants, what make Muslims—or whoever they deem "terrorists"—vulnerable is that the white individual takes on the power to decide who lives or dies. Because that's what violence/political violence does. It arbitrates who should live or die based on whatever expectation or ideology the white group in question has. So if you take that power away from whites where they are also subject to other groups of people's power, then that's frightening.

So now the academy says: this conversation is off limits. I teach in a philosophy department. We teach just-war theory, we teach military ethics, histories of revolution, Hobbes…this is the basis of Hobbes' philosophical anthropology, right? He is in the middle of a war and everybody is out to kill everybody. Social contract saves you from that. We can teach all this stuff but if I teach Robert F. Williams, "Oh, no!" This is what I think Bauman gets at—the non-being, the wretchedness, of the subject trying to write about that wretchedness, is a break with the whole conceptual scheme. The issue that scares white people is not that I actually said we should kill all white people—because that's fanatic language. If that was the argument, you could just dismiss this Black guy's argument as crazy. The *Chronicle* decided to side with a Black guy, of all people, that just said: Go out and kill white people. It's not what was said. But to say that violence has a very specific use in the history of Black people's thinking about liberation, where white life could be contingent, because Black life is worth more—that's the scary part.

The scary part is that we could imagine a notion of blackness that doesn't simply seek to be equal with whiteness. And this is the problem I have with a lot of what I call comparative discourse about racism. You simultaneously say that whiteness is evil and that white people have built up systems that are based on the dehumanization of Black folk, brown folk, immigrants, and so forth. And then

you come back and say we want those same exact rights. We want that version of humanity. I want to be equal to them, those who oppress us. I work from a position where I say: blackness is possibility; that fracturing the ontology of whiteness, the definitions of the human, allows blackness to grow in ways that allow the world to change. And, sometimes, that has to start with physical violence, as well as other types of violence. Well, we don't know if revolution is the way to do that, we don't know if it's armed resistance, we don't know, right? We don't have any maps to tell us the way the world is going to play out. But the problem is that we can't think [freely and broadly about it]. That's why Bauman is pointing to the constraints of the academic language and the canon itself.

VLW: But the fear of the thinking person focused on this kind of issue would be frightening beyond the other possibilities for violence that are normally heavily scripted or programmed, according to certain contexts. There may be a breakout in this or that context, but one can't easily imagine how thought would travel, especially in regard to the idea of the violence. We don't know how far you're going to travel around these sorts of issues.

Now you said something before about—and I wonder about—the fear throughout the country. I wonder whether or not that fear is always there; and, I wonder if its pervasiveness in fact helps explain some of the pathology in our history. And then one thinks of the South, the way in which the soil itself is just drenched by the blood, in the manner of a kind of haunting. So, Texas A&M seems like a pile-on around these issues. How otherwise would it happen? Where otherwise might it happen? There are a few other places, but there's so much coming together there.

TC: You know what, when Richard Spencer went there, he was talking of the blood and bones, and the soil of Texas. That's not by accident. Again, this is why 19th century ethnology, because you see the history of Nazism, you see the history of [Joseph Arthur, Comte] de Gobineau's, (1816–1882) theory of colonization. We always talk about his [Essay on] *The Inequality of All Races* (1853–55), which is just racism. But if you read the whole book, de Gobineau is making this point: that when you colonize a land, you don't give it back to the people whom you've colonized. He argues that you must proceed to set up institutions, you set up histories, you set up the very layout of the land to represent the colonizer's force. And that's what Spencer was talking about. His point—"…We took over Texas based on racial genocide; our blood and bones are here. So we own this land!"

Now that's fascinating also because he suggests that the complexion, the pigmentation, of the people who died for it should reflect the people who live on it. That's the price paid, so…. This is old thinking that is just put in a pretty package. And I tell people this is the danger of Spencer: not that he is a racist; the danger of Spencer is that he is actually trying to evolve white supremacy into an intellectual discourse. And this is the larger point to be made: they're not stupid. They're fanatics, they're racists, but they are not stupid. Spencer understands that the discursive impact of what he is doing is going to resonate for generations in the minds of the people that he gets to buy into it. Even the white liberal or moderate will assimilate to some aspect of an ethno-nationalist agenda because it's become part of the discursive conversation in the academy in the twenty-first century. That's the power of what they're doing.

So, then, why are they attacking academic freedoms, especially in the South? Why is this fear being assimilated throughout the country? Because now it is a platform of thought. The Alt-Right is the fringe group. Now, even liberal white America is asking: "Are we losing the country?" Now the moderate says: "Should we vote this way? Maybe they have a point." You see, it's created a new boundary for the rationalization (of race) now and some of the rest of us are not responding to that. We still think this is a debate about whether we all agree that Trump's a racist. Look at the media. The argument is that everything he is doing is ridiculous, but the ridiculous is now quotidian, it's a daily thing. So now what do people say: "O, we expect this." And at the same time, we see young people protesting and you see a crackdown by administrative managers and adults on whether or not they should have the free speech…, threatening people that they would be expelled.

See, the regime is not only about policing bodies, it's also about policing thought. And this is the piece of my work that I think people are not very comfortable with. I've tried to explain to people that the history of American democracy has not been the expansion of ideas, but the expansion of racial phobias. You socialize the citizens of America, you know when you become a citizen of America when you've internalized a notion of a phobia against certain groups who are not American, or you deem as alien. And Trump has exploited the situation.

Trump's had the ability to coalesce a group of white Americans around the idea that some people just don't belong here. And what we've done is…allowed that to sneak into the academic language. We're trying to disarm it, right? There's the good will of academics trying to disarm the language but we don't have the right tools. Because the theories that we developed—the Foucauldian analysis,

the way we read [Frantz] Fanon (1925–1961), the way we read [W. E. B.] Du Bois (1868-1963)—wasn't equipped to do that. We didn't read those theories because they were actually challenging white supremacists. We read those theories because we were actually trying to [break down white supremacy and] turn multicultural integration into equality. See, that's why we read the theories of Fanon and Du Bois and the like, because they were trying to fight against white supremacy and segregationists. That's why their writings are so raw. They're not worried about whether they are going to get academic jobs because they couldn't get academic jobs. So it's a non-issue. Du Bois produced what he produced largely…outside the academy, and other parts in Black institutions in the academy. And they read them a hundred years later when they wouldn't allow him in the places that we're working in now.

So to point out the criticism or to criticize other Black scholars for not engaging in that kind of project seems silly given the history—we know we got in [the academy] because our works are not as radical. And then to have a conversation that's radical or at least, in my view, concrete and real, which is just a question of: "Gosh, maybe people who will get killed without doing anything should defend themselves," sparks condemnation. It's unbelievable. How could a Black man say this? And, then, what's even more interesting is that my conversation doesn't just stop there. My work with Black men takes it a step farther. What I am interested in, is: Why do you see the policing in terms of Muslim men, Mexican men, Black men, in these kinds of genocidal logics of death? Why are we killing all these men?

My argument becomes ultimate because we are invested in a notion of racism that's about population [advantages], which is why these white supremacists are trying to act against white women's bodies, so they outlaw abortion, because they want them to have babies. White supremacists are—I think they call it—"stealthing." The job [of white men] is now to impregnate white women. This stuff is not new. This stuff happens every time racial regimes want to become more ethno-nationalistic, because they need babies. And, again, this is not the way we look at racism. When the white women go out and put on pink hats, they think they're marching for rights. They actually think that's what's under attack. They don't understand the argument is their womb. That's how white supremacy generates itself.

[**Susanne**] **Scholz:** Actually, it was not only white, it was very multiracial, to be fair.

TC: Yeah, I understand. But there was also some debate about the role, where white women stepped in and out, in terms of siding with Black and Brown women.

VLW: Well, I know, Tommy, I wouldn't be forgiven if I don't provide some time for the general exchange with folks. I've got lots of issues and questions, but maybe another time. But let's give our group a chance to engage you directly.

[**Leif**] **Vaage:** The idea that violence is part of the picture, not just as something going off the rails, but actually—however painful and difficult and out-of-control it is—is how something happens in the direction of something else; whether you're talking ethics, political philosophy, the good: and we reimagined you could do that without, in a concrete and practical way, somehow getting the question of violence in there as part of the conversation. It allows room to nuance, unlike the sniper saying: shoot everyone. Someone said, "if you're not talking violence as part of the picture, you're not talking reality." That's how I'm hearing it.

So, it takes me to Walter Benjamin's (1892–1940) *Critique of Violence* (1921), on the one hand, saying, if you think that violence is not what the state does and most of that is about paying attention to all the ways in which it's already in the picture, it's already normal. I am just interested in how you talk about your notion of Black violence vis-à-vis Benjamin's notion of "messianic violence" as a kind of pure violence, eschatological content: what do you do with that?

TC: I'll try to, because there's a lot to talk about on both sides, but let me say this, what I think we were missing about me was: I was thinking of Huey P. Newton (1942–1989), *War Against the Panthers* (1980; 1996). He makes this really important distinction that we come to believe that the state is not invested in violence because we've given to the state the power to commit violence against certain dissenting groups so that civil society gets to pretend it's non-violent. So we all get to pretend we're civilized. That's how I think about violence against Black people. What do you do in a world where violence has been given or the power to perpetrate violence has been given to an entity that acts with the legitimacy of white citizens or various citizens in the United States? But they have the ability to disown it because it's "that" violence and not them.

Black violence has never been used as a way to [achieve state interests]—I guess Black liberation theology has some instances of this—but you'd don't see the tradition of Black violence trying to use violence to realize a new world for some unclaimed racial imaginary. When you look at white violence, the expansion in the West, the genocide of indigenous people, that's part of a teleology: That some people are lesser people, they shouldn't have the land; these are lesser people, so they should not have existed. Black people are utilizing violence to try [to resist] the imposition of that a certain logics places on them as a group of people... So that's why I think that Black resistance or Black militancy hasn't always been violent

but has used violence strategically; this was Robert F. Williams's (1925–1996) point (*Negroes With Guns*, 1962) that we can use non-violence when we can and should, but in times when we can't, we have to at least defend ourselves. To deny that seems to me the epitome of racism.

VLW: What about Richard Wright (1908–1960)? Wright's work on violence?

TC: Richard Wright? If we're thinking about the same piece…

VLW: Well, his characters.

TC: So, he makes the comment in—I forgot the essay where he talks about violence being always present in the colonial situation as an expression of sexual excess—look, I think Richard Wright, I actually wrote a piece on Wright, where he is talking about the effeminization of the Black male. I think Wright has varying views on violence depending on whether or not you're reading *Black Boy* (1945) versus some of his later works such as *Eight Men* (1961). So I think, in the first [place], violence is both a coping mechanism and a creative force in *Black Boy* because you get the use of violence to reclaim something lost. It's really more of a transference that you get violence imposed on the Black male body and then it kind of flows through to other beings. But I don't think many people read Black Boy that way because they're so caught up on the figure of the Black male that they don't see the transference of societal violence through that entity.

I think when you get to his later work, you really see in Wright this ability of Black men to try to cope and resist it. So when you look at how he writes certain characters—what's that short story where he has a Black man dress up as a woman to do the job—I write about this story because I said it's very similar to Walter McGee... So what is happening—I forget the title ["Man of All Work," in *Eight Men*], which is terrible, because I just posted the essay [laughter]. There is a situation in which the wife is working. He is a Black man and can't get a job. Nobody wants to take him; he was serving in the military as a cook. So he cuts out his wife's dress; they hire him as a maid. He takes the job as a domestic worker. The white husband tries to rape him. The white wife says, "Well, the white husband is just a rapist, we know this. Just fight him off!" End of the story: the white woman comes in, finds him trying to rape her, they find out it's a man, the husband says, "Oh, it's a nigger, shoot him! We'll just claim he was trying to rape you," when he was trying to rape the Black man. Then, the Black man ends up shot, survives, but gets 200 or 300 dollars necessary to save the home of his family.

[James] Baldwin (1924–1987) reads this story and writes: "Wright's matured as a writer, as a thinker in the use of violence by Black men." But what's fascinating

to me and how I think about violence is the transference in Black Boy and how we think of violence here. Notice that it shows in this instance around the male black body, that violence is not only a destructive force, but a transfiguring force; that it impairs the being, contours and constrains the being, of oppressed groups of people so much that the wife at the end of the story says, "It's not easy for a Black man to exist in a dress as a woman, is it?"

So the way we should think about violence is to think about what we're doing in society, where violence changes what we think; it's not just the physical killing of Black or brown peoples, of Muslims. It's not just the censoring of thought; it changes what can be said or thought; how we actually enact different behaviors in the world. So I think Wright, especially in ["Man of All Work"] does a very good job of showing how white supremacy's violence, especially regarding Black men, is not just emasculating or effeminizing, but is negating, is dehumanizing, in such a way that you have to act differently in the world.

And I think this is what's happening in the United States. When we talk about violence, we literally think about it only as an exchange of life and death. But we're not talking about violence as a socializing force. What do people not say or how do people not behave to preserve their lives, to preserve their careers? Because, think about it, after the controversy swirled around me I have not seen very many essays over the last year and a half published about political violence, because nobody wants to do that, nobody wants to deal with the Alt-Right. This is why it's fascinating. Even under the ethno-nationalism that we see in America now, how many Black scholars have come out and made public statements or written essays or articles attacking the regime of Donald Trump or these institutions of white supremacy? There's been very few.

Much of our discourse over the last 6–12 months has been about sexism. It's been about female bodies and female vulnerability. I'm not saying that's bad, but I'm saying: look at the dynamic that you have KKK, white supremacists, neo-fascists, killing immigrants, Blacks, and others. There has been very little work that academics feel safe in doing around those issues. Because, you know what the effect is going to be: you're going to be censored, you're going to be attacked. And when you have these public displays of humiliation around scholars that are doing anti-race work—they attacked the white woman in Minnesota, Dr. Cloud, for making the point initially that these figures weren't white—think about the psychologism of this. This is an argument completely rooted in the superiority complex of even poor white people; these are white people who are adamantly against education, that are using violence to spread their ideas as if they're authorities.

So we have a whole lot of work to do around the effects of violence in this country. Some of these people of violence are outside the university, people many of whom we would think are at the bottom, the people that constitute the Tea Party, Appalachians—those whose conditions are often associated with most Black and Brown people in in this country: There is no distinction. When you read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, you have a white family saying, "We're not like Black people, we're not niggers," but they live in the house that Black people moved out of, they still feel better, because they are white. That's what we're dealing with in this country. And that superiority is based on the delusion of white supremacy; and it's perpetuated by the violence that these white people en masse inflict on other groups. And given that the political platform of government is now in line with their interests, we have to start doing some serious work about this matter.

[Katrina] Van Heest: I wonder what practically universities can do, because the threat of violence actually would have happened. It sounds like your department was supportive but the administration [was not]. What kinds of actions/structures/systems could the academy put in place so that that kind of thinking you're referencing would not happen?

TC: I think universities have to accept that under this administration they're going to have to be safe havens. Same way you had this issue during McCarthyism. You had these safe havens of academic freedom. Academy freedom particularly came about because of these issues and I think universities are turning their back on that because of donors and potential conflict with states.

When I say safe havens, I mean there need to be statements, there need to be resources, legal counsel, etc., or action plans surrounding the protection of professors and their families and children, relocation packages, and things of this sort. This stuff is non-stop. I was among one of the first and most visible scholars attacked in this way. What ended up happening was that the *Chronicle* said, maybe last month, that over a hundred scholars were attacked by the Alt-Right last year. If I got attacked in May, I think it was the first or second, maybe third, you had over a hundred more, right? It tells you where this is heading. So I think universities have to buckle up, so to speak.

…So the question becomes: How are universities going to be remembered? … administrators are business people, so they are…thinking… "we'll be gone." But what Texas A&M did is forever going to be a part of the institutional history that Black scholars and other colored people are going to have to face. And in a world where that changes, where that becomes written about in someone's history book,

who is reflecting on this moment and goes back and says, "Oh, how did a Black scholar, a Black full-professor, the youngest Black full-professor in his discipline, [come to be treated in this manner]?" How is that going to be remembered 10–15 years from now?

So universities are going to have to look at the long game. If you have scholars that are fighting, and that's what people are doing right now, that's what [ISS] is doing – if you have people that are fighting to preserve the intellectual integrity of some form of humanity, the university is going to have to protect that. And if they're not, that means that the scholars that we're talking about will have to create alternative spaces, and alternative programs, to do so. And that's the work a lot of the scholars don't want to do because we are very comfortable in our tenure-track positions. It's easy to say, "It's just easier for me to be quiet and just publish something else." But, at the same time, we claim we are these revolutionaries that really care about the world.

….

So universities have to become very clear and if universities don't do it, faculty and professional organizations have to become very clear and start pulling resources. The reality of the situation is that you're going to have some people that leave town. A good colleague of mine, Johnny Williams at Trinity, had to leave town. He is adamant; he shared a hashtag…about the death of white supremacy. And they took that out of context, saying that he was talking about killing white people. Just think about it logically: it can't be the case that every person they've attacked believes you should go and kill white people, because some of these are white people. This is the ridiculousness of the propaganda program. It's trying to say that all anti-racism is about the extinguishing of white people and white life—because that's their program. Diversity is about killing white people. And this is just their program. And universities are like: "Yeah, that's a good point, we need to respect their free speech." That's what I mean when I say that white supremacy has become a part of the intellectual range in America.

Scholz: But why do you say "become"? [The notion of the] university as forms of academic plantations has been around…longer than Trump.

TC: Absolutely! But look, you have a population now that's feeding on the social structure. Universities have always been racist. That's what we're always fighting against. They've always been institutionally conservative. But there's a rhetoric of diversity. Now you have a political platform and a majority of young people in the Alt-Right—they're not all old—that are energizing people to say, "You're right,

diversity is dangerous, diversity is the killing of the white race." Universities are now saying, well, yeah, we were racists before, but this Alt-Right thing might benefit us. So that's what I think is the difference. It's the [fact that] you've got bodies now, you have a new clientele, and that's what I think we're running up against.

Scholz: But, at the same time, I think we have infrastructure that exists, if I think about my own academic context; I would say most of the white faculty there are cowering behind the desk in total fear, and feel disempowered by the new liberal technocratic corporate environment to begin with. Now, on top of that, we have the ethno-nationalists, neo-nazi movements, come onto campus, and they're just afraid and they will not stand up and defend anybody, whether it's for racism, sexism, or anything else. Or the homophobia—that's another big thing.

TC: Right, that is a big thing. They have very strict heterosexual hegemonic patriarchal white men…

Scholz: Actually, I'm not as optimistic that it will end any time soon.

TC: Well, I don't know if it will be soon. When I say so, it's about decades. Ethno-nationalism, unless it turns into a regime, a totalitarian regime—that's certainly a possibility, I'm not excluding that—unless it goes that way, it usually doesn't reign. It's usually hard to maintain the energy and the population behind that in democratic societies.

This is the thing. I did political science and international affairs and politics, and when you look at America, you're always talking from the perspective that all the stuff that happens in Europe and Africa and Asia will never happen in America. Now, we're, like, yeah, this does happen in America.

But on a serious note, I think you're right, I agree with you, especially about white faculty. Black and brown faculty have to deal with this up front. So even if they don't want to be on the side, they're on the side. But in terms of white faculty, they cower because they're hoping it skips them by. Racism is an inconvenience. It messes with their moral courage. Sexism…it depends on whether they're men or women. Homophobia, well, I'm not homophobic, so I can kind of ignore it. These kinds of things kind of slide out of their social worlds. So they're, like: "We're really dealing with the issue of academic freedom, and this will pass. So I can just stay quiet and let it roll by." Whereas every other group—and there are always divisions within these groups; again, this is why I talk about the socializing force of violence, nobody wants to be targeted and have their name out in that way. Or end up having to move! So you have institutional structures that are conservative, administrators that are going to fight or attack faculty, and then you have groups of

very vulnerable populations—especially Black and brown folk, given their numbers in the universities—that are losing their white allies right and left, because the whites, as is usually the case in history, don't catch up or don't want to protest with the same kind of risk as other groups.

This is a very difficult time because the university and the tenure system, which is precisely made to be the apparatus to kick in and protect the activism of professors, is failing. And given that that's happening under this regime of violence and censorship, it means that the assumption that everyone will be courageous because they can't lose their job is falling apart. And this is why the academy has become much more a conservative centering force than a liberating force. That's why our theories are reflecting the conservatism of our political actions rather than an analysis of the types of things that are going on.

[David] Saul: I just wanted to point out regarding your point that America is not going to be like Europe: the social networking piece of it is a global phenomenon. So, you're not just dealing with this nationalist [phenomenon], you can turn it one way or the other with one debate in a political event where you have the debate and then the attack which silences you or any other person who speaks out. That's a global attack. It used to be a regional attack but not any longer; that's the technological change.

TC: When I went to the Netherlands, I was doing a session on my book *The Man-Not*, and we were talking about Black men, and then somebody inquired: "Well, what about this issue about Trump? Does America not care about the way the rest of the world looks at him?" Well, probably, no, because this is a white supremacist nation. If anything, this proves that Black people have been right that America is a white supremacist nation.

But…what's interesting about it is that they started telling me about the growth and rise of white right-wing groups in the Netherlands; that these ideas and trajectories are spreading throughout various geographies. That's what I'm saying, that the uniqueness of America is that it isn't all that unique, because what you see is—it's not a coincidence that you see—the rise of this kind of right-wing white supremacist leg in all the major western European countries. This is something about the course of civilization.

….

So when ethno-nationalism pops out, you see repression, you see a focus on the white population, and you see a demonization and extermination of racialized

men. That's the way that empire works. And, sure enough, tada! And I guess my frustration in philosophy is that there's never a "Curry's right!" But it also points out the arrogance of the intellectual project; the arrogance of believing that we're the interpreters par excellence, so to speak, is that we interpret the world towards our interest rather than what the world is disclosing to us. I mean, this is a major moment for people, not because it shows that one group of people is right or wrong, but because it shows we have to reorient our whole way of thinking about things.

We have to reorient ourselves to everything that we assumed democracy to be. It seems, in fact, that democracy is compatible with neo-fascism. That's an important discovery in the twenty-first century. Because we've always said democracy is the enemy of these kinds of ideology. This means we have to do a major reexamination of what we thought. If this is true, then that means all these democratic reforms that we think are doing such great work on race and on migration—we gotta rethink that. This demonstrates that the Civil Rights Movement wasn't that effective because it didn't re-socialize America.

This thing didn't just pop up overnight. This was already here. This was already the undercurrent of these invisible voices, those people Donald Trump says, "Oh, we didn't hear you, middle America; well, guess what, we hear you!" And you see what you got. So we have to start thinking about diagnosing very different problems. And that means some people may have to turn to actual politics, questions of power, because that's what we're exercising right now.

The academy has moved to this discursive formulation of race, and using continental philosophy, and talking about discourse and grammatology, precisely because it didn't want to deal with the messiness of the real world. You want us to write in terms nobody could understand because it's not speaking to the people who are being affected. These young brothers who were involved in Ferguson, these brothers were being killed. We don't know why these young Black men that are involved with Black Lives Matter are just being picked off. This is telling us something about the orientation of violence and the state to political dissent. This is costing people their lives and we're not paying attention to it because we have the veneer of what social activism looks like: "Oh, look, this academic has one million twitter followers! Congratulations! Look at how important they are!" But when was the last time you had a revolution because of a hashtag?

This is the logics we are buying into, that to be the star academic is not about whether you're motivating or diagnosing social problems. We're not trying to

create [Steve] Bikos or Fanons or [Sylvia] Wynters. We're not trying to create those people. We want people that can placate us with the idea that some identity politics, some kind of intersectional maxim, changes things. And we still haven't grappled with the real problem of death and intimidation that the political problem of death brings, or with us producing death in our thought. That's a damned position to be in. Because that means we don't have the apparatus—intellectual, social, or otherwise—to actually inspire change.

The reason people read Fanon was not because he gave cool introspective renderings of psychoanalysis or existentialism. This guy is giving us a political program that's diagnosing how we're affected by colonialism, and how we may overturn it. Very simple! Notice how *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) is written completely differently from *Wretched of the Earth* (1959). *Black Skin, White Masks* is, like, well, just so academic and lovely, and *Wretched of the Earth* is, like, if you want to start a revolution, here's how. Don't dance because you're wasting energy where you could be killing people. This is what Fanon is talking about, right? But it's written in plain language. He knew he was on the way out: here, here is how we think about these issues. When you look at his editorials, toward African revolution, it's very plain language. Why? Because he actually expects to change the way people think. That's not what we're interested in doing in the academy.

….

VLW: Well, sir, thank you very much for this hour. Can we just end this phase by expressing our appreciation to Tommy J. Curry?

WHAT HAS ATHENS TO DO WITH JERUSALEM?

U.S. BIBLICAL PLACE NAMING AS SCRIPTURALIZING

Rosamond C. Rodman

Names are the turning point of who will be master.
— Walt Whitman, An American Primer

I. Introduction

No other modern nation has as many biblical, religious and classical place names (toponyms) as the United States, not by a long shot. One study found 803 biblical toponyms not including the repetition of popular names like Salem, Antioch, or Lebanon; another study counts almost a thousand.[1] Sodom, Ohio was named by a frustrated temperance activist stymied by the residents' persistent drunkenness. Joshua Tree, California reminded Anglo settlers venturing into the desert southwest of Joshua's outstretched, javelin-bearing hand in his conquest of Ai (Josh 8:18, 26). The number of U.S. town names derived from classical Greece, Rome, Sparta, Carthage, and Egypt is likewise exceptionally high. Beginning in the 1820s, Illinois had a Cairo, a Thebes, and Alexandria, a Dongola and a Karnak. By the 1830s, the entire southern part of Illinois was nicknamed "Egypt."

It has frequently been assumed that this distinctive toponymic feature of the United States resulted from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europeans, who encountered these new lands through the lenses of "classical, biblical and medieval mappings, a geographical palimpsest beneath which the Old World discerned traces of Atlantis and Elysian Fields, the Garden of Eden and the Promised Land."[2] The problem with this presumption is that no other nation "has anything in its

[1] John Leighly, "Biblical Place-Names in the United States, *Names* 27:1 (March 1979): 46-59; Moshe Davis, "Names on the Land: Biblical Place Names in America," in *America and the Holy Land: With Eyes toward Zion IV* (Westport, CT, 1995), 135-146. See also Moshe Davis, ed., *Scholars Colloquium on America-Holy Land Studies* (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1977), 246-252.

[2] Brian Jarvis, *Postmodern Cartographies: The Geographical Imagination in Contemporary American Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 1; see Anthony Grafton with April Shelford and Nancy Siraisi, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: the Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1992).

toponymy even faintly resembling the United States situation, with the marginal exception of a few score Brazilian names of classical coloration and a curious small cluster of classical (and Biblical) names in Colombia's Cauca Valley."[3] If European colonizers were responsible for biblical and classical naming, why aren't their more such toponyms in South and Central America, or in Canada?

Furthermore, those most frequently credited with biblical place naming, the English Puritans, in fact did the least of it.[4] They loved using the Bible for personal names, but worried that naming places biblically was presumptuous (for surely, the New Jerusalem is not of this world). Instead, they agreed to "plant here the other names of England," favoring in particular names from East Anglia, England (Norfolk, Hingham, Suffolk, Essex, Cambridge).[5]

In fact, it was not until the nineteenth-century that biblical naming caught on with colonial settlers, who began choosing biblical names like "Zoar, Ohio (Gen 13:10); Ruma, Illinois (2 Kings 23:36); Mount Tirzah, North Carolina (Joshua 12:24); Zela, West Virginia (Joshua 18:28), Mt. Pisgah, Oregon (Deut 3:27), as well as 47 variations on Bethel, 61 on Eden and 95 on Salem."[6] The sudden adoption of biblical names correlates with the nation's explosive growth in the nineteenth-century. From 1800 to 1865, the United States tripled in area and increased in population eightfold. The popularity and variety of classical and biblical names grew in tandem with the often violent acquisition of western territories in the 1800s-1850s; the pressing questions of slavery and sectionalism leading up to the Civil War (1850s–1860s); and Reconstruction followed by Jim Crowism (1870s–1910s).

Satisfying as it is to correct the misperceptions about when and whence U.S. biblical (and classical) place names, that is not the ultimate aim of this essay.

[3] Wilbur Zelinsky, *Exploring the Beloved Country: Geographic Forays into American Society and Culture* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1994), 296.

[4] There are a few, such as Salem, Massachusetts, the Anglicized form of *shalom*, the Hebrew word for peace; and Newark, New Jersey, adopted after members of the New Haven colony refused to merge with the Connecticut Colony by order of King George II and left by boat to found a new and purer colony – thus, a New Ark of the New Covenant. For the most part, though, Puritans avoided naming places biblically. See Edward P. Rindler, *The Migration from the New Haven Colony to Newark, East New Jersey: A Study of Puritan Values and Behavior, 1630-1720*, Ph.D. Diss, University of Pennsylvania, 1977, 2. See also David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 38; and Frank John Urquhart, *A History of the City of Newark, NJ Embracing Practically Two and a Half Centuries,* Vol. 1 (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1913), 32; *contra* John T. Cunningham, *Newark* (Newark, NJ: The New Jersey Historical Society, 1966), 23.

[5] "In seventeenth-century Boston, 90 percent of all first names were taken from the Bible," but English place names were preferred for toponyms. "Three out of four [Massachusetts counties] received East Anglian names." Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 94, 36. In a 1630 meeting of the Massachusetts General Court, attendees debated the merits of choosing biblical toponyms or eponyms (personal names), according to George Rippey Stewart, *Names on the Land: A Historical Account of Place-Naming in the United States* (New York: New York Review Book Classics 1992 [2008], 46.

[6] Nathan Hatch and Mark Noll, "Introduction," in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan Hatch and Mark Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 3.

Instead, the purpose is to illuminate the politics of biblical place naming. While toponyms often "appear to people as ideologically innocent rather than power-charged semiotic dynamos for making meaning about places," a second look at biblical and classical place naming in the United States strongly suggests the latter. To put it bluntly, colonial settlers chose these canonical referents to support white supremacist discursive scaffolding. Naming places simultaneously conjured and concealed the social, racial, religious, and political hierarchies of settler colonialism, socio-linguistically smoothing over the construction of domination. They were effective dovetail joints, useful in helping to create "a structure of reality…that produces and legitimates and maintains…power relations."[7] These names provide strikingly concrete examples of persistent identification with and investments in scriptural-canonical texts to calibrate and normalize the often violent negotiations undergirding nineteenth-century settler colonialism.

There are simply too many U.S. classical and biblical place names to consider each in turn. Instead, what follows is a selective set of place names arranged thematically, and as much as possible, chronologically. I privilege names that illuminate key strategies used by colonial settlers in framing U.S. national identity, names that expose the politics of their choosing and the effects of their adoption. Since the trend of naming U.S. places biblically began only after the embrace of classical world referents, the investigation begins there. Then, I turn to place names that reflect the strategies of erasing Native Americans that historian Jean O'Brien's referred to as "firsting, replacing, and lasting."[8] Next, biblical toponyms conferred during the U.S. acquisition of Mexican territories is considered before turning finally to African American engagements of biblical naming.

II. The Prequel: Classical Place Names

In the post-Revolutionary period, faced with the rather complex task of composing a new republic, Anglo Americans routinely "ransacked the ancient world as a usable past for guidelines, parallels, analogues to present political problems."[9] They mined the texts and personages ancient Roman republican heroes such as Livy, Tacitus, Marcus Aurelius and others for "important, if imprecise, models of personal behavior, social practice and government form."[10] Initially

[7] Vincent L. Wimbush, *White Men's Magic: Scripturalization as Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 46.

[8] Jean O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

[9] Reinhold Meyer, *Classica Americana: The Greek and Roman Heritage in the United States* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 95.

[10] Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 53.

regarding ancient Greece as "a giddy, fluctuating, mobocracy," they favored ancient Rome, with its orderly Senate, its ethical-statesman Cicero, and its idealization of agriculture as a noble, civic pursuit.[11] It was not uncommon for elites to "construct textual alter egos" out of Roman republican heroes.[12] George Washington identified with Cato, a Roman senator famous for his opposition to tyranny; some of Washington's admirers preferred to think of him as a latter-day Cincinnatus, a Roman general called out of retirement to lead an army. Samuel Adams and Alexander Hamilton associated themselves with the Roman statesman and lawyer Marcus Tullius Cicero. Perhaps most famously, James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, writing for the Federalist Papers, identified as Publius Valerius Publicola, a Roman hero who aided in toppling the king and establishing the Roman republic. These pseudonyms afforded "ventriloquized performances" that concealed the identity of the messenger while magnifying the message.[13]

Colonial settlers in the post-Revolutionary era were acutely aware of being seen by the British, their former colonizers, as barely civilized and "still mired in colonial dependence."[14] It was but a small step from psuedonyms to toponyms. Naming was one tactic in a larger effort by the newly independent to express their hostility and mask their insecurity, especially with regard to England. "Americans wanted to distinguish themselves from the British, yet also wanted to adopt aspects of monarchical culture, in order to add gravitas and legitimacy to their new nation."[15] By adopting classical place names, these former colonists challenged the perception that they were backwards farmers scratching out a bare existence on the margins of the civilized world map.

A. Troy, New York (1789)

After the Revolutionary War, an influx of settlers claimed land near Albany and Lansingburgh in New York, near the farm of Jackob Vanderheyden, who was persuaded to "lay out his farm in city lots" for sale.[16] He did so on the condition

[11] Caroline Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780-1910* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 20.

[12] Eran Shalev, *Rome Reborn on Western Shores: Historical Imagination and the Creation of the American Republic* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2009), 158.

[13] Eran Shalev, "Ancient Masks, American Fathers: Classical Pseudonyms during the American Revolution," *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Summer 2003), 156.

[14] Kariann Akemi Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 9

[15] Yokota, *Unbecoming British*, 91.

[16] Rutherford Hayner, *Troy and Rensselaer County, New York: A History* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1925), 136.

that the small settlement continue to be called Vanderheyden. But the more recent settlers found the name "too polysyllabic, Dutch and strange," and, swinging for the fences, chose the name Troy. The announcement published in the local paper explained that the change of name was because they expected "at no very distant period, to see TROY as famous for her Trade and Navigation as many of our first towns."[17] Optimistic, perhaps, for such a small settlement.[18]

Troy, after all, was the place on which Homer lavished praise in *The Iliad*. A mighty walled city, seemingly impervious to sustained and repeated attacks, the walls of Troy "once reached a height of nine meters (30 feet)," with watchtowers that afforded "a commanding view the Trojan plain."[19] The residents of Vanderheyden apparently considered themselves likewise well-positioned at the premier spot on the eastern banks of the Hudson north of Albany, the confluence of several tributaries and a site from which to maximize the benefit of trade with neighboring Vermont and Massachusetts. Having just successfully withstood a years-long attack by England's better-armed and better-funded army, these former colonists plied the name Troy to inscribe their victory over the world's super-power, to imagine themselves as "equals to the world's most famed warrior states," and to vaunt their "fragile Revolution and bleak prospects beyond its seeming tenuousness."[20]

Though some laughed at their audacity, the trend for naming places after classical heroes and sites caught on. Today there are some with ninety-seven U.S. towns named Troy.[21]

B. Athens, Georgia (1801)

In the transition from colonies to confederacy to nation, settlers began to find ancient Greece more useful than ancient Rome.[22] The new republic depended "by definition on 'a virtuous people,' a phrase that circulated throughout all forms of political discussion in the 1780s," and one often paired with Athens.[23] Political

[17] Arthur James Weise, *Troy's One Hundred Years 1789-1889* (Troy, NY: William H. Young, 1891), 28-29. See also Writers of the Works Progress Administration, *New York: A Guide to the Empire State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), 344.

[18] "The number of inhabitants in 1789 did not probably exceed 50." Weise, *Troy's One Hundred*, 30.

[19] Trevor Bryce, *The Trojans and their Neighbors* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 58.

[20] Shalev, *Rome Reborn*, 19.

[21] Wilbur Zelinsky, *Exploring the Beloved Country*, 300-1.

[22] See Winterer's *Culture of Classicism*, and Carl J. Richard, *The Golden Age of the Classics in America: Greece, Rome and the Antebellum US* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[23] Jon Butler, *New World Faiths: Religion in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 141.

speeches frequently mentioned "the glories of Athenian democracy," since Athens symbolized a democratic citizenry that would be both educated and involved in its government.[24] For example, Georgia's governor Lyman Hall, alarmed by the enormous influx of white settlers moving into Georgia under the spell of the "Georgia fever," gave an inaugural address in 1783 that articulated his concerns about these new immigrants.[25] He said that they were by and large a disinterested, disparate, disengaged group, motivated by solely by profit. Alarmed by the "profligate and wicked lives" of the new Georgians, Hall argued that the key to Georgia's success lay in an informed public, cultivated by the "principles of religion and virtue." To encourage this, he proposed using public monies to build state schools that would serve as the "foundation for endowing seminaries of learning."[26]

This was a fairly radical idea, particularly because European education was a much-desired commodity for early Americans of means, who frequently sent their sons to Europe for schooling. The Georgia General Assembly embraced Hall's suggestion, authorizing the state to procure a parcel of land for its purpose. John Milledge, who would follow Hall to the governorship in 1802, purchased 633 acres and donated it for the purpose of creating this first publicly funded university. The property featured a prominent hill that inspired Milledge to imagine the future site of learning as a modern-day "'Athens,' after the city that was home to the academy of Plato and Aristotle in Greece."[28]

The site would become The University of Georgia. The school's charter, with its emphasis on a classics-heavy European curriculum, exemplifies how "American elites place[d] a premium on adopting elements of European culture as a way of establishing their own legitimacy," even as they bristled at and sought to escape their "lingering colonial dependence and its corresponding sense of inferiority."[29] Americans were sensitive to being perceived by Europeans as bumpkins living on

[24] Richard, *The Golden Age of the Classics*, 41.

[25] Lyman Hall, "Message from His Honor the Governor to the Honorable House of Assembly" (8 July 1783), in *The Revolutionary Records of the State of Georgia*, Vol. II, ed. Allen D. Candler (Atlanta: Franklin-Turner Co, 1908), 512-3.

[26] O. Burton Adams, "Yale (sic) Influence on the Formation of the University of Georgia," *The Georgia Historical Society Quarterly* 51:2 (June 1967), 175.

[28] A. L. Hull, *A Historical Sketch of the University of Georgia* (Atlanta: The Foote & Davies Co., 1894), 3.

[29] Yokota, *Unbecoming British*, 9 and 11.

the margins of the transatlantic map "lately occupied by a race of savages."[30] The period in which "southern Atlantic coastal planters [could] pretend that they were simply English gentlemen who happened to live across the Atlantic," was rapidly drawing to a close and an era of self-definition yawned open a portal navigated in part, by using classical referents.[31]

C. Memphis, Tennessee (1819)

Just as Athens was chosen in Georgia, "Egyptomania" gripped the United States. Newspapers eagerly reported on Napoleon Bonaparte's campaign in Egypt (1798-1801) and readers hungrily pored over sensational descriptions of the Nile River and the pyramids.[32] As a result, the Mississippi River was given the nickname "the American Nile," a nickname both "aspirational and accusatory, speaking of empire, profit, slavery, and liberation."[33] It would soon inspire the naming of Memphis.[34] The Egyptian names evoked in the cultural imaginary a great world civilization using slave labor.

At that time, white settlements lay entirely in the eastern part of Tennessee, while the western part "was an unbroken wilderness…[save for] the garrison and the trading-post on the Chickasaw Bluffs."[35] In a striking bit of luck and cronyism, John Overton, Andrew Jackson, and James Winchester came into possession of a sizeable plot of land situated at what was then the far western border of the United States; the only way to it was by flat-boat, walking or horseback. In 1819, Overton, Jackson and Winchester optimistically filed a plat for a proposed town – Memphis—and advertised plots for sale in local newspapers:

> The general advantages of Memphis are owing to its being founded on the Mississippi, one of the largest and most important rivers on the globe… which may with propriety be denominated the American Nile …[36]

[30] As the Rev. Timothy Dwight put it, before becoming Yale's president. Quoted in Yokota, *Unbecoming British*, 17.

[31] Edward Countryman, *Americans: A Collision of Histories* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 28.

[32] Bob Brier, *Egyptomania: Our Three Thousand Year Obsession with the Land of the Pharaohs* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 56-65; and Scott Trafton, *Egypt Land: Race and Nineteenth-century American Egyptomania* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

[33] Thomas Ruys Smith, *River of Dreams: Imagining the Mississippi before Mark Twain* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 1, 2.

[34] James Davis, *The History of the City of Memphis* (Memphis: Hite, Compton & Kelly, 1873), 27-30.

[35] John MacLeod Keating, *History of the City of Memphis and Shelby County, Tennessee*, Vol. I (Syracuse, NY: D. Mason & Co., 1888), 90.

[36] The entire text of the advertisement can be found in Samuel Cole Williams, *Beginning of West Tennessee: In the Land of the Chickasaws*, 1541-1841 (Johnson City, TN: Watauga Press, 1930), 127-129; and in James Davis, *The History of the City of Memphis* (Memphis: Hite, Compton & Kelly, 1873), 27-30.

What they meant was: buy property on this prime riverfront land, ideally situated for growing and/or transporting slaves, cotton and tobacco. The cotton-growing economy, still quite localized in Mississippi, was beginning to spread westward to other regions, and slavery with it, owing in part to the invention of the cotton gin in 1794. Still, it was expensive and time consuming to transport cotton across miles and mountains to the northern and eastern seaboards for trade and export. Steamboats changed that.[37] They expanded enormously the amount of material that could be freighted in relatively shallow water, changing the scale of doing business in slaving and cotton by orders of magnitude. With these new technologies, the Mississippi became the first American interstate highway.

Memphis offered much in this rapidly developing economy. It had both rich alluvial soil and a direct route to ship agricultural exports both to northern and southern harbors for transport in a trans-Atlantic voyage. Memphis' location on the "American Nile" also meant that it offered a better interstate method by which to traffic in slaves. In the 1820s, the years immediately after founding Memphis, interstate slave trading morphed from "a loose-limbed avocation into an organized, productive, and lucrative profession."[38] The Mississippi became increasingly associated with slavery, as did Memphis.

After the first decades of the nineteenth-century, biblical place names began to eclipse classical place names in popularity. The 1830s and the 1840s are frequently referred to as the peak decades of the United States' multi-tiered "Indian Removal" policies. Coincidentally, adopting biblical place names also peaked in this period, making clear that treaties and federal legislation were not the only ways that Natives were "removed."

III. Firsting, Replacing, and Lasting

Historian Jean O'Brien's study of nineteenth-century New England historical narratives created by non-Indians – both written and material — targets three main strategies by which Anglos extinguished Natives from the land, replacing them with "non-Indians who are making modernity."[39] The first, called "firsting" refers to the way that Anglo Americans produced local histories that reflected their

[37] On the centrality of the steamboat in the Mississippi for the development of slavery in the Mississippi valley, see Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2013), esp. chap. 3, pp. 73-96.

[38] Robert Gudmestad, "The Troubled Legacy of Isaac Franklin: The Enterprise of Slave Trading," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 62:3 (Fall 2003), 198.

[39] O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*, 55.

primacy, rendering themselves indigenous and erasing Natives from historical records. Extending this effort in material ways by erecting monuments, excavating Native relics, naming and transforming the land, Anglos also created "replacement narratives." Finally, by introducing modernity, progress, and change, Anglos framed Natives as remnants of a time before time, a sepia-toned "timeless people in nature."[40] Colonial settlers used biblical place names in tandem with these larger, multi-pronged strategies.

A. Nauvoo, Illinois (1837)

Beginning in 1823, a teenager named Joseph Smith living in western New York began a years-long conversation with a messenger he called the Angel Moroni; this messenger indicated to Smith where to locate a set of golden plates. Once unearthed, Smith translated them into the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon tells the story of Lehi leading a small group of Israelites from the Middle East to the Americas after the Babylonian exile and their subsequent splitting, disobedience, and warring (1 Nephi). The Book of Mormon also emphasized that Mormon prophets anticipated the birth of Jesus Christ (1 Nephi 10:4; 19:8; 2 Nephi 25:19; Helaman 13-16), one reason many consider The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints a restorationist group, not unlike other groups that arose during the so-called Second Great Awakening that aimed to restore the true message of the New Testament by discerning the most original, apostolic form of earliest Christianity.[41] The Book of Mormon established the beginning of the Latter-day Saints even earlier than the earliest disciples.

When Smith's nascent group was violently shooed first out of New York (where Smith was tarred and feathered), and then out of Missouri (the site of mob killings of Mormons known as the Haun massacre), Smith purchased a plot of land in Illinois and named it Nauvoo. "'It is a beautiful site and it shall be called Nauvoo, which means in Hebrew a beautiful plantation.'"[42] Some doubted Smith's etymological explanation, while others leapt to his defense. Parley Pratt, sometimes called "the Apostle Paul of the Mormons," owing to his successful missionizing, argued that the Hebrew נָאָה (*nawaw* or *nawvaw*) was a not uncommon word in the Old Testament, referring to something beautiful, pleasant or comely. Pratt

[40] Ibid., 106.

[41] Richard T. Hughes, "Joseph Smith as an American Restorationist," *Brigham Young University Studies Quarterly* 44:4 (2005), 31-39.

[42] Quoted in Louis C. Zucker, "Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3:2 (1968), 48. Nauvoo was originally called Quashquema by Fox Natives; changed to "Venus" in 1827, and "Commerce" in 1834.

cited J.S. Frey's *Hebrew and English Dictionary*, which translates the word in the third-person plural to mean "they were beautiful, adorned."[43] Others referred to the Hebrew grammar book that Smith used to learn Hebrew under the tutelage of Joseph Seixas. In Fawn Brodie's biography of Smith published in 1945, she argued that the name Nauvoo "sprang fresh out of his fancy," a statement that was removed in later additions.[44]

Naming Nauvoo linguistically anchored the nascent Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints in the language of Hebrew rather than Greek, symbolically linking the Mormon community in Illinois with the Israelites of the ancient Near East, out-firsting other Restorationist groups and even the Native Americans.

B. Antioch, Illinois (1845)

Another example of using biblical names to establish primacy obtains in the naming of Antioch. Antioch lies at the northeastern border of Illinois, within a mile of the Wisconsin state line, one of many towns created by waves of white settlers flooding into Illinois in the nineteenth-century. The settlers associated with restorationist movements spearheaded by Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone, whom separately and together sought to model themselves after the Jesus's disciples and in doing so "return to the pattern of the first century church in doctrine, worship, and practice."[45] Stone and Campbell focused on the earliest disciples of Christ, and thus favored the Book of Acts.[46]

Fundamentally, Acts is about the shift from a small Jewish reform group centered in Jerusalem to a mixed Gentile/Jewish group focused on the imperial seat of Rome. Throughout, the author of Acts highlights both the hostilities disciples faced (Stephen and James are killed; Peter and Paul are repeatedly persecuted); and the geographical spread of the mission, as the small but growing community of Jesus people extends north, south, but especially west, towards Rome. Antioch symbolically represents a fundamental shift in the identity of the early Christian

[43] Stanley B. Kimball, "Discovery: Information of Interest to Latter-day Saints, *Ensign*, April 1973, https://www.lds.org/ensign/1973/04/discovery-nauvoo-found-in-seven-states?lang=eng .

[44] Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith* (New York: Vintage Books, 1945), 156.

[45] David Edwin Harrell, *A Social History of the Disciples of Christ*, Vol. 1: *Quest for a Christian America, 1800-1865* (Nashville, TN: The Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1966), 4.

[46] Disciples of Christ put emphasis on the New Testament as the only guide to Christian action. "Perhaps even more significant was the emphasis placed on the Book of Acts and the Epistles." Harrell, *A Social History of the Disciples of Christ*, Vol. 1, 28-9.

movement, the moment it came into its own distinct identity, since "it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called 'Christians.'" (Acts 11:26, NRSV).[47]

Naming the settlement in northern Illinois Antioch was initially suggested as a joke by the "town wags," but the settlers quickly embraced it.[48] A name reflecting the place that disciples were first called Christian and that elicited the hostility and resistance faced by early Christians suited settlers continuing to see Native resistance to their presence, such as the Winnebago War of 1827, and the Black Hawk War of 1832.[49] The early white residents of Antioch identified themselves as the first Christians in the region, who like the early disciples of the risen Jesus had faced hostility and resistance.

C. St. Paul, Minnesota (1841)

St. Paul, Minnesota grew up in the shadow of Fort Snelling, the northernmost of a series of Northwest Territory military installations built to protect American commercial interests (the fur trade). The Fort Snelling soldiers spent long winter nights playing cards and drinking, as a result of which a number of whiskey traders set up in the shadow of the Fort, the most successful being Pierre Parrant, better known as "Pigseye." Pigseye was described as "a coarse, ill-looking, low-browed fellow, with only one eye, and that a sinister looking one," hence the nickname.[50] To the chagrin of later historians, St. Paul was initially known by white settlers as Pigseye. The Dakota called it *I-mni-za-ska-dan* (little white rocks).[51]

That changed around 1841 with the arrival of a freshly ordained young cleric, Lucian Galtier, who had a log cabin church built and promptly dubbed it "St. Paul's." In a letter to his bishop, Galtier explained why.

> [A]s the name of Paul is generally connected with that of Peter, and the gentiles being well represented in the new place in the persons of the

[47] There are two Antiochs mentioned in the New Testament, Antioch of Pisidia and Antioch of Syria, both of them Roman cities with Jewish populations. Antioch of Syria was the larger of the two and plays a larger role in the New Testament.

[48] Elijah M. Haines *History of Lake County* (Chicago: Wm. LeBaron & Co., 1877), 242.

[49] Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian Hating and Empire Building* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 198; see also Patrick Jung, *The Black Hawk War of 1832* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 2007), Roger L. Nichols, *Black Hawk and the Warrior's Path* (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1992), 147-8.

[50] J. Fletcher Williams, *A History of the City of St. Paul, and of the Country of Ramsey, Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1864), 64.

[51] Stephen Return Riggs, *A Dakota-English Dictionary*, ed. James Owen Dorsey (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1890), 197; William Lass, *Minnesota: A History* (New York: London, 1998), 82.

> Indians, I called it St. Paul…. The name, St. Paul, applied to a town or city, seemed appropriate. The monosyllable is short, sounds well, and is understood by all denominations of Christians.[52]

The "gentiles being well-represented…in the persons of the Indians" was an understatement. In fact, the Native population was significantly larger than the white population. The 1840 census counted only "351 non-Indians living in the St. Croix-Mississippi River triangle."[53] In 1849, nearly a decade *after* Galtier built his log cabin church, Minnesota Territory had "fewer than 4000 people (counting mixed bloods but not the native Indian contingent) living there."[54] A year later, the federal census counted 6077 persons of European descent in the territory. In spite of smallpox and war, "white inhabitants were probably outnumbered by Indians 4 or 5 to one."[55] Ten years later, Natives were still the most populous peoples in the region. The 1860 census "enumerated a total Minnesota population of 172,023, and of these, the native-born constituting 113,295 of that number.[56]

Galtier was clearly in the demographic minority, yet he chose a name that framed Native "gentiles" as mere background, minor, if stubborn, players against Paul's heroic, conquering-converting journey. Naming the settlement St. Paul reduced the linguistic and cultural complexity of Natives on the one hand, and on the other hand, bound together diverse whites by amplifying their religious commonalities in the figure of the apostle to the gentiles.

D. Zion National Park, Utah (1919)

A later, and balder, example of how biblical names both replaced Native residents and simultaneously coagulated Euro-Americans of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds occurs in replacing the Native name Mukuntuweap with Zion (National Park) in southern Utah.[57] When President Abraham Lincoln

[52] Lucian Galtier's letter to Bishop Grace is provided in full in J. Fletcher Williams, *A History of the City of St. Paul*, 110-112.

[53] Mary Wingerd, *North Country: The Making of Minnesota* with illustrations compiled and annotated by Kirstin Delegard (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 151.

[54] Wingerd, North Country, 176; Theodore Blegen, *Minnesota: A History of the State*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), 159.

[55] William Lass, *Minnesota: A History* (New York: London, 1998), 107.

[56] Blegen, *Minnesota*, 175. Even accounting for settler births among whites, this is still a sizeable majority.

[57] The name Mukuntuweap, according to *Native American Placenames of the United States*, "comes from the Southern Paiute family of language, meaning "Straight Canyon." It is likely that John Wesley Powell's Paiute guide, Taú-gu, who led both of Powell's expeditions exploring the Grand Canyon into neighboring Mukuntuweap canyon, introduced the name Mukuntuweap. William Bright, *Native American Placenames of the United States* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 301; J.W. Powell, *Exploration of the Colorado River of the West and its Tributaries in 1869, 1870, 1871 and 1872 Under the Direction of the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1875), 111.

began signing legislation that set aside land for explicit preservation in 1864, the beginnings of what would later become the National Park Service were planted. Mukuntuweap was designated as a "National Monument" in 1909, a step below National Park status.[58] In pressing for its inclusion into the National Park Service, the acting director, Stephen Albright, decided to change Mukuntuweap to Zion in order to acquire the special status he thought the land deserved.

> I always preferred local names, especially native Indian ones, for natural wonders, but Mukuntuweap was a problem … too difficult to pronounce and really tough to spell. I sounded out the local people and found they all used just the one word "Zion," which to Mormons meant "heaven" or a "heavenly place." That sounded about right to me, so I decided that when I returned to Washington and pressed for national park status, I would use that too.[59]

His renaming strategy seemed to work. This was a national park, after all, and "[p]olity place-names carry the weight of the body politic. They identify not only a place but also a people."[60] Since the park was a national and not just a state site, Mukuntuweap was repackaged to appeal to Congress as Zion National Park, which better resonated with America's nationalistic sense of itself, as well as providing a bit of familiarity for Utah, a state that many regarded with suspicion.

After a history of antagonisms first with Natives and then with Mormons in Utah, the newly awarded national park stitched the nation into a continental cohesion. "By contributing to the national identity a park that met such high standards, Utah was validated and the park became a symbol of acceptance."[61] Mukuntuweap was a problem, and not because it difficult to pronounce or to spell. Rather, as Albright effectively admitted, because Natives – and their names – needed to be replaced.

E. Salem, Oregon (1840)

After the War of 1812, millions of white settlers crossed the Appalachian Mountains, but most went only as far west as Arkansas and Illinois. At the time, the Oregon Territory was a vast region that included all or part of five present-day

[58] Appendix D, Zion National Park Legislation, www.nps.gov.

[59] Quoted in Horace Albright and Marian Albright Schenck, *Creating the National Park Service: The Missing Years* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 126.

[60] Jared Farmer, *On Zion's Mount: Mormons, Indians and the American Landscape* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 254.

[61] Matthew Barker, "Selling a State to a Nation: Boosterism and Utah's First National Park," *Journalism History* 36:3 (Fall 2010), 172.

states (Washington, Oregon, Montana, Idaho and Wyoming) jointly administered by Britain and the United States. "Until the early 1840s, there were literally no more than forty Americans in the entire territory," and most whites in the region were associated with the Hudson's Bay Company.[62] In 1846, the Treaty of Oregon established 49th parallel as the dividing boundary of U.S. territory – in spite of the clarion on which James Polk rode to White House – "Fifty-four forty or fight!"

The Willamette Valley in what is now the state of Oregon was beautiful, fertile and well-forested valley home to the Kalapuyans, who referred to it as Ilahee.[63] Among the few whites settlers in Willamette Valley were Methodist missionaries who arrived in the fall of 1834. That winter, the missionaries took in several Native children, many of whom died as a result of diseases carried by whites, against which they had no natural immunity. The first year of the mission, "fourteen children were received; five died before the winter was over; five ran away; two died within the next two years, leaving two of the original fourteen to have their souls saved and their lives civilized."[64] Similar statistics characterized the adult population. "Between 1838 and 1841, 92 percent of Willamette Valley Kalapuyas died from fever and ague, with the population declining from 7,785 to only 600."[65] The Methodist Missionaries, envisioning "'a Native population clamoring for the Bible,'" instead converted a healthy population into "a people reeling from malaria epidemics."[66]

Methodists abandoned their original aim of converting Natives and relocated upstream to an area that Natives referred to as "Chemeketa," a word variously ascribed but often translated as "happy home," or "resting place," and which the Methodists decided to call Salem, thinking it a fair approximation of its meaning.[67] That name conjured a pseudo-Puritan past. "In a sense," one observer of colonial

[62] Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 35.

[63] Gray H. Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Ilahee: Empire and the Transformation of an Indigenous World*, 1792-1859 (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

[64] SuAnn M. Reddick, "The Evolution of Chemawa Indian School: From Red River to Salem, 1825-1885," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* Vol. 101 No. 4 (Winter 2000): 447.

[65] Reddick, "The Evolution of Chemawa Indian School," 445. See also Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Ilahee*, 162.

[66] Gray Whaley, "'Trophies' for God: Native Mortality, Racial Ideology, and the Methodist Mission of Lower Oregon, 1834-1844," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 107:1 (Spring 2006), 7.

[67] On the word "Chemeketa," see Howard Corning, *Dictionary of Oregon History* (Portland, OR: Binfords and Mort Publishing, 1989), 215. The word seems to have several variations, including "place of peace" or "place of running water," and "resting place," or just "the name of the Santiam village at Salem." Henry Zenk, "Notes on Native American Place-Names of the Willamette Valley Region," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 109:1 (Spring 2008): 16; Tom Fuller, Christy Van Heukelam and the Mission Mill Museum, *Salem* in Images of America Series (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 7.

settler migration to Oregon wrote, "the Oregon movement was in preparation from the time … Puritan congregations were led…from the vicinity of Boston westward through the forests to the banks of the Connecticut."[68] Not for the first time, the "Bible was the mechanism through which the apparent chaos of an undeveloped, torpid, pre-capitalist country would be re-arranged into a reflection of divine order, a prosperous New England" – this time in the Oregon Territory.[69] Oregon was admitted to the Union on Feb. 14th, 1859. Its capital is Salem.

F. Phoenix, Arizona (1868)

Phoenix, Arizona is home to the Akimel O'odham ("River people"), sometimes called the Pima, "descendants of the 'Hohokam' (those who have gone)."[70] The Hohokam lived in Arizona for thousands of years, and hold the distinction of having constructed a massive canal network (up to 22 miles in length) and irrigated extensive tracts of land (up to 70,000 acres)."[71] They excelled at agriculture and irrigation, and "leveraged a favorable geopolitical setting into a viable and sustainable agricultural economy that resulted in economic prosperity."[72] The canals, ditches, and mounds they constructed are not only still visible, but form the baseline water infrastructure that sustains the fastest growing city in the United States, with a metropolitan population of about 4.5 million.

Soon after the Civil War broke out in 1861, Confederate generals set their sights on the Southwest, a region they regarded as key to Confederate success in the war. Gaining the territory of Arizona provided profit for the Confederacy in the form of minerals (especially silver and copper) and other natural resources. Equally important, control of the region gave direct overland access to California, with its gold and its Pacific seaports. At the war's end, many who had served in Civil War battles in Arizona chose to remain, drawn by the potential of mining claims.

[68] F. G. Young, "The Oregon Trail," *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* Vol. 1, No. 4 (Dec. 1900), 347. Later historians also reflected this analogy with such assessments as, "The Oregon Methodists possessed many of the intellectual traits of the New World pioneers." Kent D. Richards, "The Methodists and the Formation of the Oregon Provisional Government," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 61:2 (Apr., 1970), 87.

[69] Hilton Obenzinger, "Holy Land Narrative and American Covenant: Levi Parsons, Pliny Fisk and the Palestine Mission," *Religion and Literature* 35:2-3 (2003), 248.

[70] The Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community website pagelet, "History and Culture." http://www.srpmic-nsn.gov/history_culture (accessed July 6, 2016).

[71] Suzanne K. and Paul R. Fish, "The Hohokam Millennium," in *The Hohokam Millennium* (Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007), 5.

[72] David H. DeJong, *Forced to Abandon our Fields: The 1914 Clay Southworth Gila River Pima Interviews* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011), 14.

One such was Jack Swilling, who tried his hand at mining near what is now Prescott, but eventually headed towards Camp McDowell in Salt River Valley. The militia housed at Camp McDowell mainly provided protection to whites from Yavapai and Tonto Apache resistance to Anglos mining claims and overland transportation.[73] Food for troops and animals at Camp McDowell was an expensive and perennial problem, since importing goods from California or northern Mexico was prohibitively expensive.[74] To solve it, the men at Camp McDowell learned irrigation techniques from local Pima and Maricopa. Swilling set himself up east of Camp McDowell on the Salt River, filed for water rights, and established a settlement that came to be known as "Swilling's Ditch," until some suggested finding a more resonant name.[75] Swilling wanted to call it "Stonewall," in honor of the Confederate General Stonewall Jackson, but the name Phoenix as chosen instead by Swilling's friend Lord Phillip Duppa, who was fascinated by the ancient agricultural berms and landworks laid by the Hohokam. Duppa's choice elicited the imagery of a creature reborn from the ashes of a predecessor, in this case the Hohokam and their descendents.[76] Naming Phoenix trenched a triumphal narrative of white modernity arising, better and stronger, from a prior Native civilization.

IV. Taking

In addition to advancing strategies of firsting, replacing, and lasting Native Americans, the use of biblical naming reflected and shored up the U.S. acquisition of Mexican lands. Both Corpus Christi, Texas, and Ophir, California were named during the 1830s-1850s, a period often associated with the supersaturated phrase "manifest destiny." Manifest destiny basically refers to an idea that the Anglo-Saxon Protestant population was guided by a providential design to reach its fulfillment in the westward expansion of the United States. The literature on manifest destiny is immense and marked by disagreements about whether the phrase lends coherence to a contested, unorganized, and untidy process of expansion; is an overused reference that has "run its course intellectually and that nothing more need be said about it, *ever*," or an absolutely central concept and social movement "of signal importance in the way that United States came to understand itself in the world

[73] Geoffrey P. Mawn, "Promoters, Speculators, and the Selection of the Phoenix Townsite," *Arizona and the West* Vol. 19 (Fall 1977), 208.

[74] Mawn, "Promoters," 210, 212.

[75] Andrew Wallace, "John W. Swilling," *Arizoniana* Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring 1961), 18.

[76] Special Correspondence of the Los Angeles Times, "Honors Paid to Arizona Pioneer," *The Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 30, 1910, 13.

and still does."[77] Regardless, names conferred during this period unmask the high-stakes language game white colonial settlers played to frame Mexico and its resources as rightfully, deservedly theirs.

A. Corpus Christi, Texas (1844-5?)

Arguably, Corpus Christi is not a biblical name in the strict sense of the term, but its Latin intonation and meaning, "the body of Christ" has clearly biblical roots. Conveying as it does the theme of sacrifice, of laying down one's life for others, the name reflected the debates about the annexation of Texas and the territorial boundaries between the United States, the Republic of Texas, and Mexico – debates that focused especially in the trans-Nueces region, where present-day Corpus Christi is located.[78] Naming Corpus Christi reflects a particular spin on Texas, its annexation, and U.S. expansionism in general.

In the face of harsh critiques by Conscience Whigs and abolitionists who argued against the annexation of Texas, pro-expansionist voices highlighted the (Anglo) sacrifices made, especially the Alamo in 1836, in which Anglo patriots were said to have laid down their lives "for a transcendent national purpose."[79] Casting Texas in terms of blood spilled and sacrifices made was articulated early and often. In 1836, when Sam Houton was elected president of the nascent Texas Republic, he said, "Our soil is consecrated by the blood of martyrs and we will defend it or perish."[80] Americans apotheosized Texas martyrs and grew to regard Texas as a symbol of noble sacrifice, narratives that helped to create a cultural climate increasingly receptive to the annexation of Texas and later the war against Mexico. Texas served "mythologically as a second birthplace for the American, who under[went] a regeneration in the sacrificial death inside the Alamo image."[81] The language of sacrifice, which cohered especially around the Alamo mythologizing, rationalized and legitimated U.S. expansionism not as conflict but as consummation of American national destiny. When President James Polk addressed Congress

[77] The first quote can be found Kris Fresonke, *West of Emerson: The Design of Manifest Destiny* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 7; the second in Stephenson, *Manifest Destiny*, xiv.

[78] See Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Arnoldo de León, *The Tejano Community 1836-1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982); and David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).

[79] Mark Nackman, *A Nation Within a Nation: The Rise of Texas Nationalism* (Port Washington, WA: Kennikat Press 1975), 57.

[80] Sam Houston, "A General Call to Arms," in *The Writings of Sam Houston* Vol. II, ed. Amelia W. Williams and Eugene C. Barker (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1938-1943 [1842]), 490-1.

[81] Holly Beachley Brear, *Inherit The Alamo: Myth and Ritual at an American Shrine* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 2.

about his plans to go to war with Mexico in 1846, he repeatedly emphasized blood sacrifice. "Mexico…has shed American blood upon American soil," and "shed the blood of our fellow-citizens on our own soil."[82] In other words, disputed territory in Texas had required bloodshed before, and perhaps would again.

Polk dispatched General Zachary Taylor to find a suitable site for the enormous U.S. "Army of Occupation." Taylor chose the "west side of the Nueces near a hamlet called 'Kinney's Rancho,' on the then border between the United States and Mexico.[83] Henry Lawrence Kinney, whence the eponym Kinney's Rancho, was a dubious character who had fled to Texas to escape debts and deals gone bad.[84] While "Kinney's Rancho" flourished during the time that Taylor's Army of Occupation army was stationed there, it ceased to be called Kinney's Rancho and acquired instead the name Corpus Christi. The latter name better echoed efforts to regard Texas as a critical site for "an Anglo-Saxon nation…bound to glory; [and] the inferior, decadent Indian race and the half-breed Mexicans [bound] to succumb before the inexorable march of the superior Anglo-Saxon people."[85] It also evoked the association of sacrifice that many American whites already made with Texas.[86]

B. Ophir, California (1850)

The Bible was useful in a colonial settler frame because there were seemingly endless variations that effectively encoded and rationalized "the rawest, most extreme, most violent settler-colonial expansion in the world."[87] But it was also an effective dovetail joint because "scripturalization works best when…it appears to be something else – or when it escapes notice altogether."[88] Nowhere is this clearer than the instance of California, which so defied credulity that people could only make sense of it by thinking about it as the ancient biblical land of Ophir.

When the discovery of gold in California was first announced in 1848-1849, no one took that news very seriously, thinking it was likely an overstatement, if not an outright hoax. The vast majority of U.S. citizens lived east of Missouri in

[82] James Polk, Message to the Senate and the House of Representatives, May 11, 1846, in "The Mexican War," in *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents* Vol. IV, ed. by James D. Richardson (New York, n.p.: 1897), 440-443.

[83] Robert H Thonhoff, "Taylor's Trail in Texas," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* (July, 1966), 8.

[84] Quoted in Joseph Leach, The Typical Texan: *The Biography of an American Myth* (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1952), 28.

[85] Montejano *Anglos and Mexicans*, 24.

[86] For fuller discussion, see Rosamond C. Rodman, "Rethinking Corpus Christi," *Names: A Journal of Onomastics*, 66:3 (2018), 166-175.

[87] Hilton Obenzinger, *American Palestine: Melville, Twain, and the Holy Land Mania* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), xvii.

[88] Vincent L. Wimbush, *Scripturalectics: The Management of Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5.

1849; certainly very few had ever been west of the Mississippi. Many dismissed such claims as hyperbole aimed to promote emigration to California which was not yet a state, and had only recently been ceded by Mexico and annexed by the United States. The possibility of "being able to pick up gold like common dirt" was "received something like a doubting reservation."[89] Even the governor of the California territory waited to submit "to the War Department a discovery made in February, until the middle of August, because he could not bring himself to believe the reports he heard of the gold district, until he visited it himself."[90]

The publishing industry strove to meet the public's voracious curiosity about California. "The press in the first months of the great excitement gathered in and reproduced every official text to give the greatest credibility possible to the incredible accounts appearing in their newspapers," and often referred to California in so doing as "the modern Ophir."[91] Mentioned several times in the Bible, Ophir refers to a region that was the source of King Solomon's famous wealth, especially gold (1 Kings 9:26-28, 10:11, 22:48; 1 Chron 29:4; 2 Chron 8:18; 9:10; Job 22:24; 28:16; Psalms 45:9; Isaiah 13:12).[92]

Naming Ophir provided a support for the hasty scaffolding of the infinitely adjustable biblical story about a covenanted people arriving at the Promised Land. What else could explain why Spaniards had controlled the area for hundreds of years, while "the enterprising Anglo Saxon had needed only three months" to find gold?[93] Perhaps Ophir had been occluded until Providence saw fit to reveal its hidden riches to a white and Protestant people.

> There is certainly something remarkable, something Providential in the opening of the region at the present time…Why have those gigantic forests, those herds of cattle, these rich mines…been left so long to a few

[89] James Ward, *History of Gold* written in 1852, quoted in David Goodman, *Gold Seeking: Victoria and California in 1850s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 1.

[90] Benjamin Greenleaf, *The California Almanac for 1849* (Friends of the Huntington Library: San Marino, California, 1942), 17.

[91] Peter J. Blodgett, *Land of Golden Dreams: California in the Gold Rush Decade, 1848-1858* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1999), 36; for example the column, "California the ancient Ophir," *Scientific American*, New York, Vol. 4 No. 20, (Feb. 1849), 155.

[92] The location of Ophir, long a tantalizing mystery, had been "discovered" repeatedly. The Greek astronomer-mathematician Ptolemy calculated the Ophir lay in what is today known as Pakistan; Columbus found Ophir in Haiti; nineteenth-century philologist Max Müller decided that Ophir was in India.

[93] Goodman, *Gold Seeking*, 31. It was a frequent observation that "Providence had held the gold in readiness for just the right historical moment," and just the right historical people, viz., white Protestants. See the comments cited in Goodman, *Gold Seeking*, 30-32. This idea preceded for many the actual finding of gold, as Laurie Maffly-Kipp's study of religion in frontier California points out. "Between 1796 and 1845, thousands of home mission societies, located primarily in the northeastern states, embraced the notion that the settlement of vast territories to the west played a crucial role in the divine plan of salvation." Laurie Maffly-Kipp, *Religion and Society in Frontier California* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 14. See especially chap. 2 for discussion of how Protestants engaged the concept of providence to filter and frame the discovery of gold and its effects.

> inefficient Indians and Spaniards? Does it not seem as if Providence had been keeping these regions from the attention of the great nations, until a thoroughly Protestant people could occupy them?[94]

Place naming, so often overlooked in more formal processes by which race, ethnicity, gender, class or other forms of dominance take place, illuminates the moments such hierarchies come into being. Naming Ophir – which became one of the biggest and most successful gold rush towns in California – aided in subtly but incontrovertibly framing California and its gold as reward for white Protestant dominance.

V. Flipping the Script

After the Civil War, African Americans began to take possession of land, and to name it. The names considered here showcase the challenges met and difficulties faced by African Americans during Reconstruction. By camouflaging particular meanings within well-recognized biblical signs, the inhabitants of Promised Land, South Carolina and Nicodemus, Kansas flipped the script on the dominant white Bible.

A. Promiseland, a.k.a. Promised Land, South Carolina (1870)

At first glance, Promised Land, South Carolina (or as residents call it, "Promiseland") seems to be just another small town in the Bible Belt with a recognizably biblical name, such as Faith, North Carolina; Galilee, Arkansas; Gospel Hill, Texas; Bethlehem, Florida; Saul, Kentucky; and Obadiah, Mississippi, and so on. Certainly the Promised Land would have been recognized for its play on Exodus, in which God directs Moses to free the Hebrew slaves and lead them out of bondage to Canaan, a story that Black folk had long used to call out the injustice of slavery and to frame their plight. The North was the Promised Land. Famously, Harriet Tubman, who guided runaway slaves on the Underground Railroad, was called the Moses of her people.

In fact, Promiseland, South Carolina refers instead to promises made to Black citizens of South Carolina concerning land ownership during Reconstruction. At the very end of 1863, President Lincoln authorized that some 60,000 acres of South

[94] George Shepard, *Addresses of Rev. Professor George Shepard and Rev. S.L. Caldwell, to the California pilgrims, from Bangor, Maine* (Bangor: Smith & Sayward, 1849), 4.

Carolina land be parceled into "twenty and forty acre tracts, to be sold to the heads of Negro [sic] families."[95] At the War's End, in March of 1865, Congress created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, shortened to the Freedmen's Bureau. One short month after the formation of the Freedman's Bureau, President Lincoln was shot and killed. Vice-President Andrew Johnson, who once said he "believe[d] that slaves should be in subordination and [would] live and die so believing" assumed the presidency.[96] Johnson began implementing policies that restored land to former confederate plantation owners. That was the first broken promise.

The second came by way of South Carolina Land Commission (SCLC), created to assist the beleaguered Freedmen's Bureau. The SCLC was empowered by the state to purchase land earmarked for sale to "landless blacks on favorable terms," a path-breaking program of "land distribution."[97] All white men, the SCLC quickly overspent their allotted budget, and engaged in several fraudulent deals that favored the Board's cronies. In this way, the SCLC "was early sabotaged by internal dissension, riddled with corruption, and harassed by the criticism from the Conservatives."[98] In spite of internal corruption and external pressures, the SCLC was remarkably successful. By 1876, "some 14,000 black families (about one-seventh of the state's black population)…had been settled on homesteads… a remarkable achievement no other state comes close to matching."[99] In its original mission, the SCLC aimed at more than the redistribution of land, but rather the transformation of an entire society. Many whites knew it, feared it, and fought against it. By the time the South Carolina Congress called for a review of the SCLC, too many nefarious deals had been done. By the end of the 1870s, the Democrats had regained state control; by the end of the 1880s, the SCLC was abandoned altogether.

The third broken promise occurred at the local level. Before the Civil War, Marshall told his slaves that 'if you clean two acres you get two acres; if you clean

[95] Carol K. Rothrock Bleser, *The Promised Land: The History of the South Carolina Land Commission, 1869-1890* (Columbia SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1969), 6.

[96] Douglas R. Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America's Most Progressive Era* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2014), 103.

[97] Bernard E. Powers, Jr. "South Carolina Land Commission," *South Carolina Encyclopedia*, March 17, 2018. Web. http://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/south-carolina-land-commission/.

[98] Bleser, *The Promised Land*, 47.

[99] Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper, 1988), 375.

ten acres you get ten acres.'"[100] When Marshall died, the farm came into the hands of his sons, who had no intention of honoring his promise. Eventually, the land was sold to the SCLC, sub-divided, and purchased by several families who banded together to buy the land that they had already purchased, several times over, with their labor. They named it Promiseland. Read by many as a reference to escaping bondage and fleeing the Promised Land (the North), the name cleverly uses a biblical carapace to refer to lies and broken promises.

African Americans engaged the Bible in strategic and coded ways, often flipping the script on white readings of the text. The Black residents of Promiseland further recycled a common reference in the Black biblical canon to conceal and simultaneously convey a quite pointed critique of the dominant white culture.

B. Nicodemus, Kansas (1877)

A similar strategy of encoding occurs in naming a place Nicodemus. In the years following the Homestead Act (1862), the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment (1865), thousands of newly freed slaves left the South. Many African Americans associated Kansas with the radical abolitionist John Brown and the Underground Railroad, which made it an attractive potential destination. The tide of immigration there peaked in 1879-1880 with the "Kansas Fever Exodus," and several black settlements were established during this period of mass migration, Nicodemus being one of them.[101] Founded and incorporated in the spring of 1877, Nicodemus is the sole remaining western town founded by and for African Americans at the end of Reconstruction. Its name remains something of a mystery. Most scholars and the National Park Service that oversees its administration as a historic site link the name with a legendary slave rather than the biblical character.[102] While handbills used to advertise plots in Nicodemus indeed referred to "a legendary slave" made popular in a Civil War song, "Wake Nicodemus," several life-long residents of the town have said that the town was named after the biblical Nicodemus, not the legendary slave. Why would the founders of Nicodemus name their place for a minor biblical character?

[100] Elizabeth Rauh Bethel, *Promiseland: A Century of Life in a Negro Community* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 25.

[101] There were other sizable African American settlements on Homestead Act lands such as Mound Bayou, and Boley, Oklahoma. For those in Kansas, see Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., [1977] 1992). For a representative list of scholarship on Nicodemus, see Rosamond C. Rodman, "Naming a Place Nicodemus," *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 28, No. 1 (Winter 2008), 58, n. 2.

[102] Noting the possibility that the town was named for the biblical character, most historians prefer the explanation that the name derives from a legendary slave. Rodman, "Naming a Place Nicodemus," 59-60, n16.

One reason lies in the issue of literacy. Learning to read the Bible meant that slaves could mobilize passages directly contradicting white reading selections that legitimized slavery, such as Ephesians 6:5 and 1 Peter 3:18ff. The practical allure of literacy, combined with the potentially revolutionary contents of the Bible, explains why laws were passed making literacy a criminal offense for slaves (and those who taught them).[103] As a result, slaves met clandestinely, in secret areas and at night to read the Bible.[104] In antebellum years, southern states passed myriad laws making it illegal for slaves to learn to read. Many of those laws specifically mention night, before day, or after sunset, for this was the time when many stole away to engage in learning. The effort to conceal themselves was due to reprisals they faced should they be discovered trying to learn to read. Nighttime, then, came to confer the secrecy and covert operations required of slaves seeking literacy. Nicodemus, who appears only in the Gospel of John (see John 3), comes to Jesus at night and in secret.

The appeal of Nicodemus to African Americans extends beyond his nocturnal encounter with Jesus. In their conversation, Jesus tells Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God'" (John 3:3 KJV), and "Marvel not that I said unto thee, 'Ye must be born again.'" (John 3:7 KJV).[105] The trope of "rebirth" was important to slaves because it allowed them to shed the negative and conferred identity of slave. "Blacks were anxious to be reborn," avers one scholar, "to put off their slave identities and slave names, and to find a better self, a social self truer to their internal image."[106] For these reasons, Nicodemus provided the Kansas settlers a point of identification with which to configure themselves both positively and authoritatively, flipping the script on the dominant white Bible typically used to justify their enslavement.

[103] For a list of such laws, and other statutes pertaining to literacy, see the Appendix in Heather Andrea William's *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 203-13.

[104] For more on secrecy, literacy, and religion, see "On the Secret Religious Meetings of Enslaved Persons," excerpts from the digital collection "Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938," www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/aarsecretmeetings.html.

[105] The Greek words translated into English as "born again" can also be translated as "born from above." Indeed, "born from above" is probably the more accurate of the two options, given the Gospel's binary, above/below worldview. But the King James Version, which was almost certainly the translation with which slaves and freed Blacks came into contact, renders the Greek as "born again."

[106] Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Westport: CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 101. Raboteau echoes this sentiment: "The conversion experience equipped the slave with a sense of individual value and a personal vocation which contradicted the devaluing and dehumanizing forces of slavery." Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 318.

C. Courtland, formerly Jerusalem, Virginia (1888)

Courtland is obviously not a biblical or a classical name, but it did replace one. In 1888, citizens of Jerusalem, Virginia, decided to change the name of their town to Courtland. The reason given for the change of the town's name reflects nothing of its infamy as the place of Nat Turner's arrest, trial, and execution, though it should. Just as Turner's body was dismembered and scattered so as to ward off the potential of veneration or even remembering who Nat Turner was, so also the replacement of the name Jerusalem with Courtland testifies to a concerted effort to deny any allusion between Nat Turner's death in Jerusalem and that of the death of Jesus in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, Virginia was where Nat Turner was jailed, tried, convicted and hanged in 1831 after he admitted participation in a rebellion that resulted in the deaths of scores of neighboring whites, including women and children (estimates range from 57-65). The parallel between Nat Turner's death in Jerusalem and the death of Jesus has been downplayed, not least by Thomas Gray in the fraught *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. There can be no question that Turner was familiar with the Bible. Indeed he was a practiced and skilled interpreter of the text, especially the Gospel of Luke.[107] According to *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, Turner said that one passage from the Gospel of Luke (12:31) was especially important to him: "I was struck with that particular passage which says: 'Seek ye the kingdom of Heaven and all things shall be added unto you.' I reflected much on this passage, and prayed daily for light on this subject—As I was praying one day at my plough, the spirit spoke to me, saying 'Seek ye the kingdom of Heaven and all things shall be added unto you.'"[108]

The Gospel of Luke emphasizes the importance of Jerusalem perhaps more than any other gospel. All the important events of that gospel occur there, beginning with the annunciation of the birth of John in Luke 1:11-20; continuing in the story of a young Jesus remaining at the temple in Jerusalem after his family returns to Nazareth (Luke 2:42-46), and re-emerging after the death of Jesus in Jerusalem at the end of the Gospel of Luke. Luke's second volume, the book of Acts, repeats the mandate that Jesus' mission must begin in Jerusalem, although it will extend to

[107] Eric Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1993), 59. See also M. Cooper Harriss, "WHERE IS THE VOICE COMING FROM?: Rhetoric, Religion, and Violence in "The Confessions of Nat Turner," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 89:1-2 (Spring-Summer 2006), 135-170. Cooper-Harriss argues that Eric Sundquist's elegant exposition and reclamation of Nat Turner has rightly given to Turner full agency and abilities in religio-political exegesis, insight, and activity, but has yet missed the full complexity of Turner's biblical engagement.

[108] Thomas Gray, *The Confessions of Nat Turner, the Leader of the Late Insurrection in Southampton, VA* (Baltimore: Lucas & Deaver, 1831), 9. The passage Turner refers to is Luke 12:31; it is part of the material shared by the Gospel of Matthew (6:24-34, especially 6:33) and the Gospel of Luke (12:22-32) though placed at different points in each Gospel narrative.

the "uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The literary structure of the two-volume gospel also emphasizes Jerusalem, with the first part of the Gospel relaying the early stages of Jesus's life and work (Luke 1:1-9:50) followed by a rather abrupt turn at 9:51, in which Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem." The author of Luke maintains this locative thread throughout the text, keeping the temple in Jerusalem "constantly in the background…as the only scene appropriate for such historic moments."[109] Because Nat Turner used "the Bible, in particular the prophets and the Gospel of Luke, to create a candid and detailed explanation of many aspects of the rebellion," it would be surprising if he were not aware of the reference to Jerusalem in Luke 13:33-4:

> Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! (KJV).[110]

Curiously, to the extent that Nat Turner's voice comes through authentically in *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, Turner does not explicitly say that Jerusalem was symbolically or allegorically significant in his resistance. It may be that Gray worked to downplay the connection between Turner's impending death in Jerusalem precisely because Turner "had completed the allegory: revelations, the mission to the lowly, healing the sick, baptism like that of the savior, the man reviled by his enemies, taking up the yoke, the impending trial and execution at Jerusalem."[111] Whether or not the site of Jerusalem was understood to be significant by Thomas Gray or the white authorities in Virginia, "it is beyond question that Turner himself understood the symbolic significance of his attempted destruction of the city of 'abominations' and 'perverseness.'"[112] If the timing of the revolt, originally planned for the fourth of July, should be assigned "utmost significance," so too should the rebellion's spatial orientation.[113]

Nat Turner was executed by hanging in Jerusalem in November of 1831. In 1888, the name of Jerusalem was changed to Courtland. The reigning explanation for this sudden change of name is that it resulted from the newly established

[109] Burton Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament: The Making of the Christian Myth* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 171.

[110] Anthony Santoro, "The Prophet in His Own Words: Nat Turner's Biblical Construction," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 116:2 (2008), 116.

[111] David Allmendinger, Jr., *Nat Turner and the Rising in Southampton County* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 21.

[112] Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*, 73.

[113] Ibid., 65.

Atlantic and Danville railway operating between Virginia and North Carolina. The route allowed residents of Southampton County to travel to Norfolk, Virginia easily. Norfolk was a much bigger town and afforded more mercantile venues. As the story goes, when folks from Southampton Country got to town, "people would say 'here come those Arabs from Jerusalem.'" The residents reportedly bristled at this characterization and the Jerusalem postmistress, Fannie Barnett, petitioned for a new name. She apparently chose Courtland owing its landmark courthouse, the scene of Turner's trial.[114]

This explanation lacks credibility. How were Norfolk residents to know which of the train's disembarking passengers had originated in Jerusalem in order to cast the racialized aspersion of "Arab" on them specifically? The timing of the name change also raises doubts, coming as it did on the heels of Reconstruction and after a resurgence of interest in and praise for Nat Turner.[115] More likely is that during a national period of heritage building, re-historicizing and erecting commemorative statues, taking away the name Jerusalem would also take away the potential to read Nat Turner as a martyr, a prophet, a hero who, like Jesus, was killed in Jerusalem.

Nat Turner has no grave. The courthouse in which the trial took place has been razed and rebuilt; the tree from which he was hanged cut down. These removals, alongside that of destroying, desecrating and scattering Turner's remains, were meant to erase the revolt, and Nat Turner, from memory. Re-naming Courtland meant that even if Nat Turner was remembered, he could not be said to have died in Jerusalem at the hands of the state.

VI. Conclusion

The United States, unique among nations, features thousands of biblical and classical toponyms. Each one marks "where power is in the world."[116] Neither quaint commemorative biblicisms, nor mere remnants of colonial conquest,

[114] This explanation was offered by Southampton County Historical Society President Lynda Updike and Vice President Kitty Futrell in "You Asked: Jerusalem renamed Courtland in 1888 due to railroad completion," *The Tidewater News*, June 16, 2012. Historian Daniel Crofts offers a similar explanation: "Courtland…was known until the late nineteenth-century as Jerusalem. Local boosters, tired of gibes about the Arabs from Jerusalem, engineered the change of name." Crofts, *Old Southampton*, 1.

[115] Laudatory treatments of Nat Turner may be found in William Wells Brown, *My Southern Home*: or, *The South and Its People*, NP, 1880, 243-4, in *Great Lives Observed: Nat Turner*, ed. Eric Foner, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1971), 144-5; George W. Williams, *History of the Negro Race in America From 1619 to 1880, Vol. 2* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1883), 91-92; and William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising* (Cleveland: Geo. M. Rewell & Co., 1887), 1039.

[116] Vincent L. Wimbush, "Introduction: Scriptures and Transgression," in *Refractions of the Scriptural: Critical Orientation as Transgression*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Routledge, 2016), 8.

biblical and classical toponyms instead reveal the complex and often violent negotiations of a colonial settler and white supremacist nation. Hiding in plain sight, they go unnoticed for the most part, reflecting what Pierre Bourdieu argued lies at the heart of language and symbolic power: language can reveal and conceal, and "presupposes recognition, that is, misrecognition of the violence that is exercised through it."[117] These place names make white supremacy appear rational if not in fact fated while using a mode of expression that suggests "it is not being spoken."[118] That is what, to twist Tertullian's rhetorical question about, Athens (Georgia) has to do with Jerusalem (Virginia).

[117] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. by John Thompson, trans. by Gino Raymond (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 209.

[118] Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 143.

ROUNDTABLE: THE INSTITUTE FOR SIGNIFYING SCRIPTURES AND BIBLICAL STUDIES

Interrogating one articulation of the scriptural—Biblical Studies, in this instance—the text below is an email conversation conducted in September of 2018 among four transgressive scholars: Susanne Scholz, Timothy Sandoval, Francisco Lozada Jr., and Tat-siong Benny Liew; and ISS director Vincent L. Wimbush. The conversation assesses the pitfalls, obstacles, and possibilities for the ISS research agenda intersecting with an academic discipline.

–QUESTION 1: Can ISS as an intellectual-political project and orientation and modern academic biblical studies be made compatible and complementary?

Susanne Scholz

I love studying fetishized texts like the Hebrew Bible and agree with the meta-level, theoretically framed agenda and goals of ISS. Is there anything more satisfying than "serious and nuanced thinking and conversation about the import and uses of center-culturalist-traditional canonical forms and structures and their politics"?[1] Accordingly, my own research is not as much interested in inventing new biblical meanings as in understanding "the meaning of the pursuit of meaning," as you put it in the longer version of your question. I thus started out examining how scholarly interpretations of biblical rape texts correlated with the discourses on rape as evidenced in other academic texts.[2] In my view, issues of sexuality and gender, in their intersectional manifestations, offer particularly valuable insights into the construction of biblical meanings that do not simply reside in the biblical texts but are culturally specific, translated, and ideological like any other meanings. In my courses I teach students three hermeneutical principles to help them wrap their minds around the constructedness of all meanings, including biblical ones. The first hermeneutical principle is: "All (sacred) texts are inherently flexible, ambiguous, and elastic." The second hermeneutical principle is: "Every translation

[1] Vincent L. Wimbush, "Introduction: Scripturalizing: Analytical Wedge for a Critical History of the Human," in *Scripturalizing the Human: The Written as the Political*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (New York/London: Routledge, 2015), 3.

[2] See, e.g., Susanne Scholz, *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010); Rape Plots: *A Feminist-Cultural Study of Genesis 34* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000).

is an interpretation." The third principle is: "Readers, grounded in their social locations (not individually defined), create (biblical) meanings."[3]

With the help of these three hermeneutical principles, students start reading the Bible "as a cross-cultural complex social-historical phenomenon," as you put it so succinctly in 2015.[4] To move the minds of biblical readers beyond a "literalist-fundamentalist apologetics" and beyond "the barrage of harrumphing scientistic-secularist dismissals and ignorant assumptions"[5] is very hard work. Most people assume that they are on solid, unmovable, and unchanging ground when they read the "eternal word of God." The request to demystify, denaturalize, de-authorize, uncover, and politicize scriptural authority and power challenges most ordinary and scholarly readers, especially when they stand within committed religious contexts. They do not want to excavate their scriptures, resisting with all their might the effort of having their assumed private interpretations exposed as public declarations and their assumed nonpolitical readings shown to be political assertions of usually questionable positioning. The teaching of scriptures as inherent to human-identity constructions is thus fraught with difficulties, coming from the readers themselves but also from within the institutional settings in which biblical studies are fostered.

In short, the general framework as outlined by ISS fits my work and teaching goals, but I find it a rather lonely and cumbersome path. The obstacles are everywhere, and I would like to highlight two of them, as I currently experience them. One obstacle has to do with the institutional accreditation standards, as ATS prescribes them. They are getting more and more "Stalinist," i.e. neoliberal, technocratic, and corporate driven in their mindless rhetoric and presumably evidence-based demands. They force my colleagues and me into standardized language that must appear on our individual syllabi and assessment rubrics. This language pretends to be neutral, objective, and non-intrusive but its assumptions cannot be interrogated or modified because otherwise the status of accreditation is threatened. Since my colleagues are far removed from considering anything resembling the scripturalizing framework, the conceptual battles to articulate scripturalizing pedagogical goals in our collectively approved accreditation materials are relentless and unwinnable.

[3] For an elaboration on my hermeneutical position, see, e.g., "'Tell Me How You Read This Story and I Will Tell You Who You Are: Post-Postmodernity, Radicant Exegesis, and a Feminist Sociology of Biblical Hermeneutics," chap. in *The Bible as Political Artifact: On the Feminist Study of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 167-190; "How to Read the Bible in the Belly of the Beast: About the Politics of Biblical Hermeneutics Within the U.S.A.," in *La Violencia and the People's Life: Politics, Culture, and the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Susanne Scholz and Pablo Andiñach (Semeia Studies; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2016), 137-162.

[4] Wimbush, "Introduction," 9.

[5] Ibid., 3.

Thus, my biggest concern with the question, whether "ISS as an intellectual-political project and orientation" might be "compatible and complementary" with academic biblical studies, relates to the issue of power in contemporary institutional academic settings like mine. The accreditation issue is one obstacle, but the other obstacle seems even mightier and more threatening to the project of "deep (collective) self-excavation,"[6] which you define as "the trans-disciplinary (more self-) critical comparative history of the practices and politics that we call here scripturalizing the human."[7] This second obstacle is the emerging fetishization of data in contemporary institutions of higher learning. The quest for information in digital form (i.e. data) has definitely superseded the quest for (historical) origins. In fact, I want to assert that digital data are the new scriptures of our time. My own university just poured several million dollars into data-analytics teaching and research programs because so much money is to be made with them. Students flock to data-analytics courses, willing and able to pay enormous amounts of tuition dollars, probably paid by marketing and technology firms seeking to know more about their customers listed in their digital databases ready to be exploited for financial gain and fame. Cash is King, or perhaps even God, and I do not think that "goddess" would have the same cachet in this present kyriarchal game of data thrones.

The problem is that little or no money can be made with our collective efforts of understanding scriptures as humans and humans as scriptures, even if we defined either one of them as data. After all, our academic audiences are not usually part of the moneyed class.

My point is this: When the academic study of the Bible was invented five-hundred years ago, the financial and geopolitical incentive to study the Bible with academic rigor was great. It endorsed and supported the growing independence of the moneyed class from ecclesial control and power. Nowadays, however, the one-percenters do not care for intellectual independence as a symbol of financial and geopolitical power and control. In fact, I am witnessing some of my colleagues in the English department trying to adapt their field into the "digital humanities" so that the academic study of literature might survive the move towards digital data collection, classification, and analysis. I just received the following digital invitation to a digital humanities lecture that states: "We invite you to join us for the first of a series of discussions about the role of digital technology across the disciplines. We ask fundamental questions about what counts. How do different disciplines

[6] Ibid., 17.

[7] Ibid., 12.

conceive of data? How do they produce it? How do they work with it?"[8] Literature as data, the Bible as data, Scripturalization as data. Shall we join the data quest?

In sum, two main obstacles that relate to institutional accreditation requirements and the neoliberal move toward data analytics present serious impediments for any kind of critical-thinking and critical-analysis project that values the "human" more than data, streamlined standards, and money. Here I see serious challenges for our collective goals when we conceptualize the academic study of the bible not only as an intellectual-political project, as envisioned by ISS, but also face the institutional pressures from the profit driven, market and consumer oriented, commercialized, and neocolonial forces of domination in our globalized world, including in our academic institutions of higher learning.

Timothy J. Sandoval

Vincent Wimbush has suggested that critical biblical studies asks "what is the meaning of this or that text or situation behind the text" and ISS asks "what is the meaning and import/politics/social-psychologies/performativity, etc., of pursuit of the 'text'—of the scriptural/discourse/media, etc." (Wimbush, personal communication, 09-12-18). If Wimbush is correct, it is likely the case that the two projects are not, and will not be, fully "compatible" in the sense that they can exist side by side without conflict, at least for *many* biblical scholars and perhaps also for those whose intellectual orientations are more closely aligned with the ISS project. Wimbush's description of the *status quo* as it were, in large part seems correct to me and thus an easy compatibility of the biblical studies project and the ISS project in part seems ruled out from the outset. Certain biblical scholars will not wish to acknowledge the legitimacy of the ISS project, at least not as a form of 'biblical studies,' though it may indeed for them represent some other sort of intellectual project. On the surface of it, and without further elaboration, Wimbush's formulation of matters seems also to intimate that from an ISS perspective there may not be much, if anything, in the usual concerns and pursuits of biblical studies that is compatible with ISS concerns.

If one turns to the question of complementary between the ISS project and biblical studies, the answer will only be somewhat different; if by complementary we mean that the work of the one area will substantively impact work in the other. Most broadly, the critical skills, modes of argumentation, and so forth of one

[8] Internal SMU email correspondence sent to me by the "Digital Technology Forum" on September 16, 2018.

discipline should in principle be broadly transferable to the other. For example, a text critic of the Hebrew Bible strives to make clear and cogent arguments about the best (if not original) readings of biblical texts by providing compelling evidence logically presented and by drawing critically on the best and most compelling work of other scholars. The most intellectually astute text critics also ask critical questions about the conceptualization of their own discipline, its presuppositions, the ends it serves, and so forth. It strikes me that these sorts of intellectual practices developed by scholars whose concerns are primarily directed to traditional and emerging questions about the Bible are not too dissimilar to those intellectuals whose interests are better expressed by the concerns of ISS. The critical nature of the two projects is not so divergent that the critical skills developed in one area would not be largely transferable to the other project.

Some 'big tent' understanding of the discipline of biblical studies may thus certainly have a place for the sort of project pursued by ISS. Such an understanding of biblical studies would insist biblical critics can and ought, at least at some level, be concerned for the way the interpretation of the Bible (the usual concern of biblical critics) has funded the process of scripturalizing, the concerns of ISS. Of course, the ISS project is broader than this and is not limited by questions of how interpretation of the Bible is related to scripturalizing and scripturalization.

Francisco Lozada, Jr.

To be honest, I am a bit ambivalent if the ISS project and academic biblical studies can be made compatible and complementary. One reason why I am ambivalent has to do with the authority or sacredness of the text. The academic biblical studies orientation, though often unsaid or avoided, still works with the text as authoritative (whatever this might mean to folks) in some capacity or another. I realize that the ISS project is not coming to "text" or "scripture" in the same way as academic biblical studies folks might do. The academic perspective sees text—in my opinion—in a static fashion. The ISS project—as I see it—sees text in a dynamic fashion—always moving and always creating meaning hence the language of "scripturalizing" (I think). For compatibility between academic biblical studies and the ISS project, academic biblical studies would need to move beyond a static understanding of text. Both fields (academic biblical studies [some folks] and scripturalization) participate in a process of de-sacredlizing, but I do see both re-sacredizing.

Another reason why I am ambivalent has to do with the scope of the ISS project of scripturalizing. On the one hand, I see some similarities and on the other some differences. With regard to a similarity, both academic biblical studies and scripturalizing are in the process of creating meaning. For instance, as I talked about in February 2018 at the ISS Annual Meeting when I read the "wall" (US/Mexico fence) as a text, I am envisioning this as scripturalizing. I am in the process of meaning-making. With regard to a difference, the object of study is different. I am not dealing with the bible and all that is traditionally associated with this word, I am dealing with a "wall" that does not have the same sense of the bible as sacred (though I understand this could be debated) as the wall does. Again, though, the "wall" is employed as "scripture" to define people and create different worlds. In so doing, I see this as scripturalizing.

One other reason why I might be ambivalent is because the approaches used by contemporary academic biblical studies and scripturalization are similar in approaches for the most part. Both take a cultural turn (politics, literature, film, music, etc.) and both take a global turn (nation-state aspects like the wall) when engaging the bible and/or when studying a "text" out there. Also, both fields (contemporary academic biblical studies and scripturalization) also take an interdisciplinary turn in engaging ethnic/racial formations, gender and sexuality formations, and economic and class formations. When looked at the question of approaches, academic biblical studies and scripturalization appear to be compatible, but when closely examined I see areas where they cannot be made compatible. One can borrow the same tools to analyze texts or intellectual-political projects, but I am not sure if the tools will lead to the same results. This is why I am ambivalent and would need to give it more thought.

In short, I am not sure if these thoughts are helpful. I know I am not addressing the question directly, but there are moments where I see the two areas (academic biblical studies and scripturalization) as compatible, but there are times when I see the development of scripturalization wanting to make a total separation and thus, if so, incompatible. On this latter point, I need to think more about this.

Tat-siong Benny Liew

I don't see why the ISS project and programs cannot be compatible with modern academic biblical studies, because modern academic biblical studies is already diverse and heterogeneous. Biblical scholars have done and are doing disparate things through biblical studies; this field has been developed and pushed

in different directions and is hardly monolithic. Especially in the last three decades, biblical scholars have increasingly been engaging in interdisciplinary work. In sum, many biblical scholars are not allergic or resistant to conversations or even collaborations with scholars for whom the Bible is not their primary scholarly expertise and interests. While some biblical scholars may embrace disciplinary purity or insist on disciplinary hygiene, not everyone does.

In my opinion, scholars in academic biblical studies can do all kinds of things, as long as those pursuits have something to do with the Bible. (One can say, for instance, that biblical studies in the hands of some historical-critical scholars of the Bible, the real concern is *not always* the meaning of a biblical text.) Biblical scholars can ask questions about the meaning of a biblical text, but we can also ask *why* we are reading the Bible in general and reading particular biblical texts in particular. Would this latter question not be similar to ISS's question regarding the meaning of the pursuit of a text?

Clearly, ISS scholars research various dynamics in social formation with all kinds of texts (and not just or necessarily the Bible); when the text in question is the Bible, however, there is no reason why, at least on a theoretical and conceptual level, ISS projects and academic biblical studies cannot be compatible or even complementary. If I may use an analogy, even if ISS positions itself as a kind of non-canonical or "gnostic" practice that challenges institutionalized biblical studies within the academy, we know that non-canonical or "gnostic" texts are also read and studied by card-carrying biblical scholars.

–QUESTION 2: In re: biblical studies, conceding for the moment the arguments and assumptions (held by some) about its current big tent or large and diverse formation and politics, can it be made to advance or reflect a 21st century progressive politics or critical studies agenda? If so/not so, please explain why.

Scholz

Yes, of course. The question is by *whom* biblical studies can "be made to advance or reflect a twenty-first century progressive politics or critical studies agenda." Your question does not specify the subject as it uses the passive voice. This grammatical detail presents an interesting opening for my response. If I consider myself the subject of your question, I am confident enough to say that in all of my published books, essays, reviews, and miscellaneous writings as well as in my

teaching I aim to reflect, articulate, and advance, progressive politics and a critical studies agenda in biblical studies. My goal is not to produce *l'art pour l'art*, but to make ethical-political arguments in support of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation, as the mission statement of the World Council of Church said it so well at the World Convocation in Seoul, Korea, in 1990. As a post-Holocaust, diasporic German, US-"naturalized" feminist Hebrew Bible scholar, I am placing myself into a proud politically progressive tradition in biblical studies. In Germany, my most important master-level theological teachers were connected by lineage to the *Bekennende Kirche* (Confessing Church) of the Nazi area; they were or are the children and children's children of those Protestant theologians and Bible scholars who resisted fascism in Germany during the 1930s and 1940s. Among them are Luise Schottroff, Willy Schottroff, and Dorothee Sölle. During my master-level and graduate work in the United States, I studied with feminist and womanist theologians, all of whom pursued a theo-politically progressive agenda. Among them were foremost Phyllis Trible, Beverley W. Harrison, and Delores S. Williams. I could add many others, but my point is that we pursue our agenda in terms of advancing a twenty-first century progressive politics and critical studies agenda, but usually we pay a price for it. If we do not get intimidated too much or are not cut loose altogether, it is possible to keep going.

In my view, the serious problems begin on the institutional level because in the current neoliberal, technocratic, data- and corporate-driven academic climate any politically progressive and critical studies agenda encounters serious challenges. I sense tremendous fear among faculty, staff, and students to resist the mind-numbing demands of accreditation bureaucracy, increased enrollment struggles, and general dumbing-down tendencies to please prospective learners, donors, and visitors alike. I have thought deeply about these challenges in one of my essays entitled "Occupy Academic Bible Teaching: The Architecture of Educational Power and the Biblical Studies Curriculum."[9] There I am talking specifically about the external forces in institutions of higher education that discourage a politically progressive redesign of the biblical studies curriculum, but my argument applies beyond teaching within the field of biblical studies. The considerable pressures of the neoliberal agenda that currently combine with nationalist-proto-fascist forces have been gaining strength in the twenty-first century. The notion that universities, and scholarship produced in such institutions, are obliged to please corporate interests and powers tempts scholars in the field of biblical studies (as well as in other academic disciplines) to turn right ideologically or to risk moving into oblivion.

[9] Susanne Scholz, "Occupy Academic Bible Teaching: The Architecture of Educational Power and the Biblical Studies Curriculum," chap. in *The Bible as Political Artifact: The Feminist Study of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 29-48.

The issue of degree marketability and what its absence means further challenges a politically progressive vision of biblical studies. The external and economic forces that inhibit the transformation of biblical studies into a politically progressive field of study are thus considerable, and so I ask in my essay:

> Is it not the case that powerful external forces have sidelined those academic disciplines that do not directly advance neoliberal and money-driven goals, and thus curricular practices in biblical studies—and in the humanities in general—attempt to preserve at least the status quo? At worst, are these external forces not steadily nibbling away at any curricular ambition to offer a thriving humanities curriculum, including biblical studies, and to develop in students "critical thinking, dialogue, and those values that engage matters of social responsibility and civic engagement?"[10]

This is a dire diagnosis. So what shall we do in this kind of situation?

In my view, those of us who aim to articulate biblical studies as a politically progressive and a critical studies enterprise need to keep doing just that. Perhaps Nike is onto something with its slogan: "Just do it!" I for one have made it a habit to invite my politically progressive and critical studies colleagues to participate and build networks of collaboration that nurture and develop alternative visions, parameters, and programs for reading (biblical) texts in the twenty-first century. For instance, I wish to invite you to consider sending in book proposals for a newly established book series that I am co-editing with a colleague in the field of Jewish Studies. Our series is called "Dispatches from the New Diaspora" and published by Roman & Littlefield (https://rowman.com/Action/SERIES/LEX/LFADND#). In this still early period of the twenty-first century, we encourage thinkers in biblical studies and other fields to "describe the intellectual's posture as an 'exile' from established and dominant communities of religious and political orthodoxy." We are looking for colleagues who are open "to highlight the practices of inquiry and solidarity across boundaries that constitute the critical work of scholarship in biblical, theological, and religious studies disciplines." And as we are certainly all experts of deconstructing "power" in our intellectual work, our "series also seeks to describe and present the positive practices that are already establishing a new and more humane social reality." Consider yourselves invited to submit proposals so that the network of politically progressive scholars in text (biblical) studies expands, deepens, and thickens at a time of serious threats to all life on planet earth. Step by step we build a politically progressive and critical studies agenda so

[10] Ibid., 33.

that in time academic (biblical) studies demonstrates that other ways of thinking, living, and being are possible and desirable.

Sandoval

Aspects of biblical studies should be able to advance and reflect a twenty-first century progressive politics and critical studies agenda. It seems to me that there is already evidence that some biblical scholars, who still work from some identity as a biblical scholar are pursuing this—including I would assume (perhaps incorrectly) some involved in this exchange of questions and answers. It likely will not be the case that biblical studies as a whole will soon be so characterized, but I would not anticipate a withdrawal from such endeavors from those whose work already reflects a progressive politics and aspects of a critical studies agenda. I would assume too that others who come to the study of the Bible will similarly engage study of the Bible, the effects of its readings, etc. (i.e., biblical studies as a large and diverse formation) in such a way. I believe this to be the case since the work of biblical scholars is not unrelated to the range of social, political, intellectual, and religious identities and institutions that they inhabit. Some, though not all, biblical scholars will be working in and out of progressive identities and institutions.

Lozada Jr.

I do think that biblical studies can be made to advance or reflect a twenty-first century progressive politics or critical studies agenda provided that the question of biblical authority is re-understood or abolished.

Many, including myself, have been formed in the biblical tradition as one of the root causes that led to a progressive politics or critical studies agenda. But in thinking about it some more, I really never considered the biblical tradition as authority—at least as how it has been traditionally conceived. The biblical tradition was more inspirational in that it charged one (at least for me) to think about one's social condition as well as the global condition. However, I am not sure society or biblical studies is ready to re-conceive the status of the biblical tradition. This re-conceptualization is necessary to enter into a sustained progressive politics. If not, biblical studies will simply stay as is. Biblical authority as is traditionally conceived allows practitioners to keep their jobs.

Liew

For me, biblical studies undoubtedly *can* advance or reflect a progressive politics or critical studies agenda, as long as we understand the distinction between *can* and *will*. That is to say, while no one can guarantee the influence or developments of biblical studies, no one can—or should—foreclose or prematurely deny its potential impact or future directions.

To steer biblical studies toward a progressive politics or a critical studies agenda, one will, first of all, need to grasp and, if and when necessary, work against the ideology of biblical studies as a field. Let me simply highlight one significant factor that merits our attention: the professionalization of biblical studies as a discipline. I am, of course, not denying the advantages and benefits that come with professionalization, but professionalization, unfortunately, also often leads to an emphasis on specialization and atomization in ways that separate biblical critics from other scholars and biblical scholarship from larger sociopolitical concerns. Professionalization, in other words, comes with what Foucault calls "disciplinary power" and a certain "regime of truth" that regularly function to limit research scope and agenda. Professionalization further means that critics will generally need not only the guild but also an institution of higher learning for certification, credibility, and financial support. This need or even dependence can also discourage biblical critics from becoming too subversive, given the desire for respectability and stability on the part of the guild and of most institutions. If we are to move biblical studies toward a more progressive politics or a more critical agenda, we will need to dis-close—in the doubled sense of exposing and opening up—this and other invisible frameworks that are operating in the field.

Having said that, it will be wrong for me not to acknowledge some of the changes that have taken place in the field of biblical studies. With the rise of reading practices that are explicitly and unapologetically contextual, biblical studies is now less Eurocentric than before. Various camps of ideological critics have also given voice to more and more underrepresented groups and disadvantaged communities. Similarly, many in the field have come to realize that scholarship on the Bible is inseparable from but not reducible to history, and that history includes what happened in the past as well as what is going on in the present. As a result, biblical studies has become more diverse, more dialogical, and more interdisciplinary. Saying this is, of course, not the same as saying that biblical studies has arrived in terms of a progressive or critical agenda; it is only showing that biblical studies can change, has changed, and has achieved some important progressive or critical agenda items.

I am also of the opinion that, generally, reading done well can allow a person to try on alternating identities by putting oneself in the shoes of various characters and authors; it has the potential, therefore, to open a reader to different perspectives and different realities and hence to rethink one's political and critical commitments. This is arguably even more so in the case of the Bible, given its political content and, in the case of the U.S., its cultural capital in society. One should remember that many of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament prophets had access to political leaders of their time, and hence were playing roles similar to those occupied by political advisors to presidents and rulers today. In the New Testament, Jesus was executed by the state and early church congregations were similar to political assemblies of the Hellenistic periods where members and participants negotiated not only issues but also power. The Bible also addresses and accounts for all kinds of human struggles that are still going on today, such as exclusion, exile, migration, and violence. This does not mean that one should approach the Bible always with a hermeneutic of affirmation, but that through careful and close reading of the Bible—including doing so with a hermeneutic of critique, suspicion, and resistance—one has the *potential* to better understand and better contribute to causes of freedom and pluralism.

Yes, I am suggesting that reading and asking about the meaning of a biblical text, as many biblical scholars do, *can* or has the *potential* to help push for a progressive or critical agenda. At the same time, I am not implying that reading the Bible for meaning and doing this better as biblical scholars will be all we need. To further this agenda, biblical studies as a field will need to keep on enlarging its frameworks, providing more and greater alternatives, and challenging reductionistic tendencies within the field, so the public will learn that there are different authors and viewpoints within the Bible, that there are multiple ways to interpret the same biblical text, that the Bible's content has not been set in stone, and that there are all kinds of scholarly endeavors to engage the Bible (including those scripturalizing projects that are being pursued at ISS). While there are surely a lot that we can appreciate and affirm in what we find in the Bible and what we have learned to do in biblical studies, we must at the same time approach both the Bible and the field of biblical studies with a similar hermeneutic of critique, suspicion, and resistance. We need to, for instance, do better in what Vincent Wimbush calls "talkin' 'bout something": namely, something immanent, this-worldly, relevant, such as human suffering and social oppression. And we may pursue what Edward

Said calls "amateurism" by not being afraid to learn new tricks and try new things, even or especially with the increasing impulse and pressure towards professionalization. The keyword for me here is "openness": biblical scholars must be open to not only accepting new disciplinary directions but also rejecting old disciplinary habits.

Perhaps I am mistaken, but this question about progressive or critical agenda strikes me as one related to an "anxiety of influence." While this phrase has been made popular in literary circles by Harold Bloom, it does not mean that authors inevitably feel the need to break out of their predecessors' long shadow. I am instead thinking of the concern or the uncertainty that many of us feel as biblical scholars: does our work in biblical studies really make any difference in this world?

In one particular commencement service during my nine years as a faculty member of Chicago Theological Seminary, Ken Stone—my Hebrew Bible/Old Testament colleague at the time—gave the charge to the graduating class. Referring to the Book of Esther (particularly how Mordecai, despite his limited access to the Persian ruling class, is able to foil a genocidal attempt against him and his Jewish community by working with and working through Esther, who, unlike Mordecai, has access to the Persian King), Ken talked about how this canonical book that does not even mention God showed him how he might have an unexpected and possibly greater influence through his seminary teaching. As a seminary professor, Ken might even have influence among people and populations to whom he has no access and with whom he has no connection because of and through his students. There are multiple publics; even if my own reach is somewhat confined, there is still the possibility of a greater impact through my narrow network simply because contacts within my narrow network have their own network or circle of influence.

Of course, in this digital age, biblical scholars like myself are no longer in full control over the circulation of our research and publications. While this lack of control is admittedly threatening in a way, it also signifies that our work may well reach a larger audience than we expect. We certainly do not want to overestimate our own influence and importance as biblical scholars, but we also should not underestimate the potential impact of our work. I return therefore to where I started: while no one can guarantee the influence or developments of biblical studies, no one can—or should—foreclose or prematurely deny its potential impact or future directions.

–QUESTION 3: Given the European and North American and European modern origins and development of biblical studies as a gendered (male), racialized (white), and clerical-/religion-inflected, even a religion-practicing and mono-cultural field (notwithstanding breakouts here and there), certain assumptions, concepts, orientations, gestures, and practices have been and remain for the field over-determining and delimiting. What are some of these over-determinations and delimitations as lingering problems and challenges? What cautionary measures or corrections are warranted?

Scholz

Since I am responding to these questions, including Question #3, while spending a couple of weeks at the Ēcole biblique in Jerusalem, I cannot help asserting that the modern European and North American origins of biblical studies as a gendered, racialized, and clerical-/religion-infected enterprise show no sign of demise. This is true for Israeli archaeological endeavors as well, as they seem to enjoy extraordinary and increasing backing from Christian and Jewish fundamentalist followers. During my current Jerusalem visit, I have seen this kind of support particularly openly expressed at Tel Shilo on the West Bank and the City of David archaeological site in Jerusalem, but it also finds unblemished expression in the curriculum of the Ēcole biblique, to name just one example. In fact, the website of the Ēcole biblique acknowledges candidly that "[t]he founding purpose of the École biblique was to renew biblical studies at a time when modern criticism (history, philology, etc.) was challenging the traditional understanding of the sacred text and unsettling the faith of many Christians" (http://www.ebaf.edu/ecole-biblique/the-ecole-biblique-et-archeologique-today/), and, in fact, the founding father of the École biblique, the Dominican Marie-Joseph Lagrange (1855-1938) was given an order of silence by the Vatican because of his work in historical criticism (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie-Joseph_Lagrange). Yet today the École biblique has not yet updated its challenge to contemporary faith-readings of the Bible although the twenty-first century setting of "modern criticism" has changed quite significantly from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century expectations characterized so significantly by the heydays of Western-European colonialism. After all, the École biblique was founded as a French academic establishment in 1890 by the Dominican Order, and to this day the school "welcomes students with the pontifical license in biblical studies who desire to prepare for a doctoral degree (SSD)" and "also receives students at masters level, who wish to specialize in

archaeology or the history and geography of the Near East" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89cole_Biblique).

Of course, the École biblique is not the only academic institution in Jerusalem that fosters the Western-European modern notion of biblical studies as a linguistic, archaeological, and historical-critical enterprise. The W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research (AIAR) in East Jerusalem also follows this paradigm, as articulated in its mission statement: "The mission of the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research is to develop and disseminate scholarly knowledge of the literature, history, and culture of the Near East, as well as the study of the development of civilization from prehistory to the early Islamic period" (http://www.aiar.org/mission-and-history/). During my Jerusalem visit, I also checked out the Bible Department at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and predictably it too prides itself for its linguistic, archaeological, and historical framework, as stated on the departmental website:

> The Bible Department at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem is among the leading departments in the world for research in the Hebrew Bible. The Department accepts students at the undergraduate, graduate and doctoral levels. Research and teaching conducted at the Department represent a wide range of specialties and interests, including linguistic, historical, comparative and literary analysis of the Hebrew Bible, integrating the study of premodern exegesis and recent methods of inquiry. The Department integrates research in the areas of the history of Israel in Antiquity, Semitic languages, ancient Near Eastern cultures and literatures, religious studies and archaeology with critical research of the formation, development, composition and transmission of the texts comprising the Hebrew Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the ancient translations. (https://en.bible.huji.ac.il/book/bible-department).

I am only mentioning these few examples because I just enjoyed three weeks of research at one of those schools. It made me realize again that the kind of biblical-hermeneutical scholarship that the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) has welcomed during the past thirty years or so is indeed largely absent at the moment I am leaving my "safe" hermeneutical bubble in the United States. Thus, I am sure that many other scholarly organizations in biblical studies could be named from across the world to further illustrate my point that the modern European and North American "over-determinations and delimitations" do not only represent "lingering" challenges to those of us interested in moving the field into a post-postmodern future, but that those "over-determinations and

delimitations" remain firmly and securely established in institutional and religious frameworks all over the world. The modern colonizing infrastructures do not disappear all that easily because they still provide considerable institutional, religious, and academic legitimacy and authority that the scripturalizing framework simply does not (yet) offer.

How to deal with this situation, or to use the question's terminology: "What cautionary measures or corrections are warranted?" Perhaps I would have been more hopeful before my stay at the Ēcole biblique, but I just do not see how those of us coming from the scripturalizing corner of biblical studies can do much about the dominating framework that these kinds of institutions uphold. We won't "blend" in those institutions, and the "authorities" that keep things aligned with the modern origins and the development of biblical studies as a linguistic, archaeological, and historical enterprise won't be cajoled or charmed into opening up to the critical analysis of biblical interpretation as a political, cultural, or sociological enterprise about the world and its power plays. This is not only a generational hurdle that can be waited out. In my experience, young and old adherents of the modern framework collaborate to keep things the way they are. So there is little hope that things might simply get better by waiting for the postpostmodern future. Something more is needed, but it won't just happen inside the institutions that were founded to advance biblical studies as an academic enterprise aligned with the modern political, economic, and social forces so successfully built on Western colonial hegemony of the past five-hundred years.

Sandoval

In my view there are two primary, related, and ongoing determining and delimiting aspects of biblical studies. These, however, are evolving because of the changing shape of the institutions with which they are linked. The first aspect is mentioned in question four, namely the ongoing concern with the meaning of texts, something that is related fundamentally, I think, to biblical studies' relationship to especially Christian religious communities that continue to be concerned, if not with *the* meaning of the biblical texts, then with their possible *meanings*. The second, related, determining aspect of biblical studies is precisely its ongoing relationship with religious communities. Here I only allude to the US Christian landscape, as I know other formations even less well than the diverse Christian formations. Biblical studies, as is intimated in the question, in its foundation was, and in its ongoing existence is, deeply implicated with Christian religious communities. In the U.S. at least, the steep decline of mainline protestant

religious formations, especially in their liberal to progressive forms, I suspect will mean something significant for the possible changing shape of biblical studies. The protestant institutions in which many biblical scholars were shaped, formed, employed, trained others, and so forth are not merely changing but disappearing (along with mainline liberal church membership). In some ways, then, the biblical scholar as "he" (usually) has existed is disappearing. I am not yet clear what is taking "his" place; but it strikes me that biblical studies may be in a transition stage. It in (large?) part appears that what is coming next is simply just another incarnation of the biblical scholar concerned largely with textual, historical, and theological meaning—trained as this person will have been in that form of biblical studies that has long been prominent (and in the U.S. largely, though not only, associated with Christian denominations). However, these new biblical scholars will be less and less individuals tied in some fashion to mainline, liberal to progressive, protestant institutional forms. They will be related to more conservative and evangelical streams of the protestant denominations and from institutionally established independent evangelical churches. I do not know, but if such a shift is underway, it may mean that the 'biblical studies' that scholars linked to these institutions will inherit will eventually be shaped in a quite different way than the 'guild' currently is formed. This might mean that the 'big tent' will again shrink and that intellectuals of a politically progressive bent who are concerned with the mechanisms and effects of biblical interpretation in different contexts, its regimes of truth, as well as the broader sorts of questions ISS foregrounds, etc., will find their homes less there, in biblical studies (where there is currently in the U.S., I think, still space for them), but in other institutional formations such as ISS.

Lozada Jr.

The approach to biblical studies remains couched in a "scientific" way of constructing knowledge. This is most obvious with socio-historical approaches, but it is also visible in "post-modern" approaches as well. It is important to understand "understanding" in a different way that is not based on a "Western" epistemological system. This is key for me.

Liew

I think my response to the first question has already pointed to what I think about this question. My emphasis on professionalization points to the need to understand biblical studies as an institution, and institution is about institutionalizing—that is to say, regularizing and normalizing—its members. Biblical

studies as an institution is inseparable from the assumptions and developments of professionalism. After all, biblical scholars do not just read the Bible. A lot of people do that, but they are not professional biblical critics or Bible professors. This claim to be a professional is, in turn, closely connected with the emphasis on and trust in specialization, which characterizes modern forms of not only production in general but also production of knowledge in particular. Yet, specialization itself does not make a professional. Think about the person who assembles parts or tightens screws down a factory's production line. Specific? Yes. Professional? Not in the eyes of most people. According to Burton Bledstein:

> Utilising his trained capacity, the professional person interpreted the special lines along which such complex phenomena as a physical disease, a point of law … developed in time and space. The professional did not vend a commodity, or exclusively pursue a self-interest. He did not sell a service by a contract which called for specific results in a specific time or restitution for errors. Rather, through a special understanding of a segment of the universe, the professional person released nature's potential and rearranged reality … Such was the august basis for the authority of the professional. (*The Culture of Professionalism*, 89-90)

More than specialization, then, what distinguishes a professional is that—at least in theory—he or she does not sell, even though he or she, more likely than not, does get paid for doing what he or she does. I will have more to say about this later on, but let me register here that a professional, as one can see from Bledstein's examples, is meant to meet a public need, like a doctor whose work helps bring about health or a lawyer justice. Since a professional is supposed to be about use-value rather than exchange-value; that is to say (again, at least in theory), his or her activities take place in a separate sphere outside of market relations. Unlike a worker or a businessperson, a professional masters a field that is inaccessible to others but coherent and self-contained in and of itself. The important point here is that only after a field—or a discipline—has been isolated and established as autonomous can specific rules or larger paradigms be developed or debated *within* it to certify and evaluate the competence, promotion, and tenure of an institutional or institutionalized professional. Professional authority and institutional autonomy are mutually reinforcing processes. That is also why the professionalization of biblical scholars means also the ever-proliferating or—perhaps more accurately—the ever-shrinking spheres of specialization. It is not enough to split between the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament or New Testament. Within the New Testament, you have those who work on the Gospels and those who work on the letters. Among those

who work on the Gospels, you have Markan scholars, Matthean scholars, Lukan scholars, and Johannine scholars. These are scholars of religion who really spend their entire career on one book within the Bible of a single Christian tradition; they are, in other words, what Stephen Moore and Yvonne Sherwood recently called "a subspecialist in a subdiscipline of a subdiscipline." Why? Because professional authority and institutional autonomy are mutually reinforcing processes.

An academic discipline is therefore a social unit with its own epistemological decorum or what Foucault would call "regime of truth," and one's authority, credibility, or legitimacy within a discipline also requires conforming to this decorum or regime. This regime functions to limit the kinds of questions that should be and can be asked. A school or university with its demarcations of departments and divisions embody this same kind of institutional operation. Mingling with professional scholars of other departments is not only unnecessary but also harmful.

Acknowledging our discipline as an institution will perhaps enable us to see and question the game rather than just go on playing the game or trying to be a good or its best player. Acknowledging our discipline as an institution enables us to understand a discipline's difficulty with interdisciplinary pursuits, because such pursuits challenge and violate its premise on isolating its turf and hence controlling its borders. As Alfred North Whitehead professes approvingly half a century ago:

> [The professionalization of knowledge] is exclusive and intolerant, and rightly so. It fixes attention on a definite group of abstractions, neglects everything else, and elicits every scrap of information and theory which is relevant to what it has retained. (*Science and the Modern World*, 179)

This territorial emphasis also partly explains how biblical studies as an institution, through its emphasis on professionalization, has a tendency to not only objectify but also atomize, hence preventing biblical scholars—again, as Wimbush put it in his SBL address several years ago—from "talkin' 'bout something" that folk care about. Territorial borders or margins, then, become even more dangerous if they carry seeds of pluralism. For example, we may wonder about the relations between most biblical scholars' continuous neglect of other languages, but long obsession with biblical languages, even if biblical studies is supposed to be an international guild. This sole obsession may, of course, have to do with modernity's essentialist and orientalist assumption that philology gives one access to a people's true being. Let me, however, make a different point here: fluency with biblical languages has, for a long time, distinguished biblical scholars' identity and justified their authority, perhaps even their claim to superiority over, say, theologians.

Biblical languages, in other words, help provide a basis to delimit a field and a criterion for admittance. Likewise, despite the production of knowledge in other disciplines that may inform our work, biblical scholars who want to engage other disciplines are judged to be guilty—or at least a little less credible or legitimate—unless they can provide an alibi, not in the sense of proving one's presence elsewhere at the time of a crime but of arguing for the necessity for a professional to be in multiple places, locations, or fields at one and the same time.

I would like to suggest that interdisciplinary work displaces a discipline, and hence may function as one correction for such a discipline as biblical studies; that is why I am invested in it. As I have mentioned in response to Question 1, Said uses the term "amateurism" as a shorthand to resist professional and institutionalized over-determination.

To embrace "amateurism" is, of course, easier said than done, as we need the guild and/or the university to give us legitimacy and credibility. Now, let me go back briefly to what I promised I would talk about: the relationship between us as biblical scholars and market and money. Without external legitimation from the guild and/or the university, we don't get a salary, not to mention funding support for new research. There are tensions or compromises here that I must acknowledge.

I have most likely gone on for too long already, so let me simply name three more things. First, let me give a slightly more concrete example of how one might question and challenge the conventional delimitation. We can perhaps move to further "provincialize Europe" (to use Dipesh Chakrabarty's terminology) by not only specifying North Africa and West Asia as the provenance of biblical writings but also studying more carefully the material and cultural exchanges between the so-called Greco-Roman world and places such as India during the Hellenistic period.

Second, partly because of how the distinction between conventional biblical studies and ISS projects was phrased in your introduction, I do wonder at times if the conventional search for textual meaning(s) in biblical texts does not end up always defending canonicity, even if we critique the texts, read against the texts, or open up the texts in all kinds of ways. If canonization is really a matter of repetition—that is to say, the more a text is repeated and commented upon, the more prestigious and canonical it becomes—then how might our practice of biblical scholars wittingly or unwittingly be supporting, continuing, or resuscitating a religio-cultural triumphalism that has such a long and ugly history?

Third, without denying the ongoing influence of biblical studies' origins as a discipline, I will insist that origins do not and cannot dictate or arrest how this

discipline may develop and change. I am also not willing to give up the discipline because I do not want its practice and ethos to become a male, white, and clerical-/religion-inflected by default.

–QUESTION 4: If in considering the situation described in Q#3 (above) you remain convinced that an organization or circle of scholars oriented differently from those in biblical studies--in pursuit of different problematics, in "changing the subject," in having different kinds of conversations, in modeling different interpretive practices--is not warranted, explain why. Otherwise, with its springboard question having to do not with the meaning (no matter how "radical," "liberal," "liberatory," etc) of the already religion-/culture-given texts presumed authoritative, but with the critical description, politics, and social psycho-logics of the more broadly and comparatively construed modern social-cultural phenomenon of scripturalization; and with focus on tracking how modern individuals/society and culture shape and are shaped by this phenomenon, and with what historical and ongoing consequences—given these emphases, address how ISS might become a transgressive and ex-centric force.

Scholz

What is "a transgressive and ex-centric force" in our day and age? Originally, I wanted to suggest that ISS needs to build an *alternative* academic infrastructure and become a renowned alternative *institution*. It would then need to offer scholarships, fellowships, and research grants, become a recognized academic household name in the scholarly study of the socio-cultural, political, and religious phenomenon of scripturalization, and sponsor a curriculum for scholarly and lay audiences alike. I also wanted to propose that ISS collaborate and connect with already existing institutions friendly to the mission of ISS, and develop and nurture sponsors and donors who in turn will entrust their funds toward scholarship and teaching within the intellectual framework of ISS. All of it would need to be international in scope, interdisciplinary by design, and interreligious by mission. The goal would be to bring visibility, credibility, and reputation to the tasks, procedures, and practices of the scripturalization project. ISS would then be like one of those "think tanks" in Washington, DC! But then I wondered: would such a vision be "transgressive" and "ex-centric" enough? Usually, any kind of "institutionalization" accomplishes just the opposite. It ushers in the status quo, the mainstream, and the hegemonic, just like what currently is happening with the Green Party in Germany

(http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/gruene-mit-neuer-parteispitze-wie-links-sind-die-noch-15421019-p2.html?printPagedArticle=true#pageIndex_1). Transgressive for what? Ex-centric for what? Perhaps a serious conversation on this issue is in order to discern how to transform the field of biblical studies into a scripturalizing enterprise or, if the entire field is not of interest to the ISS followers, perhaps we need to ask where "we" want to go, why, how, and for whom. I would certainly hope to be part of this kind of conversation.

Sandoval

Even if one might think that the sorts of questions ISS is interested in might currently also be pursued within a 'big tent' of biblical studies, an institution like ISS, which is more robustly and exclusively dedicated to such matters, is also warranted. There seems to me to be little question about that. It may be that ISS might best become a transgressive and ex-centric force simply by doing what it does, without worrying too much about biblical studies, that discipline's origins and developments, its well-guarded questions and concerns, or the scholarly origins of ISS inclined individuals in that discipline, and so forth. One can and ought to give something of an account of ISS genealogy, or of our own intellectual developments vis-à-vis biblical studies. However, how much more than that is needed? In the biblical idiom, which reflects my own biblical-scholarly genealogy, ought one to simply dust off one's feet, even if someone like myself may return to get them dusty again in some other village of biblical studies? It certainly does not seem necessary to try to convince biblical studies, with its usual questions and concerns, of the appropriateness of ISS concerns. Not only will relatively few in biblical studies be persuaded, the problems and challenges that stem from its modern origins and developments will not be best remedied by direct engagement with biblical studies. Rather, to relate my response to Question 4 to my response to Question 3, the focus of any transformation of the study of the Bible—i.e., biblical studies—ought to be with its "determining" ecclesial/religious institutions. Without these institutions—churches, seminaries and religiously founded/oriented colleges and universities—that in a range of ways sustain biblical studies and its practitioners, the discipline would not exist; at least not in a form easily identified with its current shape. The study of the Bible, when it happened (if it happened much at all), would take place in various departments of the university. Even if ISS is not necessarily directed to the transformation of religious institutions, the sorts of cultural-critical questions and concerns with which ISS is occupied seem to me actually to be more likely to contribute to the transformation of religious institutions (which largely

shape the study of the Bible) than the next new exegesis of John or Genesis, even (or especially, because it will be resisted) the most progressive and transgressive of these.

Lozada Jr.

Let me see if I am addressing this question accordingly: I think that the ISS project is warranted only if it is willing to move beyond traditional ways of understanding. "Changing the subject," or having different kinds of conversations, etc. are all fine. I think some organizations have attempted to do so, but until new ways of knowing are entertained I am not quite sure. Most participants are trained in the "Western" way of understanding and I am not sure how one might move beyond such ways. I do like that the "changing the subject" is there. I might not be as interested in the traditional sense of text but I remain interested in the concept of text from a generic point of view. ISS might be able to move toward an ex-centric force from within the organization of circle of scholars as well as from without. It doesn't have to be an either/or move but rather a both/and. Moving away from the center can be done many different ways although it will take time and most likely not occur in my time.

Liew

I don't think I am well suited or situated to respond to this question, because I am still learning and trying to understand the project under this umbrella term called scripturalization. Instead of talking about how this project might proceed and develop, I would prefer to ask some questions about it. I hope this is acceptable.

If biblical studies, in its different forms and directions, has something to do with the Bible whether the Bible is at the very heart of one's work or not, then what about "scripturalization"? After all, the word "scripturalization" implies a religious framework. Does a religious framework, therefore, differentiate "scripturalization" from other critical studies that scrutinize textualized social formations ("text" here, in true ISS fashion, is understood in the broad sense of the term and hence not narrowly limited to literary texts)? To put the question differently, does "scripturalization" necessitate a focus—some focus—on scriptures? If so, how does ISS define scriptures? Are scriptures limited to texts (again, both literary and non-literary) that have been recognized as sacred in various religions? Or are scriptures referring to any social formation that, first, seem to be of ultimate importance or provide

ultimate meaning to a group of people (hence a "secular" meaning of "religion") and, second, involves repetition (because canonical power is, as I mentioned before, inseparable from the practice of repetition)?

I understand, of course, that the practice of "signifying" is about taking the same words but giving them different, even ironic or sarcastic, meanings. If the parameters of ISS projects are not strictly conforming to the conventional understanding of religion, then why use a term like "scripturalization" that has such a religious framework and implications? Is this for the purpose of displacing religious scriptures, especially but not exclusively the Bible? Or is it to suggest that what many call "secularization" is in fact not at all devoid of dynamics that are close to if not exactly the same as the religious? Is ISS—in a manner reminiscent of Northrop Frye's *The Secular Scripture or The Great Code*—suggesting that while scripture or religion may not be immediately visible or conspicuously present, it still filters in through various social formations? Let me be clear here that I have no invested interest in a rigid distinction between the so-called sacred and secular (just as I have no interest in disciplinary purity), but in hearing a clear rationale for employing the term "scripturalization" as a shorthand for the intellectual-political projects of ISS.

I may be completely wrong, but I do sense that scripturalization is an attempt to do more than just reporting or reading what the Bible or a biblical passage says or means. I sense that it is not about discovering some truth about some textual formation. Instead, it focuses on analyzing the rules that determine "truths" and the power effects of those "truths." If so, I am wholeheartedly in support of the project, because I think struggles can take place in and through multiple sites and I don't think there is a need to coordinate, harmonize, or integrate these sites. In the same manner that I am invested in interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary pursuits, I don't think there is a need for me to explain to anyone my simultaneous presence in multiple sites, places, or projects.

Many thanks to all of you for your time and your thought-provoking responses. The conversation should continue in many different formats and contexts.

REMEDIATING SCRIPTURES: HTML AS A CULTURE OF CANON

Richard Newton

The abbreviation "Y2K" conjures great expectations for many in a certain age cohort. Somehow "the year 2000" had seemed essentially different from any other year in recent memory. Maybe Prince and the Revolution's anthem "1999"—a party pop music standard since its 1982 release —had attuned the masses to an eschatological mindset.[1] Perhaps the aesthetic, quantitative, or phonic contours of Y2K's characters disrupted the routine ways by which we were accustomed to group and divide time. Somehow it was different enough from preceding moments that we began to wonder what other changes might be possible.

Of course, Y2K was just another year, but it signified more potentiality in meanings, and modes of meaning and opportunities for meaning-making, than we had previously presumed possible. The imaginative disposition teased out in Jacqueline Hidalgo's reading of Chicanx nationalism and John of Patmos's Revelation is also present in Y2K as a discursive space. Y2K was a revealing "apocalyptic" in its conjuring of "an orientation toward cosmic-scale revelations, a quest to unveil an other world behind and beyond the world portrayed in dominant cultural scripts."[2] It reminded us how even a simple instance of calendrics can act as a site of creativity, one "especially concerned with destinies, with a kind of playful futurity that is entangled with the present and past."[3]

Anticipation and anxiety marked the occasion. The onset of a new millennium conferred the coming arrival of a future with hopes, dreams, and promises requited. Our science-fiction fantasies were now to be realized in the unfolding of history. At the same time it meant that our own human shortcomings could finally catch up with us. Some readers may still recall the widespread worry over the "millennium bug," an uncertainty about how computers would reconcile years beyond 1999 in light of their programmers' (at least postulated) failure to program

[1] Prince and the Revolution, "1999," track 1 on *1999*, prod. Prince, Warner Bros., 1982.

[2] Jacqueline M. Hidalgo, *Revelation in Aztlán: Scriptures, Utopias, and the Chicano Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 13.

[3] Ibid., 13.

systems to work in an unheralded epoch.[4] Failure to have done so properly may have resulted in the falter of energy grids, global economic exchanges, telecommunications networks, and other computer-dependent systems. Thus, software companies in the so-called developed world issued patches to inoculate computers. And enterprising companies sold emergency preparedness kits in case the patches failed. But at the end of the day—at least as the history books attest—the world continued with business as usual.

However, US vice president and 2000 presidential hopeful Al Gore may have a different view of how American voters perceived life through digital technology at Y2K. His narrow electoral loss to George W. Bush in the state of Florida hinged, in some part, on technicalities including the tabulation of manual votes (i.e., "butterfly ballots" and "hanging chads") and the deletion of nearly sixty thousand felons from a voter-roll database contracted to a third-party data-mining firm.[5] In addition to questioning the confusing analog ballots in an increasingly digital age, the Democratic Party claimed that discrepancies in the firm's records disproportionately disenfranchised African American voters—a demographic overwhelmingly projected to vote for Gore.[6,7] Ultimately, Gore won the popular vote nationally. But the loss in Florida resulted in his loss in the deciding Electoral College vote.

Gore's Y2K woes are a noteworthy plot point in the process story of his campaign defeat. Having served in elected office for over twenty years, he proved to be a perfect foil for George W. Bush's campaign calls for a "Reformer with Results," the latter's 2000 campaign slogan. Bush had no national political experience and positioned himself as an outsider to the unproductive bureaucracy in which Gore was presumably entrenched. Conservative pundits perpetuated the myth that a pompous and out-of-touch Gore had claimed to have "invented the Internet."[8] The supposed quote is actually an interpolation of a 1998 comment Gore had made while touting his public service record. The presidential hopeful had characterized his vice presidency as a "dialogue with the American people." And in expounding upon his congressional record, he said:

[4] Lily Rothman, "Remember Y2K? Here's How We Prepped for the Non-Disaster," *Time*, December 31, 2014, http://time.com/3645828/y2k-look-back/.

[5] Ari Berman, "How the 2000 Election in Florida Led to a New Wave of Voter Disenfranchisement," *The Nation*, July 28, 2015, https://www.thenation.com/article/how-the-2000-election-in-florida-led-to-a-new-wave-of-voter-disenfranchisement/.

[6,7] Robert C. Sinclair et al., "An Electoral Butterfly Effect," *Nature* (2000) 408: 665–66.

[8] Dan Keating and John Mintz, "Florida Black Ballots Affected Most in 2000," *Washington Post*, November 13, 2001, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2001/11/13/florida-black-ballots-affected-most-in-2000/16784e7d-439a-4b96-9653-1b7362312d2a/.

> During my service in the United States Congress, I took the initiative in creating the Internet. I took the initiative in moving forward a whole range of initiatives that have proven to be important to our country's economic growth and environmental protection, improvements in our educational system.[9]

Lost in the translation of parody, opposition adds, and late-night comedy monologues was a conception of the internet as a relationality rather than a stable, finite object. Gore neither coded the software nor soldered the hardware through which we engage the internet. But he was among the first legislators to endorse the nascent idea of networked computing as a conduit for socioeconomic, educational, and communication development. He had supported such efforts since the 1970s and introduced to Congress the High Performance Computing Act of 1991 (also known as the Gore Bill), which coupled earlier military and research computer networking systems with an investment package to create an "information superhighway" for civilian use.[10] Ironically, President George H. W. Bush—his opponent in the 1992 election and father to Gore's 2000 opponent—signed the bill in hopes of stimulating national growth in a variety of sectors. Yet Gore's attempt to highlight his role in a bipartisan collaboration with the public and private sector only furthered a narrative in which he appeared all the more abstracted from reality rather than a leader in it.

Gore's Y2K campaign was plagued by his inability to explain his theorized vision of the internet, the efforts it could facilitate, and the people it could unite. But Hidalgo's study on Revelation sheds light on some of the scriptural politics at root in Gore's campaign. Gore had hoped to unveil the internet as an "imagined community" that could only be born out of a nation with an infrastructure in which he had played a substantive role in building.[11] As he had said in a 1996 technology speech, this is "how it has worked in America. Government has supplied the initial flicker—and individuals and companies have provided the creativity and innovation that kindled that spark into a blaze of progress and productivity that's the envy of the world." But in the 1998 comment on creating the internet he failed to convey its anthropological features. That is to say, Gore did not explain, like

[9] Gore's comments are excerpted from his March 8, 1999, interview with CNN's Wolf Blitzer.

[10] Whether Gore coined the phrase is a matter of dispute. Much of the commentary attributing the phrase to him note that he had used the phrase since the 1970s but developed the imagery most fully in a March 29, 1994, speech to the Benton Foundation (C-SPAN, https://www.c-span.org/video/?55624-1/information-superhighway). But the idea of a high-speed telecommunications network through fiberoptic cables or other means was common musing among the international tech industry (cf. INFOBAHN).

[11] Here I am thinking of Benedict Anderson's argument on the role of newspapers in early American cultural connectivity in Imagined Communities: *Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; New York: Verso Books, 2006), 33–39.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith did regarding scripture, that it is "a human activity . . . a human propensity . . . a potentiality."[12] Herein lies a lesson for the scholar of scriptures.

With Y2K come and gone, we no longer need to remain mystified by the ongoing expansion and essentialization of the internet. Instead, we might do the work of considering the internet as a recent example of "scripturalization" or the "social-psychological-political structure establishing its own reality."[13] This essay presents three initial observations about the internet in light of scholarly literature in the critical comparative study of scriptures as well as digital media theory and the history of religions.

First, I will redescribe the internet as a *culture of canon*, or a site of knowledge and social relationships refracted through mutually held frames of reference. Second, I will acknowledge some of the ways in which prior scriptural technologies inform the commonplaces of the internet known as social media. More specifically, I will explain how the internet is an example of the way in which our significations—the work we do to ourselves and others through these frames of reference—manifest as "remediation," or "the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms."[14] Lastly, I will briefly parse the three elements in the internet coding script Hypertext Markup Language (that is, HTML) as declensions in the "scripturalectics" of the internet—not just what the internet is but how the internet mediates its users.[15] Therefore, this initial foray into scripturalization and the internet may not only model the beginnings of a larger investigation but also demonstrate how networking the scholarly production of the Institute for Signifying Scriptures may help us illumine "future" scriptural phenomena—or, better said, those veiled to us at this time.

The Internet as Culture of Canon

Gore's idea of an "information superhighway" is a useful heuristic for conceptualizing the internet. It is also a metaphor in need of qualification insofar as we take for granted the complexities that make each seem possible and essential. The internet is a system of interfacing connections with any number of access points and exchanges for the high-speed and unimpeded transmission of data.

[12] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 296.

[13] Vincent L. Wimbush, *White Man's Magic: Scripturalization as Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 19.

[14] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 273.

[15] Vincent L. Wimbush, *Scripturalectics: The Management of Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Like the most complex roadways, its utility is defined by its users, their desires, and the protocols upon which they agree in order to meet those needs. Because of shared frames of reference regarding how to proceed, users can traffic in the goods, services, and trades they use to represent themselves to others. To veer away from those protocols, however, can cause a traffic jam—or worse, a crash—reminding observers of the fragile conditions of our most routine interactions.

The internet is a culture in that it is a social group united by reified boundaries extending from the means of exchange. Users, software, and hardware that do not conform to a set of standards risk exclusion (e.g., disuse, debugging, deletion) once judged incompatible with others in the network. Tat-Siong Benny Liew's characterization of (mis)readers in interpretive communities is apt for the noncompliant nodes of the internet: "'Bad' readers risk alienation . . . to read 'badly' then is a lonely endeavor. To read 'badly' is to read in exile."[16] In fact, the punitive notion of exile is a commonplace in speculative science fiction on cyberculture, usually setting the stage for the rise or return of a charismatic figure or serving as the denouement for an antagonist.[17] The "uproot," "routing," and "taking root" happening in the culture are rooted not only at the level of code, but also in user etiquette—whether in the massive followings garnered by trendsetting social media creatives or *influencers* or the banning and blocking of uncouth commenters in online fora.[18] Displacement, negotiation, and complacency characterize this digital cultural formation just as we would expect of any other social space.

For all the talk of the internet as a democratizing force, it is also a bifurcated rhizome comprised of numerous "subcultures."[19] This is not just at the niche level of user interest but at the scripts used to mediate the internet. For instance, although in popular usage the "World Wide Web" (WWW) is synonymous with the internet, it was once but one of online user networks. In 1989, a British scientist named Tim Berners-Lee chartered a network built upon three technological customs: (1) HTML, the hypertext markup language used for digital communication; (2) HTTP, the hypertext transfer protocol users use to navigate the many sites that comprise the internet; and (3) the URI, or uniform resource identifier, that

[16] Tat-Siong Benny Liew, "Asian Americans, Bible Believers: An Ethnological Study," in *Misreading America: Scriptures and Difference*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 206.

[17] See William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (New York: Penguin Random House, 1984), Steve Lisberger's film *Tron* (Disney, 1982), and the Wachowskis' film *The Matrix* (Warner Bros., 1999) as three of the most influential popular examples of this premise.

[18] Richard Newton, "Reading Alex Haley's Roots: Toward an Anthropology of Scriptures," *Postscripts: The Journal of Sacred Texts and Contemporary Worlds* 9, no. 1 (2018): 1–26.

[19] On the tensions between reliance and rebellion in cultural formations, see Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Routledge, 1979).

labels and catalogs files.[20] In the language of Vincent Wimbush's introduction to Theorizing Scriptures, we might signify HTML as the "textures" of the internet (a point to which I will return), HTTP as its users communicative cues and "gestures" (including the button pressing, mouse clicks, and keyboard taps), and URIs as the classificatory "powers" of its users and their tools. There have been other user subcultures and coding vernaculars, but the World Wide Web's relative legibility led tech companies, programmers, and other user bases to invest in it over other frameworks.

So, contra rhetoric of free and unlimited expression, the internet as we know it relies on a limited number of operational procedures for functionality. But what makes the internet seemingly boundless is the ingenuity of users to sequence and specify the procedures in ways that circumscribe what would otherwise be perceived as limitations.[21] The syntactical nature of computer programming presupposes a culture of canon, the persistent "rethinking of each little detail" out of an "obsession with the significance and perfection of each little action."[22] As Jonathan Z. Smith suggests, a culture of canon presumes that anything is possible within its bounds "without alteration or, at least without admitting to alteration" (e.g., hacking) given a hermeneutical prowess.[23] Again, to question or challenge the canonical completeness of the internet would be to risk exile.

So innovators on the internet exude a kind of scriptural intrigue, or what Leif Vaage calls "borderline exegesis." Their novel work "aims to underwrite instead the possibility of its transcendence—or transgression—through the disclosure of another possible world that lurks within the interstices of whatever we may think we already know about reality."[24] On the popular user side of this culture, it is little wonder that so much time is spent *searching* for answers within a googleplex of big data. A similar exegesis is happening among designers and programmers, albeit with specialists' tools and argot. This commitment to "make do" with a data set and "the social technology at hand" will be familiar to students of scripturalizing

[20] The World Wide Web (W3C) consortium's website provides a useful primer to these three pillars of the WWW. See "HTML and URLs," https://www.w3.org/TR/WD-html40-970708/htmlweb.html. And for a description of the development of the internet in relation to textuality and writing, see Matthew G. Kirschenbuam's *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), esp. 219n16.

[21] Richard Newton, "The African American Bible: Bound in a Christian Nation," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136, no. 1 (2017): 222.

[22] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Sacred Persistence: Toward a Redescription of Canon," in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 39.

[23] Ibid., 50.

[24] Leif E. Vaage, *Borderline Exegesis* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press), 5.

practices.[25] And as we will see in the next section, the resemblances between the canon culture of the internet and other instances of scripturalization are not simply a matter of coincidence; they are in many ways by developers' design.

Remediation as Signification

For the critical student of scriptures, Al Gore's internet imbroglio is a refraction of the enveloping way in which our descriptive signifying acts betray the politics of explanatory ambition. For Gore to say he created or invented the internet was an attempt to overwrite the inconvenient truth of the numerous agents, structures, and exchanges that preceded his involvement. We need not ascribe malice to Gore's declaration. Even if we read him as the humblest of public servants, we can note that he was crafting a narrative framework in which listeners might dream with him a new America (and one with him occupying the seat of the presidency). But his vision dissipated in the American imaginary because it too blatantly transgressed what C. Travis Webb has called a "scriptural boundary . . . the historical arc circumscribed by the germinal myth that subtends, and therefore legitimizes, institutional otherworldliness."[26] It too obviously challenged the logics and defaults of the world already known.

While the revolutionary aspect of scriptures are storied, successful significations at the same time cannot be too different or break too much with the past. Jennifer Reid's remarks on scholarly production are instructive here: "Essentially, our efforts at a reflexive cultural critique may simply be the efforts of one modern tradition trying to come to terms with its own consciousness of the world, *and to preserve as much as is possible* in the face of its own mourning discomfort."[27] At work in scripturalization is the striking of an equilibrium between change and maintenance or novelty and preservation. Otherwise the byways and boundaries erected between signifiers will falter. This may be the brilliance of Gore's metaphor of the "information superhighway." It takes a prior sign presumed to be integral to a culture (i.e., the superhighway) and extends it into a provocative and enticing domain (i.e., information). Digital media theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin describe the internet's underlying "double logic" as one of "remediation."[28]

[25] Ibid., 6.

[26] C. Travis Webb, "Trespassing Scriptural Boundaries: Secularism, Specialization, and the Humanities," in *Refractions of the Scriptural: Critical Orientation as Transgression*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Routledge, 2016), 61–62.

[27] Jennifer Reid, *Finding Kluskap: A Journey into Mi'kmaw Myth* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 95 (emphasis added).

[28] Bolter and Gruisin, *Remediation*, 5.

Remediation is the observation that new media is not altogether new but simultaneously dependent and defiant of prior forms. It involves "immediacy," an interpretive relationship in which the medium and the message are entirely collapsed such that signification is reality from the perspective of the user.[29] And it entails "hypermediacy," the free rein a user has in signifying previously agreed-upon mediums and messages to make meaning in manners that diverge from how they were received, resulting in "a mediation of mediation."[30] With remediation as a primary mode of signification in the world of the internet, nothing can be entirely new under the sun.

In this initial venture to examine the internet in terms of the comparative and critical study of scriptures, we should briefly note how many of the social media platforms that typify current internet usage explicitly remediate familiar scriptural technologies. Facebook was initially modeled off of the directories that colleges and other institutions issued to initiates (e.g., students, and new employees) to accelerate peer networking. A digital site has pictures and profiles of users, but when users agree to "friend" each other they can share additional information. The ease of doing this has increased the centrality of the platform in establishing relationships. Facebook's 2 billion monthly users engage regularly with friends whom they have never met "in real life" or use the directory to reinforce those relationships.[31]

Another example of remediation is the popular blogging platform WordPress. As the name suggests, it is a digital publication service allowing users to make their writing accessible to internet users. WordPress invites technophobic and tech-savvy users to embrace the motto "code is poetry" as they manage their own online printing presses. The site consistently pays homage to Gutenberg, the name of its latest user interface. But they have also supplanted the German inventor's legacy by using the internet to hybridize publication and distribution. The customizability of the site has led WordPress to engine 30 percent of the internet, including the web presence of Disney, CNN, the New *York Times, Vogue*, and Beyoncé.[32]

In theorizing about the internet—and particularly Facebook and WordPress—as an example of scripturalization, it is important to register the dynamism not simply in terms of data packets, word count, storage space, or user bases. To fully

[29] Ibid., 30–31.

[30] Ibid., 57.

[31] Josh Constine, "Facebook has 2 Billion Users . . . and Responsibility," *TechCrunch*, July 27, 2017, https://techcrunch.com/2017/06/27/facebook-2-billion-users/.

[32] Paul Sawers, "Wordpress Now Powers 30% of Websites," *VentureBeat*, March 5, 2018, https://venturebeat.com/2018/03/05/wordpress-now-powers-30-of-websites/.

appreciate the phenomenon we must appreciate the imbrication that remediation as signification entails. What J. Z. Smith says of religion as a human activity can be said of scriptures: "That, if there is anything that is distinctive . . . it is a matter of degree rather than kind, what might be described as the extremity of its enterprise for exegetical totalization."[33] In glimpsing the remediation at work in this culture of canon, we can begin to see that there is much more to theorize about scriptures and the internet.

The Scripturalectics of HTML

One promising area for consideration is the scripturalectics playing out on the back and front ends of the internet. For instance, what might HTML—hypertext, markup, and language—come to mean for the student of scriptures? HTML, you will recall, serves as one of the primary exchange avenues for internet interaction. Previously I likened it to the "textures" of the World Wide Web, but as a code it is more poignantly a metadiscourse with and through which people are networked. And while HTML connotes a synecdochic relationship between hypertext, markup, and language, I close this paper by disaggregating and deconstructing the work usually abbreviated in an attempt to better postulate what humans do with scriptures.

Scriptures as Hypertext

Among the most visible and normalized aspects of internet culture is hypertexting. A hypertext is a connection between one location on the internet to another. On the World Wide Web and most interfaces, users activate a hypertext by clicking a word or image programmed to send a signal to another site (cf. HTTP and URI). Once that signal is received, the linked site fetches the user. The high-speed transmission between data points on servers appears as a jump from text to text or window to window. For internet users, this kind of movement is as customary as turning the page in a bookish cultural setting.

The hypertextuality of the internet reminds us of the unwieldy possibilities for scripturalizing a cultural master text. Barring its own protocol (i.e., clicking

[33] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Sacred Persistence," 44.

and requisite server transmissions) hypertextuality promises interpretive freedom through the medium, a genre acknowledgment of the author's death. To borrow from Jennifer Reid, the internet as "cultural knowledge is not a product; it is the surplus that comes of reciprocal relationships."[34] Given that context, hypertextuality signifies the permutations of meaning that can happen with enough creativity—not as invention so much as signification and remediation.

Velma Love has helped us see a similar modality in the "personal scriptures" divined by Yoruba infants and Ifa initiates.[35] Love explains how parents and godparents divine an *ifa* or narrative that draws upon physical sources (e.g., materials related to *igbodu* or location for the rites of passage) and metaphysical sources (e.g., orishas) so as to guide the subject in a custom, tailored way. At the same time, even the most personal of rites is a social event, belying the interdependence signified (often unwittingly) by scriptures.

An internet corollary may be the personal timelines or newsfeeds that—although presumably objective documents of history—are also expressions not only of a social media user's specific profile but also of the sites to which the user has hyperlinked and the sites that wish to hyperlink to the user on account of a personal connection (fellow travelers on the informational superhighway) or automated algorithm (i.e., profile-based ads). Nothing is private on the internet because it is by definition a social network.

Scriptures as Markup

Though, as discussed earlier, cultures are held between the tension of interpretive freedom (i.e., hypertexuality) and canonical limitation, in HTML the latter is expressed as markup, or the aspect of coding in which parameters are set around how a site—and thus user—can perform online. This functions to maintain legibility between servers, users, programs, and devices so that the internet operates smoothly. Our proclivity for markup is apparent in our need for "clarity about what constitutes the subject of interpretation."[36] In the case of Ifa, those seeking or wishing to remain in community consult guides, priests, godparents,

[34] Reid, *Finding Kluskap*, 5.

[35] Velma Love, *Divining the Self: A Study in Yoruba Myth and Human Consciousness* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 28–29.

[36] Reid, *Finding Kluskap*, 3.

and other sages for guidance. If a user wants to read and be read on the internet, then the user's actions must conform to the markup standards agreed upon by the internet's most powerful users—the programmers, technology companies, vendors, designers, and influencers that make internet culture both viable and enviable. On this point, the symbology of markup languages helps to underscore the stakes.

In markup languages such as HTML, brackets (e.g., "[ ]," "< >") and switches (e.g., "/") setoff the extent in which a code is to run. It creates a context for commands to operate. For example, to render a text—say, "Institute for Signifying Scriptures"— in italics using HTML, the code string would look like this: Institute for Signifying Scriptures. The "i" indicates italicization, and the "< >" provide the constraints where that italicization is to happen, the first bracket denoting the beginning and the switched bracket denoting the end. Markup enables expressive precision, at least at the temporary expense of the interpreter, by providing a context in which texts, hypertexts, and their users can function.

HTML is not unlike many modern biblical interpreters in its insistence on delimiting a context for signification. As Rosamond Rodman comments upon the preoccupation with situating the Bible in a "historical, political, linguistic, and cultural" background, contextualization "enables readers to read and understand those texts often rendered obscure and mysterious."[37] The insistence on context is a political act that manages propriety of interpretations and applications deemed acceptable in a social system. Furthermore, the scriptural markup provides what James Bielo sees evangelical Bible readers gaining from restrictive ideological commitments—"a vocabulary and grammar," a "unified textuality," and "an assumed continuity."[38] The aesthetics of the World Wide Web—and, I hazard, any culture of canon—serves to veil the complexities of the governing discourses so that they are acceptable for continued user engagement. That, too, is part and parcel of the internet most know today.

Scriptures as Language

The language we use to conceptualize the internet has changed considerably since the signing of the Gore Act. Today's youngest users have had no use for turns

[37] Rosamond C. Rodman, "'*We* are Anglicans, *They* Are the Church of England': Uses of Scripture in the Anglican Crisis," in *The Social Life of Scriptures: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Biblicism*, ed. James S. Bielo (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 106.

[38] James S. Bielo, "Textual Ideology, Textual Practice: Evangelical Bible Reading in Group Study," in *The Social Life of Scriptures: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Biblicism*, edited by James S. Bielo (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 170–71.

of phrase like the "information superhighway" or the "World Wide Web." Even typing "www" at the beginning of a hyperlink (cf. URI) is unnecessary, driving the abbreviation itself toward obsolescence. The internet is not an abstract code known only by specialists. It is, more or less, what it is.

The essentializing of language—rather than the instantiation of a specific language—points to an important scripturalectic, the insistence of reality. In the late twentieth century, computer coders alluded to this cognitive move in arrogating their products as WYSIWYG, or "what you see is what you get." The phrase was used to distinguish the digital interfaces that required programming knowledge from those that were more intuitive and analogous to the everyday functions of society. Older personal computer users may remember having to master Microsoft DOS code prompts to access nested folders. Contrast that to the graphic-based operating system Microsoft Windows and its illustration of information portals via filing-cabinet icons. Usability is not just a matter of the difficulty of skill acquisition. It is also about compatibility with prior routines. WYSIWYG exploits both of these aspects of remediation.

Like many of the other abbreviations in this paper, WYSIWYG is no longer in use. But the dynamism in that cognitive shift is part of the "psycho-social-cultural performances that make scriptures mean" and make the internet compelling.[39] The internet, like language, is a social network. But to what extent is making one see and accept a reality a matter of utility, compulsion, even violence? Music-sharing pioneer and futurist Sean Parker opines that such a question should be prepared to consider a manipulation on the order of Foucauldian "bio-power."[40] In an interview, the Napster founder says this of social media:

> The thought process that went into building these applications, Facebook being the first of them . . . was all about: "How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?" And that means that we need to sort of give you a little dopamine hit every once in a while, because someone liked or commented on a photo or a post or whatever. And that's going to get you to contribute more content, and that's going to get you . . . more likes and comments . . . It's a social-validation feedback loop . . . exactly the kind of thing that

[39] Vincent L. Wimbush, "Introduction: TEXTures, Gestures, Power: Orientation to Radical Excavation," in *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon*, ed. Vincent Wimbush (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 3–6.

[40] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (1976; New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 140–41.

> a hacker like myself would come up with, because you're exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology . . . The inventors, creators—it's me, it's Mark [Zuckerberg], it's Kevin Systrom on Instagram, it's all of these people—understood this consciously. And we did it anyway.[41]

To speak of language as WYSIWYG and as a scripturalectic is to begin to unveil the engineering that keeps a canon culture from falling apart. It is to peer into some of the machinery and programming that makes the center hold.[42] But doing so also means coming to terms with how the human is socially, biochemically—and with the tethering, wearing, and implantation of digital devices—cybernetically networked into the structure.

Conclusion

The internet has been a mystical locus in the social imaginary since its invention. What was once the digital network of a privileged class of researchers, government agencies, and tech barons is arguably now a matter of fact in modern life. But at the boundaries and byways of social formation is an anthropology of scriptures through which people read and are read not only by those with whom they are in community, but also by the media and technologies they rely upon to identify each other.

Whether one signifies the internet as an ideal or shadowy representation of this, I have argued here that scholars should not remain complacent in apocalyptic rhetorics but move toward understanding its scripturalectics. The critical student of scriptures can help us appreciate the internet as a culture of canon, where complex significations result from users working with data between the limits of derivation and the infinity of integrations. This remediation appears not only in the way prior scriptural forms have inspired the World Wide Web that we know but also in the ways the permutation of those forms has transgressed how we know. Furthermore, I have proffered the components of HTML as indicative of the kind of work humans do with scriptures.

[41] Mike Allen, "Sean Parker Unloads on Facebook: "God Only Knows What It's Doing to Our Brains," *Axios*, November 9, 2017, https://www.axios.com/sean-parker-unloads-on-facebook-god-only-knows-what-its-doing-to-our-childrens-brains-1513306792-f855e7b4-4e99-4d60-8d51-2775559c2671.html.

[42] Wimbush's theorizing in *Scripturalectics* (2017) is an extended mediation on Chinua Achebe's 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart*, a title signifying on W. B. Yeats's 1919 poem "The Second Coming."

As a redescriptive essay on the subject of the internet, this essay's obsolescence is inevitable. But in the meantime, as the example of Al Gore illustrates, the analytical value of my thesis extends beyond the exactitude of semantics. Whether he created the internet or green-lit the information superhighway, his words prompted us to think comparatively—to ask, is that how this works? When we do this in regard to our ways and means of knowing, we can more consciously legislate a future aware of but not beholden to the past. I contend that this is the opportunity presented to us by the internet as object of study.

SCRIPTURALIZING HERE AND THERE – VOLUME I

ISS's ongoing collaborative project, "Scripturalizing Here and There" facilitates social-cultural analysis of scriptural social psychologics and politics. As an ongoing project, reports will be compiled and published on ISS platforms. For more information on the project and how you can submit your report, visit http://www.signifyingscriptures.org/research/scripturalizing-here-and-there/

In this first volume of project reporting submitted in 2018, the five essays below isolate, describe, and analyze a wide range of representations, practices and politics of the scriptural. Each essay provides critical commentary as window onto human play with discourse and meaning.

I.1: "'Letter of Unity' (2016): Rufus Smith & the Memphis Christian Pastors Network"

By: Ron M. Serino

Description:

On Sunday evening, July 10, 2016, about 1,000 Black Lives Matter protesters blocked the Interstate-40 bridge over the Mississippi River in downtown Memphis, Tennessee, for about four hours, in response to the killings of black men by police the previous week in Baton Rouge, Louisiana (Alton Sterling, July 5), and in St. Paul, Minnesota (Philando Castile, July 6). Memphis-area clergy consequently attempted to step into the widening racial gap in a city notorious for racial tensions and violence. The Reverend Rufus Smith is African American and senior pastor of a very large, historically white but currently racially mixed congregation in an affluent suburb of Memphis. According to his church's website, Rev. Smith wrote "A Letter of Unity" that night (July 10) as a call for his congregation to begin interracial dialog about contemporary racial violence and separation in the United States (www.hopepres.com/Unity). Rev. Smith subsequently facilitated the gathering of a racially mixed group of Memphis-area Christian clergy (Memphis Christian Pastors Network, www.memphiscpn.org) to work together with the Memphis Police Department and their respective congregations for racial unity in the context of Christian faith.

Genealogy:

In trying to be inclusive of all, Rev. Smith uses the discourse of "just" Americans: "Don't you wish we could all just be Americans without the hyphen!" ("A

Letter of Unity"). Such rhetoric obscures the European-American Christian history of racialization and racism (not to mention the assumed normativity of male dominance and heterosexuality). In the context of contemporary debates between Black Lives Matter, "Blue Lives Matter," and "All Lives Matter," using inclusive rhetoric of "all" ignores the history in the U.S. dating back to the British colonial period of the use of "English" and "Christian" to mean "white." In 2016, cultural debates over who is "American" were showcased in U.S. presidential campaign slogans calling on U.S. Americans to "Take OUR country back" and "Make America Great Again" (2016 Donald Trump campaign). When language of "American" and "Christian" has been and is being used by white America to refer to itself, then scripturalization of "Unity" blocks true inclusion and "healing" by disallowing recognition of past injustices and redress of present inequities.

Analysis:

1. Especially noteworthy, this performance of "Unity" is led by an African American senior pastor of a very large congregation in well-off suburbs with strong "urban" ministry but rooted within a historically white denomination founded in the withdrawal by historically white Southern congregations from the 1980s reunion of the Northern and Southern white Presbyterian Churches who had split over slavery in the nineteenth century. More specifically, Rev. Smith's church, Hope Presbyterian, was originally a ministry of Second Presbyterian, Memphis, a predominantly white congregation which itself has a history of resisting racial integration (see Stephen Haynes, *The Last Segregated Hour: The Memphis Kneel-Ins and the Campaign for Southern Church Desegregation* [2012]).

2. In the scripturalization of "unity," those currently in power (wealthy straight white Christian American men and their allies—established political, economic, religious, and cultural leaders) articulate their desire for present (nominal) equality without recognition and redress of historic and present inequalities.

3. If all are not starting from the same place, then treating everyone equally perpetuates the status quo of economic, racialized, and gendered injustices. Memphis has a notable history of violent white racism. More prominent examples include the lynching of Thomas Moss, Henry Stewart, and Calvin McDowell in 1892 in Memphis, which led resident Ida B. Wells to start her anti-lynching campaign, and the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., fifty years ago this past spring. Memphis continues to bear ongoing legacies of racialized poverty,

housing, education, employment, transportation, and worship (see, for example, the work of Wendi C. Thomas on black-owned businesses, the University of Memphis student newspaper on racial disparities of city (students vs. faculty, etc.). In one official move, the City of Memphis removed prominent public Confederate statues in December 2017. The 50th anniversary of Dr. King's assassination (April 4, 2018) brought national focus on Dr. King's legacy and "Where Do We Go from Here?" Recent data show that while there have been gains in African American education (measured by increased percentages of college graduates), there have not been any economic gains in African American income or wealth, when compared with the white population (https://www.speakcdn.com/assets/2462/nationalcivil-rightsmuseumpovertyreport02152018edrev.pdf). The Memphis Christian Pastors Network continues to meet in 2018.

A Letter of Unity • (Written July 10, 2016)

Baton Rouge, Minneapolis, and Dallas are in our nation's stream of consciousness. Why? Because, once again, hatred, violence and lives of separation which breed misunderstanding have broken our hearts, frayed our nerves, and challenged our faith. Along with Eli and Craig, I ask four things of you over the next several days.

- The first is to STOP - and extend our heartfelt sympathies to the bereaving, bewildered, angry families and friends of **Alton Sterling of Baton Rouge, LA, Philando Castile of Falcon Heights, MN and the five murdered and seven wounded police officers in Dallas, TX.**
- The second is to START - a civil face-to-face conversation this week (not merely through social media) with another person reflecting on WHY our nation seems to be more polarized with hatred, violence and lives of separation which breed misunderstanding. Don't just talk to your friends. Talk to an Anglo-American, African-American, Latino-American or Asian-American co-worker, friend, relative, acquaintance or neighbor within your concentric circle of contact who may not already share your political perspective. (***Don't you wish we could all just be Americans without the hyphen!***) Don't pretend to have answers. Just talk. Ask questions of each other. You will not solve the nation's problems but, believe it or not, you will be taking an important step toward a resolution.

- The third is to SAY PRAYERS OF HOPE - for your spiritual and civil leaders as we grapple with how to lead and, in some cases, follow the wisdom of someone beside ourselves, including the will of God the Father. Say prayers to eliminate the hatred, violence and lives of separation which breed misunderstanding among Anglo-American peace officers (as well as some black peace officers) and African-Americans and Latino-Americans. Say prayers for minorities and police to develop a mutual understanding and appreciation of each other.
- The last thing is to STAY-TUNED - to collective current and future efforts that address root causes like poverty, the lack of quality education, meaningful employment opportunities and bridging the lives of separation which breed misunderstanding among white, black and brown Americans.

When adults in society, along with the church, disappear from notice (or are AWOL - Absent Without Leave), gangs, thugs, and misguided youth fill the vacuum. **I am glad to be a part of a church striving to be a multiethnic, intergenerational answer to our City, State and Nation on a weekly basis. Do not underestimate our endeavor to keep putting aside our pettiness and personal preferences as both an example and answer to the high priestly prayer of Jesus.**

Father, I pray that all who believe in me can be one. You are in me and I am in you. I pray that they can also be one in us. Then the world will believe that you sent me.
— John 17:21 (ERV)

We must continue to fight to be the answer to His prayer, which will significantly reduce our nation's hatred, violence and misunderstanding. I look forward to being with you in worship this weekend as we grapple with these issues as a family.

Lamenting! (Lamentations 3:19-23)

Rufus D. Smith IV
Senior Pastor-Hope Church

Hope's PURPOSE: *to engage our un-churched neighbors of every age & ethnicity to experience Jesus.*

Hope's PROCESS: *to the extent a person is involved in Worship, Community, Service, & Generosity—is to the extent they will experience the fullness of Jesus, our Life-Giver King.*

https://www.hopepres.com/Unity

I.2: "Rip or Repeal: Scripturalizing and the Second Amendment"

By: Rosamond C. Rodman

General description of scripturalizing dynamic(s)/practice(s)/event(s) (who, what, when, where?)

Apropos scripturalizing, note the *fake, photo-shopped image* (on the left) that made the social media rounds. It shows high school student activist Emma González, one of a number of survivors of a Feb. 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida that killed seventeen students and staff, ripping up a copy of the U.S. Constitution.

In the wake of the Parkland shooting, student survivors took to social and traditional media with focused and skilled messaging. González in particular became an oft-used figurehead in coverage of the movement, appearing repeatedly on the

evening news. One of the most frequently played sound-bites was her statement at a rally about the inadequacy of the "thoughts and prayers" response by politicians.

Parkland students called on politicians to skip the condolences and instead pass legislation raising the minimum age for purchasing guns in Florida from 18 to 21, more comprehensive background checks, and a ban on assault-style weapons.

Genealogy/Whence?

The image of González ripping up the Constitution was created from a GIF posted on *Teen Vogue's* gun control issue. The real image features four young women with Gonzalez in the front, ripping in two a *paper gun target*.

Representation/Performance/Poetics (how is it seen or experienced?)

This misrepresentation of González aligns gun control activism with anti-American sentiment. It does so by identifying the threat to American sacred scripture with people who embrace the freedoms that the Constitution guarantees (e.g., the freedom to be non-white, non-gender conforming), yet work to dismantle what they consider the linchpin of all American freedoms: the right of the people to keep and bear arms.

Power issues/type, directionality of mimetics (whose scripturalization? Who has scripturalized whom?)

At exactly the same time that the fake image of Gonzalez was circulating on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, *The New York Times* ran an op-ed written by former Supreme Court justice John Paul Stevens entitled "Repeal the Second Amendment."[1] In spite of the fact that Stevens called for a far more radical political response to school shootings than did the Parkland students, it was the fake image of the Constitution being torn up by Emma González that caught the public eye (before being eventually debunked).

Consequences, developments (what has it effected, set in motion?)

An image of the former justice ripping up the Constitution would have been more accurate. But Stevens' clarion hardly mattered in the social media hall of

[1] https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/27/opinion/john-paul-stevens-repeal-second-amendment.html

mirrors. He represents a privileged (male, enthroned, enrobed) protector of a universal, valid, textually transparent body of knowledge. González represents plurality, relativism, anarchy, and breakdown. Scripturalizing requires orderly, legislative, male reading and handling. Scriptures, as the fake image so clearly shows, can be torn asunder in the hands of Gonzalez and other nasty women (which in this case includes John Paul Stevens).

I. 3: "Contemporary 'Martyrdom' in Egypt"

By: Tamara L. Siuda

General description of scripturalizing dynamic(s)/practice(s)/event(s) (who, what, when, where?)

There are two definitions of martyrdom in contemporary Egypt. Neither match the original (i.e., execution by the [Roman] state for professing Christianity)

1. Coptic: Copts murdered by Islamists
2. Islamist: Suicide bombers or terrorists who die in the act of 1) or are executed for doing it

Genealogy/evolution (whence?; what are previous related representations)

Martyrdom originally was an act of Christian resistance. It was scripturalized in Christian doctrine as the highest form of Christian self-sacrifice. After the Arab Conquest, Coptic martyrdom continued, even though it mostly ceased for other Christianities. Since the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, sectarian violence and acts of terror by Egyptian and foreign Islamist groups against Copts have intensified. Copts killed in sectarian violence are called martyrs; they receive feast days, icons, etc. just like the martyrs of the second century.

In Islam, the Qur'an and hadiths confirm a martyr (*shahid*) is one who dies deliberately for faith; not only by execution, but by dying while fulfilling religious commandments. Islamists use the latter sense to justify the name for terrorists who die in suicide bombings or who are executed for murdering Copts.

Representation/Performance/Poetics (how it is seen or experienced?)

Since the same word is used for Coptic and Islamist martyrs (also Muslims who die protecting Copts, e.g., police killed in church attacks), and none of these definitions is the original, one wonders: How can both killer *and* killed be martyrs? Take Daesh's killing of 21 Copts on a Libyan beach in 2015. The Coptic Church recognized the murdered as martyrs and Egypt held days of mourning; even Al-Azhar praised the Coptic martyrs. Global leaders sent condolences; controversy broke out when the Obama Administration statement noted "Egyptian citizens" without mentioning Christianity. Simultaneously, Daesh propaganda, including a murder video and media on Egypt's subsequent bombing of Daesh facilities and apprehension of some of the executioners, characterized Daesh members as martyrs.

Power issues/type, directionality of mimetics (whose scripturalization? who has scripturalized whom?)

In the 2015 Libyan event, the murdered Copts *and* their murderers were called martyrs. Whether the definition matched its second-century meaning was only relevant to certain contexts, mostly Christian (e.g., Copts, Egyptian leaders including the Coptic Pope) and Muslims like the Egyptian President and Al-Azhar leaders; and leaders outside Egypt including heads of state and the Catholic Pope. Others, including whoever wrote the White House statement, noted only the death-by-terrorist nature of the crime. Media emphasized or deemphasized comparison with earlier Christian martyrs depending on their values. Daesh, as well as the Islamist media supporting it, reserved the word for its own members killed in airstrikes, or who were sentenced to death.

Consequences, developments (what has it effected, set in motion?)

Martyrdom has evolved to have the meaning of being willing to die for any cause, or general willingness to suffer. To be a martyr for Christ was an honorable act, whereas now one is told "stop being a martyr!" for acting in an unhealthy manner. Still different (and not considered moral) is the martyrdom of suicide bombers and terrorists: they are evil, for an evil cause. Ask a person about Egyptian martyrs and they likely mention terrorists, not the larger number of Christians murdered by them. It can seem ridiculous that a perpetrator of violence and a

victim of that violence can *both* be martyrs. Violent acts and media around Islamist terror in Egypt threaten to eclipse other definitions of martyrdom in such way that martyrs being killed for faith become invisible, as we focus on the killer and not the victim.

I.4: "The Collaborative Project on Scripturalization"

By: Daniel Patte

Tat-Siong Benny Liew asked us to address two questions: "Who or what do you want to watch as interpreter?" And "Who is watching you?" I had difficulty putting my mind around the second question until Benny rephrased it to encompass those to whom I address my interpretations: those for whom I am a watcher.

My answer to the first question was self-evident for me: I am watching interpreters of Scripture—in my case, interpreters of the Bible composed of many texts that Jews and Christians read as Scripture—i.e., those who are "scripturalizing" on the basis of these texts. More specifically, for the last 20 years or more, I focused my attention upon the interpretations of Paul's letter to the Romans read as Scripture by Christian believers through the centuries and today across cultures, comparing them with recent (especially since World War II) interpretations of this letter by exegetes who read this letter critically, i.e., purposefully trying to avoid reading it as Scripture—even though, it turns out, these critical exegetes cannot avoid doing so by the very fact that the most detached readings are aimed at correcting the "wrong" (uncritical) scriptural readings by believers.

In retrospect, my answer to the second question should have been clear to me (although I could not formulate it on the spot): it is for the sake of all interpreters of the Jewish and Christian Bible as Scripture that I am presenting my interpretations of their interpretations of Scripture—and consequently for all interpreters who are scripturalizing (whatever might be the texts or traditions or cultural events which they scripturalize).

From the perspective of our common resource (*Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-modernity, and Intellectuals* by Zygmunt Bauman),[1] the interpreters I am studying are those who are "legislating" by developing an interpretation that

[1] Cambridge (UK): Polity and Basil Blackwell, 1987.

has authority—and explicitly or implicitly affect the life of the interpreters and those around them. In Vincent Wimbush's vocabulary, these legislators/interpreters can be viewed as *scripturalizers*. Of course, I am often functioning as a legislator/interpreter in many aspects of my life, including when I tell someone else my understanding/interpretation of a situation, of a book (Bauman's [!]; a novel I am reading), etc. But when I am *interpreting interpreters*, I am no longer legislating regarding the scripturalized text; I am no longer presenting an authoritative interpretation of a biblical text. I adopt a postmodern perspective, a meta-interpretive perspective showing how each scripturalizing process works.

Scripturalization is, by definition, a contextual process. It involves transforming a discourse into a system of signs with the authority and the power to frame the concrete lives of interpreters and their neighbors. Any discourse—be it a verbal, oral, visual, social, or cultural semiotic discourse—can be scripturalized, made into "Scripture," as the Institute for Signifying Scriptures has repeatedly shown. And it is indeed essential to bring to light that this process of scripturalization is ongoing everywhere around us today, as the Institute does. Yet one should not forget that: (1) of course, this process is also ongoing around "what the West knows as Scripture," and (2) that the work of the Institute prolongs the life-long work of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, which was ultimately presented in his *What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

In this book, Smith studies the "various ways in which different groups of people have developed a mode of living and of perceiving that as involved something that looks like what the West knows as Scripture" (196). This is a phenomenological study of the contextual way in which any given Scripture functions in the individual and community lives of believers. To make his point, Smith begins with a phenomenological study of the contextual role of Scripture in Islam, because at first it looks like the less contextual perspective—viewing the Qur'an as an immutable expression of the Word of God. But Smith's study shows that "the Qur'an and various parts of it have meant different things to different Muslims" who live(d) in different cultural and religious contexts (in Arabia, Nigeria, Sumatra, northern India, Pakistan, of Western China) even as *each* interpretation claims that it presents the meaning for Muhammad (75). The Qur'an is functioning as Scripture for believers—the Qur'an is scripturalized—when today and through the ages it is for Muslim believers the Qur'an-to-live-by, that is, the Qur'an as it frames their lives in particular life-contexts. The Qur'an as Scripture is read by believers not so much for what it says in itself —for what was the actual meaning of it for

Muhammad as the presumed historical author—but what it says for their lives as believers, i.e. as the Qur'an-to-live-by.

Similarly, for the early rabbis and the Jews through the centuries, Torah was/is Scripture when it was/is viewed in its broader sense that includes the Oral Torah (*Torah she-be-ʿal-peh*) whose haggadic and halakic prolongations of the biblical text was viewed as given to Moses on Mount Sinai and thus as having comparable authority to the written Torah (*Torah she-bi-khtav*). Torah in this broader sense of Oral Torah is scripturalized to apply to the covenantal lives of the people of God in their different cultural and religious contexts – it is/was the Torah-to-live-by for Jews in these various contexts. Similarly, our study with 93 colleagues (church historians, theologians, and exegetes) of the receptions of Romans (including critical exegeses) showed that all these very different scripturalizations of this Christian Scripture were very different because, for better or for worse, there were *contextualized to their cores*—whether they originated from Alexandria in the second century, Antioch in the fourth century, Hippo in the fourth and fifth centuries, Paris in the twelfth century, Wittenberg in the sixteenth century, in Germany, France, and North America in the nineteenth and twentieth century, in Romania in the twentieth century, in Latin America, in the Philippines, and in various places in Africa in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[2] This is also what Vincent Wimbush has shown in his recent publications, including in his *White Men's Magic: Scripturalization as Slavery*[3] in which he presents a fascinating analysis of "the interesting narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano."[4] In this volume, Wimbush shows how Equiano scripturalized his life—first in Africa, then as a slave and later as a free man in the North Atlantic—by reading his life in terms of the Bible. As Wimbush illustrates with this case, and as we found again and again regarding the receptions of Romans through history and in present-day cultures, the reading of a "scripture" (whatever it might be, oral or written) by "believers" (whatever might be their traditions, religious or otherwise) always involves reading one's life in terms of this scripture. This is so because for "believers" a "scripture" is always read in quest for a Word-to-live-by, of course, in a particular concrete context. Studying a scriptural text (as I do these days with the Romans) cannot mean in any

[2] See the 10 volume book series *Romans through History and Cultures* (2000-2011, published by Trinity then T&T Clark). This series is the basis for my *Romans: Three Exegetical Interpretations and the History of Receptions* (London and New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018).

[3] New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

[4] See *Equiano's travels; the interesting narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano*, or, *Gustavus Vassa, the African*. New York: Praeger, 1967.

way elucidating the "meaning of this text." After all semiotics and linguistics have long shown that a text never had a meaning—readers are always and necessarily making sense of the characters on the page. And in the case of any given text that is viewed as scripture this is even more true. Reading a scriptural text for its meaning is always and necessarily misreading it. This is what biblical scholars of any kind need to accept, so as to acknowledge that a proper study of a scriptural text must necessarily involve analyzing and accounting for its always surprising but appropriate scripturalizations in a diversity of contexts. Such is the contribution that I hope to make to our collective project of scripturalization.

I.5: "'Stones in the shape of letters, form[ing] a book': *Zolai* and the Inscription of Laipian Identity"

By: Lalruatkima

General description of scripturalizing dynamic(s)/practice(s)/event(s) (who, what, when, where?)

Khup Go*[1] lives in Tuizang, a remote village located along the foothills of Kalay city in northwest Burma. Interacting with Khup in the summer of 2018, I learned that he had discontinued formal education since leaving school in class 8. Khup is a subsistence farmer and spends most of his time between his house and the small plot of land where he grows vegetables for consumption and for trade with other grocery items. His wife passed away during labor two years ago. He now lives with his three daughters, the oldest of them being 6 years old.

When we approached his house, I was curious about the framed image that he had mounted to the side of the entrance to his house. The frame (Fig.1) had an image of a spear, a portrait of a man, and a table of logographs. For someone who did not keep any other literary material in his house—a one room thatched structure that doubled as kitchen, sleeping area, and living area, depending on the time of the day—the frame hanging outside was a curiosity.

[1] All starred (*) names are anonymous

Fig.1: Picture frame outside Khup Go's house in Tuizang

Fig. 2: Portrait of Pau Cin Hau (right); logographic table (right); insert in a *Pasian Thu Bu*

I noticed the framed image on other houses on my way back to Kalay. These framed images served to mark the household as members of the Laipian *sanginn* or "church." A similar combination of images made up an insert in a *Pasian Thu Bu* ("Book of God's Word) used by a Laipian member (Fig.2)

Most of the Laipian members neither read nor use the *Zolai* logographic system that they display to mark their identity. A member told me that the Laipian community in Kalay city has started organizing Saturday classes to teach the script to their members.

Genealogy/Whence?

Pau Cin Hau (1859–1948), a Chin of the Sokte clan, invented the *Zolai* logographic system. Pau did not leave a written record of his work. However, his testimony to a census reporter appears in the Burma gazetteer's report of 1932. In his testimony to the reporter, Pau describes a series of dreams he saw over a period starting in 1900 where: "in dreams and vision I received a series of communications which I hold to be divine and are the foundations both of my alphabet and my religious teaching."[2]

Detailing a dream he had in 1902 that led to his script, Pau says that, "In this dream I saw an Englishman who appeared to me to be divine. He wanted me to learn lessons, taught by means of stones in the shape of letters, which put forward

[2] J. J. Bennisson, *Census of India 1931 Volume 11, Burma Part I Report* (Rangoon: Office of the Superintendent Government Printing and Stationery, Burma 1933), 217.

together formed a book."[3] Pau says he woke from this dream and put down his vision into practice. By the 1931 census, Pau's logographic system had undergone two revisions; he gave the census reporter a third version of the script (Fig.3).

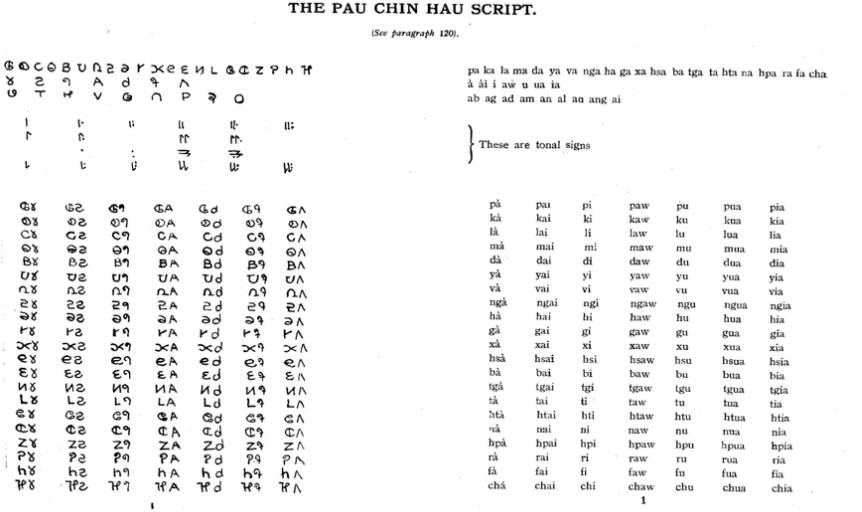


Fig.3: The Pau Chin Hau Script[4]

Pau envisioned this *Zolai* system would be the script for all Chin peoples. Chin is the Burmese referent for the hill peoples of the Chin Hills. Those called Chin refer to themselves as *Zo*, which in turn is an umbrella term for many linguistically variant but overlapping clans. *Zolai* accounted only for the Sokte and Kamhau dialects.

Representation/Performance/Poetics (how is it seen or experienced?)

Pau had his vision of the Englishman a decade before the first American Baptist Missionary, Joseph Herbert Cope, came to the Chin Hills in Burma. As part of his missionizing, Cope undertook the task of translating the Bible into the Zo dialect. Pau used *Zolai* logographs to produce the first Zo translation (Fig.4a) of the "Sermon on the Mount."

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., 195.

Cope worked on a Romanized Zo translation (Fig. 4b) of the "Sermon on the Mount." Cope's Romanized script provided the template used to translate larger portions of the Bible.

Fig.4: Translations of the "Sermon on the Mount"[5]

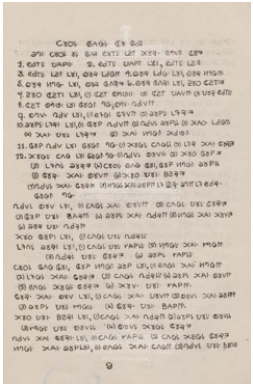


Fig.4a: Pau Cin Hau's Zolai version

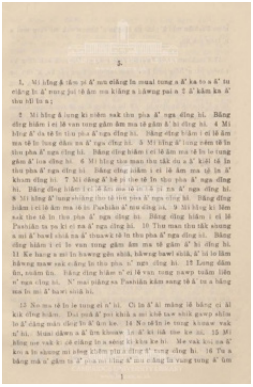


Fig.4b: Cope's Romanized version

Cope was made honorary Inspector of Schools in the Chin Hills by the colonial British government in Burma. Western style education introduced by the British employed the Romanized Zo that Cope had developed. Insistent on their use of the *Zolai* script, Pau and his followers found themselves excluded by the British-instituted educational system. Mung No* recalls that this discriminatory practice centered on a Romanized script kept Laipian members out of the educational system. Without the colonial/missionary education, Laipian members were unemployable by the colonial state or the missions.

After independence in 1948, the institution of Burmese as the official language has eased the Zolai-Romanized inter-Zo tensions of the colonial period. Laipian members study in Burmese-medium schools. Burmese is also the official language and hence employment is accessible to the Zos, Laipian or otherwise.

Power issues/type, directionality of mimetics (whose scripturalization? Who has scripturalized whom?)

Many of Pau's revelatory dreams had physical healing as a dominant motif. Having suffered for an extended period, Pau himself had received healing in a

[5] Pandey, Anshuman. 2010. "Preliminary Proposal to Encode the Pau Cin Hau Alphabet in ISO/IEC 10646" (N3960 L2/10-437), October 27, 2010. http://std.dkuug.dk/JTC1/SC2/WG2/docs/n3960.pdf

fantastic manner. It must have been a spectacular vision because the agent of the healing came "riding the sun as a horse, the bridle and other trappings of which glittered like gold."[6] Pau adds that without that divine healing, he would have had to pay an exorbitant amount for the sacrifices.

Healing comes across not only as a curative intervention but a motif for the cultural intervention Pau himself embodied. Healing meant appeasing the *nats* or demons; and his Chin ancestors had 54 of such *nats* to appease. Appeasement of the *nats* required sacrifice of various kinds of animals. Irrespective of the result, the healing rituals often left the propitiator heavily in debt. "One of the wholesome effect of my teaching is that where formerly many who had nothing went into debt to obtain sacrificial offerings and so could neither afford to buy food nor pay their taxes, my followers being free from such expenses are in much better circumstances."[7]

Along with the altered physical conditions, healing riffs on the prevailing symbolic order dominated by *nats* and the traditional Zo ritual experts. The wellbeing of ordinary folk, the non-experts, depended on how far they could go to manipulate that order. Healing for Pau came with a revelation of a creator God "who has the power to cure all sickness."[8] By appropriating the message of a mediated healing, Pau effectively upended the prevailing symbolic order; God, and not the *nats*, was the agent for healing. He described his practice when invited to households: "…after praying to God [Pau] would destroy completely the articles used for making sacrifices to the *Nats*…."[9] Upending a prevailing belief system came with collateral effects. The "old customs of the Chins" had no place in Pau's religion including the practice of retaining corpses the houses for several days, and the practice of reading pulses to determine illnesses. Dismantling the traditional Chin *doxa* meant constructing an alternative. Monotheism centered on Pasian replaced the order of *nats* and ritual experts; in their place, Pau and his followers inserted new rituals inscribed with a new logographic system.

Consequences, developments (what has it effected, set in motion?)

While a majority of the Zo converted to Christianity, Pau Cin Hau continued to eke out an alterity that was markedly anti-Christian. Almost the entire Zanniat

[6] Bennisson, Census of India 1931 Volume 11, 217.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

clan embraced Laipianism.[10] That his followers would take on a Laipian signifier underscores scripturalizing observable elsewhere. Sequoyah's invention of the Cherokee syllabary (Fig. 5a) is instructive in that it serves as a token both of cultural distinctiveness and characterization of Cherokee society as "most advanced" among the five so-called Civilized Tribes of the southeast.[11] The Hmongs regarded the China Inland Missionary, Samuel Pollard (1864–1915) as a quasi-messianic figure for his work on the Hmong script; more figuratively, for bringing back their once-stolen script.[12]

Fig.5a: Sequoyah with a tablet depicting his writing system for the Cherokee language. 19th-century print of a painting[13]

Fig.5b: Samuel Pollard (right) and Miao teachers[14]

The unidentified Englishman in Pau's dream does not quite measure up to a messianic figure; Pau would take on that messianic mantle himself. The framed

[10] H. N. C. Stevenson, *The Economics of the Central Chin Tribes* (Bombay: Times of India Press, 1943), 44, 91; and E. Pendleton Banks, "Innovation in a Zanniat Chin Village." *Southeast Asian Journal of Sociology 3* (1970): 39–42.

[11] See Margaret Bender, *Signs of Cherokee Culture: Sequoyah's Syllabary in Eastern Cherokee Life* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

[12] James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 320.

[13] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sequoyah.jpg

[14] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Pollard_and_Miao_teachers.jpeg

picture on Khup Go's door frame (Fig. 1) registers an important point in light of Pau Cin Hau's legacy. Khup Go's subsistence farming barely provides for his three daughters. His neighbor Mung No,* a Laipian convert to the local Baptist Church, attests to improved life conditions since he converted. He thinks that Khup Go and other Laipian choose to remain in the past and will remain so if they continue in the Laipian way. And yet, in spite of his life situation, Khup Go proudly displays the image of Pau Cin Hau alongside a table of the *Zolai* logographs.

Zolai inscribed something more than immediate pleasures and/or benefits. In her analysis of Seqouyah's syllabary, Bender observes that a logographic system functions as a mnemonic device. More than merely a neutral system for phonetic transcription, these systems function as a code that emphasizes the cultural, linguistic, and situational specificity.[15] For Khup Go, and even for many of the attendees at the Laipian *sanginn* in Kalay, that they could not read Zolai was not the issue. Rather what was important was that they had a distinct script that set them apart from other Zos.

[15] Margaret Bender, "Framing the Anomalous: Stoneclad, Sequoyah, and Cherokee Ethnoliteracy," in *New Perspectives on Native North America: Cultures, Histories, and Representations*, ed. Sergei Kan, Pauline Turner Strong, and Raymond Fogelson (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006). 52.