

**“My Lord’s Coming Again”:
Biblical Interpretation through Slave Songs
By Stuart Young**

Introduction

*Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home.
Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home.*

The words above, in italics, are taken from an “old Negro spiritual.” At times, this song and others like it have been described as inspirational and uplifting. Some describe it as a coded message encouraging slaves to resist and run away from their masters. Yet few have studied such slave songs through the lens of Biblical interpretation. It is common knowledge that the black church has played a critical role in the various social movements in the African American community. From the Negro spirituals of the eighteenth century to Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream speech” of 1964, African Americans have used their religion not only to cope with present social ills, but also to cry defiantly against racism and oppression. Although scholars may be moved and inspired by black religious life, they often suggest that the lack of formal analytical methods prevents African American works from being seriously considered as religious discourse or legitimate Biblical interpretation. The circumstances of African Americans, they argue, although unfortunate, impose a biased ideology onto the text (Blount 1995: 176). In the case of slaves who had no education at all, their theological interpretations merited little consideration.

Part I: Formulating an Approach

The first step must be to find an approach that will help us to analyze and interpret the slave songs in relation to Biblical texts. Fortunately, scholars have developed various new approaches during the last three decades. I chose from among current scholars whose

methods were based on social-scientific research yet would still be able to express cultural issues through the slave songs.

Brian K. Blount's Theory of Cultural Interpretation

Brian K. Blount, Assistant Professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, opposes the glib dismissal of human interpretations of Biblical passages. He notes that the traditional methods of Biblical interpretation have failed to bring the text to life in order to create substantive meaning in the lives of black Christians. He contends that new, culturally based methods of interpreting the Bible are no less valid than established traditional methods. Blount further asserts that all methods of discourse are somehow "biased" due to the influences of the author's community, background, and goals in interpreting the text. Therefore, liberation theology and other cultural interpretations can no longer be ignored, and in fact, they have uncovered valuable insights into the text that benefit academia as a whole. Blount does not desire to end traditional Biblical interpretation, but only to reconcile the more radical methods with the more conservative.

Blount asserts that the traditional Euro-centric methods of interpretation seek to define what the Christian New Testament texts meant for their first century audiences and often ignore the purposes of those texts: to inspire all audiences. As historians attempt to ascertain the "correct" meaning, they attempt to be objective by declaring the possibility of their own biases and trying to remove them from their analysis. However, Blount asserts that this technique still requires historians and theologians to use ideas from their own background to arrive at their conclusions. Their own cultural backgrounds, which are often of white European descent, inherently influence their judgment, yet academia still determines their methods to be accurate and acceptable.

In his book *Cultural Interpretation Reorienting New Testament Criticism*, Brian Blount demonstrates that the "correct" method of interpretation presupposes Euro-centric concepts and values, and it imposes them onto the text and the reader. He finds these traditional methodologies guilty of the same flaws that were used to judge minority interpretations, for attempts to seek to define an "objective" meaning carry a specific ideology that restricts the meaning and engagement of the text to an audience of similar background. In Blount's eyes, if those on the exterior or fringe of society wish to engage a religious text, they must confine their methods and ideas to the established methods of the

system. Many minorities who wish to use the text to empower their communities, communities with vastly different circumstances and experiences, are unable to confine their scholarly arguments to the established system or may find that doing so severely compromises their intent. Consequently, they will not be able to participate in formal academic interpretation, because their conclusions will be labeled as biased and “coloring” the text (Blount 1995: 2-3).

Although Blount does not state so explicitly, one can infer that he is making a moral argument for modern religious scholars to be more inclusive. According to Blount, the text makes no difference for these outsiders, but the meanings that scholars draw from the text should speak to everyone. Blount sites an example: he spoke to a group of inner city youths about the parable in Luke chapter 12 where Jesus says, “seek his kingdom, and all these things shall be yours as well.” Having used a Euro-centric approach, Blount was shocked to see his message leave minority youth so uninspired. These youth were so entrenched in the traumas of being poor and black that they were unable to derive value from the text. In fact, his message may have exacerbated their misery. These individuals so despaired of ever having a brighter future that his comments only reminded them of their inability to change their life. In order for a Biblical text to reach those who are outside of society’s mainstream, standards of interpretation must be suited to include their perspectives, which Blount claims are completely ignored in traditional academia (Blount 1995: 2-3).

Blount seeks to reorient how scholars interpret texts. Rather than focusing on a search to identify one true meaning of a text, Blount invites his peers to consider the notion that because a scholar’s conclusions are tied to his own cultural and social background, then the context from which the author writes directs him towards a particular meaning of the text. But Blount asserts that there are vast potential meanings that one can draw from a text, and these are derived from diverse perspectives and interpersonal contexts. Consequently, authors need not debate over who is right and who is wrong, because people of different backgrounds will have access to different aspects of potential meanings.

The implications of this kind of discussion are dramatic. We are not only arguing that the context discovers “meaning”; we are also proposing that contextual interpretation is beneficial to the program of biblical inquiry. If, indeed, there is not “meaning,” but “meaning potential,” and if interpreters

access only portions of that potential as it relates to their particular contextual situations, then a more comprehensive discovery of a text's "meaning potential" can only come about as interpreters from a vast array of interpretative backgrounds are invited into and accepted within the investigative process (Blount 1995: viii).

Although Blount's work focuses on a reorientation of the goals for which Biblical scholars strive, he does not intend to "throw the baby out with the bath water." In fact, he seeks to connect more radical methods with traditional ways of interpreting text. The investigation into potential meanings will broaden the perspective of the mainstream, and the overall context for traditional scholarship will shift to be more inclusive. Blount seeks to build interpersonal relationships between the reader and the text and among different readers to achieve inclusion. This creates a pathway to studying Negro Spirituals and other forms of African American religious expression in a light that makes a significant impact on theology and Biblical interpretation.

Blount chooses socio-linguistic methods to prove his case. Socio-linguistics seeks to examine how people in different sociological and linguistic categories use their language to interpret a text. Language functions differently for people in different contexts. Thus, two people from different backgrounds can interpret the same text, but because of variations in linguistic usage, they draw starkly different conclusions. If those differences are not engaged, then the mainstream is left alone to its own ideology and its complex, traditional, academic interpretations accomplish little more than perpetuating that ideology (Blount 1995: 6-7).

Professor Blount uses the sociological method of Enrique Dussel to show how scholars can interact with different perspectives and draw new conclusions. Blount then uses the linguistic method of M. A. K. Halliday as a model of how scholars can engage the scripture they study. In short, Dussel's model demonstrates how members of mainstream society can continually analyze the reality of members on society's periphery from their perspective—and those on the exterior can do likewise. This interaction offers new perspectives that will shape the theories and ideas of the center. New political and social realities become available to the mainstream, and this will shift the totality of the system to be more inclusive of minority perspectives. The effect is a system of interpretation that

embraces different social and political realities. The mainstream's monopoly on interpretation is broken.

Halliday's method includes three stages of interpretation: textual, ideational, and interpersonal. A textual analysis is the simplest of the three. It examines the structures and function of the text, in order to see how the text operates. The ideational stage seeks to understand the people, places, events, and emotions represented by the language. The interpersonal analysis delves into the meaning and significance of the passage. Here, one tries to get inside the cultural context of the text and its author (Blount 1995: 8, 11).

Blount could only briefly summarize another person's method of using linguistics to analyze a text. Blount pays relatively little attention to textual and ideational analysis, for it is in the interpersonal analysis that Blount demonstrates that mainstream academia has its own ideology and restricts the potential meanings of texts. And it is through Halliday's interpersonal method that Blount will legitimize the Biblical interpretation of those outside of the mainstream. However, more is available from textual and ideational analysis than a cursory investigation would suggest. One can incorporate other methods of getting inside the text to find evidence of potential meanings.

Vernon K. Robbins and a Socio-Rhetorical Approach

Professor Vernon K. Robbins outlines a clear, detailed method for textual analysis in his book *Exploring the Texture of Texts*. Particularly, his methods of inner texture and intertexture give Biblical students methods by which they can unlock previously overlooked knowledge. Blount encourages those scholars outside of the academic mainstream to use textual and ideational analyses, for these define the boundary lines within which the scholar will work to identify the potential meanings of a passage appropriate for one's social background. This type of analysis will also establish a credible link with the American mainstream. However, these boundary lines can and should be pushed. Minority scholars may find Robbins's work with inner and intertexture more useful than Blount's summary of Halliday's method. Although Robbins's methodology has more detail, it is relatively simple, and allows for a clearer analysis of slave songs in relation to Biblical texts.

Inner texture deals with examining the words and phrases of the text itself without searching for the text's meaning. This gives the reader access to understanding the

structure of the text, but it does so without marrying the reader to a specific set of Eurocentric ideals or values, for it does not directly address the meaning of a text, yet it provides insights into the context that will shape the meaning or meanings.

Word or phrase repetition is one of the paramount features of inner texture. Examining the number of times that words or phrases are used in a given passage will not only open the reader up to a cursory understanding of the text, but also reveal the major characters, critical actions, and important social or cultural topics. Patterns may begin to emerge from the repetition, and the reader may then gain insight into how the text flows and progresses. Robbins refers to this as progressive texture. Robbins uses several charts to demonstrate that certain repeated words lead to other repeated words. For example, one chart analyzing Mark, chapters 15 and 16, indicates that the phrase “King of the Jews” progresses towards a variation of the word crucifixion.

Another form of inner texture that may be valuable for cultural reorientation is sensory-aesthetic texture. Here, one searches the text for words and phrases that deal with the human senses and aesthetics: sight, smell, touch, sound, emotion, and thought. Robbins condenses this into three body zones: emotion-fused thought (those body parts, emotions, or nouns that deal with seeing, feeling, and thinking), self-expressive speech (those words that relate to hearing and speaking), and purposeful action (those words which describe or refer to humans doing things or taking action in the physical world). A large number of words relating to a particular zone demonstrate the emphasis of the author; a focus on the zone of purposeful action may indicate that the author views action as more important than thinking. Although examining the inner texture may not give the reader the interpersonal dimensions of the text—the “why’s” behind the progression, or the specific intent of the author’s choice of words, it does open the readers to the world of the text and shows them the boundaries within which they can address the questions that they bring to the text.

Whereas inner texture deals with the text itself, intertexture deals with the text in relation to other texts and outside phenomena. Robbins defines intertexture as those aspects of a text that refer to other texts, historical events, customs, values, and institutions either explicitly or implicitly. Robbins uses the term oral-scribal intertexture to specify those passages that refer to other texts, either Biblical or non-Biblical. Certain texts recite or replicate passages from other written texts. Some do so exactly. Many others contain a

few differences between the recitation and the original. Other scriptures recontextualize passages from other texts. Here, they modify the original version to fit their present circumstances, and do so without mentioning the existence of the original, thus taking an old story and putting it in a new context. Sometimes, texts recount older events in such a way that the current event in the text is new and outshines the older text. The original becomes a foreshadowing of the newer text. Other passages combine all three, extending and elaborating the original text. In examining the intertexture, one can see how external sources have been worked and reworked into the text. This, combined with inner texture, reveals insights into the priorities, traditions and culture (the context) of the author or authors of the Christian New Testament. In Blount's cultural method of interpretation, inner and inter textual analysis gives liberation theologians more than just boundary lines for interpreting a text. Robbins's approach is malleable and can be suited to each author's individual questions and cultural context. Thus, scholars gain new potential meanings into the past and present meanings of the text.

Including Interpersonal Dimensions in a Socio-Rhetorical Approach

By discovering potential meanings, Blount takes his readers through the interpersonal dimensions of several communities who use Biblical passages and interpretations to empower themselves and to discover what a religious passage means for them in the present. Members of oppressed groups are not concerned with what the text meant when it was originally created, but rather how they can use it actively in their own lives. This is used not only for religious purposes but also for political goals. Blount does not merely conclude that the communicative context of the interpreters influences their analysis, but also he shows how this process occurs.

Blount uses an existentialist method to move this process along. Blount asserts that every scholar approaches a text with presuppositions in mind, and that these presuppositions will form the scholar's understanding of the text. The existential interpretation condenses these influences into two factors: preunderstanding and life-relation. One's preunderstanding is the relationship of the interpreters to history: how they understand historical events, how they view their place in history, and how they view their responsibilities for history and the world that history has shaped. One's life-relation is the relationship between the interpreter, the subject matter, and the physical world around him.

In other words, life-relation is the view the interpreter carries about himself and his lot in life when he approaches the text. One's preunderstanding and life-relation will prompt the questions the interpreter will ask of the text and affect the answers he receives from it (Blount 1995: 31).

Blount uses the songs of slaves, "Negro spirituals," to demonstrate his point. Slaves wrote Negro spirituals during the antebellum period. Clearly, their primary life relation was that of slavery. Slave masters justified slavery in the present, because it was socially acceptable in the Bible. These arguments were thought to make the slaves docile. However, the slaves found such notions outrageous. Upon examining the spirituals, Blount notes that the slaves viewed their present circumstances as evil, and the evils of slavery should be opposed and resisted. That was the preunderstanding that they took to their religious experience. Because overt resistance was punishable by death, slave songs took on a covert meaning. Slaves expressed their defiance to slavery through their songs.

Reflecting their theology, their songs describe Jesus Christ as their deliverer: someone who was on their side and who understood unjust persecution. They created a special relationship with God's son, one that they believed that no white person could experience—for no white person experienced the unjust persecution that they did. Slaves also identified with the people of Israel, who were slaves in Egypt and were eventually freed. Thus, they reoriented Biblical mythology to address their spiritual needs. Songs were an oral response to their circumstances, and religious figures became symbols of their freedom (Blount 1995: 60-62, 67-68).

Religious experiences were reoriented towards political goals as well. Because slavery was considered evil and Jesus was a symbol of freedom, civil disobedience was congruous with their religious beliefs. And although most slaves were literally waiting for Jesus to return and rescue them, many did engage in revolutionary type behavior by running away. Songs of freedom were often used as guides to show other slaves how to run away, and whites feared that certain songs did have overt revolutionary tones (Blount 1995: 61-62). Spirituals became the language of affirmation and liberation. Although they did not examine the historicity of what the text meant for its original audience, in an existential manner, they adapted the religious material to answer what the text meant for them in their hour of need. Thus, they linked the past mythology with the present realities. Their social context (the horror of slavery) shaped how illiterate slaves interpreted Biblical

stories and reoriented them from the slave master's intent—docility—to fit their communal needs, namely the preservation of the human spirit.

Unfortunately, Blount does not explore the different dimensions of the religious response of slaves. His conclusions assert the fact that many slaves were resisting their oppressors, but in the process of discovering the potential meanings of a text, it is important to examine the various potential interpretations that can be drawn from the slave songs. Just as slaves suffered tremendously, they also constructed a complex theology and mythology. This culture is not monolithic but has many layers that must be explored in order to uncover macro-interpersonal dimensions of the slave songs and the Biblical passages to which they refer.

Chapters fourteen and fifteen of the book of Mark focus on the two trials of Jesus before his crucifixion. Blount analyzes the work of other scholars who have interpreted this passage. Some attempt to find the accurate history of what actually happened to Jesus; others use the text to empower their political purposes. In discussing each author's argument, evidence, and conclusion, Blount observes that each scholar deals interpersonally with the text; however, he creates a distinction in the interpersonal dimensions of analysis. There are micro-interpersonal and macro-interpersonal dimensions. "Macro-interpersonal refers to the scholarly attempt to uncover the interpersonal factors involved in the original setting of the text; micro-interpersonal refers to the interpreter's own involvement in the act of interpretation" (Blount 1995: 140). The traditionalists who are interested in the history of the text seek to identify the macro-interpersonal dimensions, while the liberationists utilize the micro-interpersonal dimensions, often to further a cause for their communities. Blount demonstrates that scholars are always dealing with both levels; however, the scholars, dependent on their personal context, usually pursue one of the two interpersonal dimensions. Unfortunately, macro-interpersonal investigation is viewed as more legitimate than micro-interpersonal study, but Blount views both as necessary and critical to create an ideology-free method of Biblical interpretation.

New micro-interpersonal perspectives promote changes in the ways in which the textual and ideational materials are evaluated, and the changes are not always simply alternative views. The new perspectives allow for a fuller appreciation for the range of meaning that resides in the text. New questions allow researchers to

see different aspects of the potentiality. New questions bring about new kinds of interpretive conclusions. In this way interpreters move beyond the boundaries of previous interpretations. It is not that new meaning has been imposed on the text. Rather, the text has been seen in a new way so that meaning that had been overlooked before suddenly floats to the surface (Blount 1995: 141).

In Blount's experience, traditional scholars tend to regard their own work with an air of superiority over the interpretations of those who operate from popular culture or ethnography. As Blount goes through their conclusions, he observes that each scholar confronts "gaps" in knowledge concerning the culture, traditions, and ideas of the first century inhabitants who heard and wrote the first stories of Jesus. In attempting to ascertain what the text meant, they fill these gaps with their own hypotheses, based on their own cultural context. Different micro-interpersonal influences lead to a variety of questions asked from the text, and consequently, they lead to different—sometimes conflicting—conclusions. Rather than invalidating their technique, Blount uses his critique to laud this dialog among scholars, for it contributes to the richness of the text.

The diversity among the traditionalists contributes to new insights and newly inspired questions. More potential meanings are discovered, and through inquiring into those potential meanings, scholars move beyond their previous boundaries of interpretation (Blount 1995: 140-44). Blount concludes that because all interpretations are highly contextualized, no one person's or one community's interpretation should be viewed as superior to others. Thus, the influence of one's micro-interpersonal experience on the analysis should not be invalidated but engaged. The acknowledgment of and interaction with different perspectives promotes learning and a fuller presentation of the text (Blount 1995: 174).

Robbins also recognizes the value of interpreting a text through the lens of culture and perspective. In his chapter entitled "Social and Cultural Texture," Robbins explores anthropological theory in order to see the world that the text evokes. Examining social and cultural topics allows the reader to understand the world in which the author and his characters lived, the world that is created or evoked, and the context from which the author writes. From the language of the text (and the preceding methods), one can hypothesize the religious worldview of the authors of the Christian New Testament texts. Robbins identifies seven character-types of religious authors and defines their priorities, world

outlook, and plan for action to promote change. This becomes important in constructing an argument for a macro-interpersonal interpretation

1. The **Conversionist** believes that the world is corrupt because people are corrupt, and if people can be converted—through a divine supernatural transformation, the world will be changed for the better.
2. The **Revolutionist** believes that the world and its corrupt structures can be saved only through its destruction from a supernatural power.
3. The **Introversionist** views the world as irredeemable, and salvation as attainable only by withdrawing from the world.
4. The **Gnostic-Manipulationist** seeks a transformed way of relating to life and a transformed method of coping with evil. Salvation becomes possible in the world if people learn new ways of dealing with their problems.
5. The **Thaumaturgical** response is concern for people's relief from their present social ills. Salvation is achieved through healing and assuagement from suffering.
6. The **Reformist** views the world's evils as a result of its corrupt social structures. Salvation is attained through divine insight into changing social structures that condone evil behavior.
7. The **Utopian** response to social evils is that people—rather than a supernatural entity—should remake the world and create a totally new social organization that would eliminate evil (Robbins 72-74).

Understanding these Christian responses to the world contributes to the insights into the culture of the author; hence, insights into more potential meanings. Each response carries certain types of meanings, values, beliefs, and actions that the author tries to promote in society. The religious responses to the world apply not only to the author but also to the

scholar. These religious responses appear in the slave songs. By looking at Biblical passages to which the songs refer, and to word usage and repetition, one can get a sense of the various responses apparent in similar groups of slave songs.

Robbins builds on cultural interpretation in his chapter entitled “Ideological Texture.” There, he outlines methods for analyzing ideologies. However, in order to understand the ideologies of others, one must understand one’s own ideology. Robbins begins his analysis of ideological texture by examining his own life history and how his age and background influence his location within the worldview of the specific social topics. Both Blount and Robbins would probably assert that it is paramount for Biblical scholars to understand their own pre-understandings and life-relations.

Robbins’s work with ideological texture in chapter four is aligned with Blount’s cultural interpretation. Ideological texture is concerned with people over the text. Ideological analysis involves the examination of biases, opinions, stereotypes, and preferences of not only the author but also the reader. Thus, the reader enters into a dialog with the text and examines his own judgments, predispositions, and values concerning his interpretation of the text. Ideological dialog is critical in one’s interpretation and commentary on a text. The ideological analysis not only deals with individual authors but also with the groups with which they identify and how these different cultural backgrounds inherently influence interpretations. It is only through ideological discussion that the conflicting views—as Blount deals with those of European descent versus those of African descent—can be interpersonally addressed, acknowledged, and integrated.

Robbins identifies five modes of intellectual discourse—that is, five approaches to studying the Bible, each carrying its methods and ideology. Understanding the ideology behind the mode of analysis allows scholars to better engage and integrate different perspectives. Like Blount, Robbins affirms the validity of each mode of discourse. In fact, he encourages the readers, who are often his students, to choose the mode that most excites and interests them:

1. **Historical-Critical discourse** dominates current Biblical interpretation in academia. This mode uses accurate historiography to gain new insights into theology, which may be used to prove or disprove other theories.

2. **Social-Scientific criticism** arises from scholars who are social scientists rather than literary critics or theologians. They examine anthropological and sociological aspects of the text, such as values and common perceptions.
3. **History of Religions discourse** uses historical and anthropological resources to study religious rituals, myths, festivals, and practices and to compare them to other religious traditions around the world.
4. **New Historical discourse** uses techniques similar to history of religions discourse, but the end goal is to interweave the history with the myth in order to create a new multivalent history.
5. **Post Modern Deconstructive discourse** creates a new context for the text, relating it the modern era, rather than searching for the context in which it was written (Robbins 105-110).

Understanding the ideology behind the mode of analysis allows scholars to better engage and integrate different perspectives, and thereby eliminates some of the conflict among arguments for one ideology's superiority. Blount might agree with the statement that the first three modes of discourse focus on a macro-interpersonal analysis of a text, whereas the last two seek a micro-interpersonal relationship with the text.

In the Biblical interpretation in this essay, I will use Robbins's socio-rhetorical methods of inner texture and intertexture as a substitute for Blount's textual and ideational methods. Robbins's methods provide more detailed procedures than do Blount's summary analysis of M. A. K. Halliday's methods, and I have some experience with Robbins's methodologies. Robbins's methods will give me not only boundary lines for analyzing Negro spirituals, but also potential macro-interpersonal meanings for several Biblical passages.

Blount's work with the reorientation of Biblical interpretation will allow me to develop facility with Robbins's Social, Cultural, and Ideological texture, and in fact, push the limits of Professor Robbins's initial methods in working with the micro-interpersonal dimensions of the text. I will be using aspects of the African American religious tradition

for interpreting New Testament scripture. I will also be connecting these Biblical interpretations with other speeches, songs, and writings of African Americans in an inter-textual style analysis.

As Robbins indicates in his chapter on ideological texture, an author should state his location on the spectrum of Biblical discourse. Another significant aspect that contributes to my own micro-interpersonal interaction with the text is my experience with modern ontology and existentialism: the study of “being” in life and how humans view and relate to their lives. This view involves an inquiry into how and why humans relate to their lives, who they are being when they are functioning successfully, as well as who they are being when their lives are not working as they would like. Just as humans create interpretations and conclusions about texts, humans do so in their lives. They create “stories” about themselves, other people, and life in general. Often, humans are attached to these stories; they gather evidence for them, and conclude that their stories are the way life is. They fail to see their perceptions as mere stories, constructs that they created. This, in turn, limits their ability to interact with new conversations and ideas that may shift the paradigm in which they live. Thus, they may try to change the circumstances of their life with which they are dissatisfied, some with more success than others. But because they are trapped in the same way of relating to their lives, the same or only story that they accept as “the truth,” they have access to only one way of being. This produces the same result in their lives over and over again. This view will no doubt encourage me to explore the potential meanings of texts that leave readers with new ways of thinking and new ways of relating to the text, not merely adding on to what is already there or fixing what is not working.

Consequently, I would label myself a Gnostic-Manipulationist. This orientation undoubtedly contributes to my promoting of new ways in which academics can view older material. This thesis is an attempt to integrate Historical-Critical discourse (Robbins’s analysis of inner and intertexture) with New Historical discourse and Post Modern Deconstructive discourse (Blount’s methods of Cultural Interpretations). I will be working with slave songs in an attempt not only to demonstrate that they are a response to the circumstances of slavery, but also to uncover the various religious responses and Biblical references therein. Through an intertextual analysis of these songs, I intend to prove that

the slaves have constructed an oral theology that is authentic Biblical interpretation and that this interpretation is a contribution to Biblical analysis as a whole.

Part II: Slave Songs and Apocalyptic Discourse

In his most recent work, *Then The Whisper Put On Flesh*, Blount examines the book of Revelation in relation to the songs sung by slaves that use imagery from that book of the Bible. Blount passionately discredits the notion that these songs were sung in order to divert their attention from the present horrors of slavery, but rather, he asserts that these songs were sung to inspire resistance. He sites Harriet Tubman and her use of *Swing Low Sweet Chariot* as she delivered slaves from the south to the north on her Underground Railroad. He even sites Nat Turner, who was one of the few slaves actually to revolt against whites. Because the slaves had little to lose in their present circumstances, these calls to resist created a new future for the slaves in the very present. The possibility of freedom was there impacting them in their present moment of slavery (Blount 2001: 159-160).

I do not take issue that freedom's possibility empowers and inspires one in the present, rather than being a mere tool to escape reality. However, most slaves did not actively resist slavery or segregation's oppression. Therefore, I am inclined to press Blount on this issue. Blount only recites five slave songs in his analysis of the book of Revelation. Further study of slave songs reveals additional responses to the world. Using multiple models of religious responses to the world, one can gain insights into new potential meanings for the slave songs and their authors' intentions. Blount's theme of resistance would most likely be characterized by a Reformist response (those who wish to change the social structures of society). However, a socio-rhetorical analysis would indicate that the slaves were theologically oriented towards the responses of the Revolutionist (the belief that God will destroy the world) and Thaumaturgical (relief from present suffering). At times, other responses also play a significant role, and those will be examined as well. In the quest to eliminate the dominant ideology of Biblical analysis, it is important that we examine multivalent layers of the text and their potential meanings. Painting all the slaves with the broad brush of "resistance" limits what is possible not only for the texture of the slave songs but also for the Bible verses to which they refer.

In addition, Blount makes limited comparisons of the slave songs to the Bible. I find this to be an opportunity. In Blount's first book, *Cultural Interpretation*, he does extensive work with the Old Negro spirituals and the Passion narratives—particularly in the book of Mark. Having studied with Professor Robbins the book of Revelation and other apocalyptic discourses, I thought that I could contribute to Blount's work in this area, while building on the work and experience I gained from Robbins's seminar. Examining how the slaves relate to death, the end of the world, and the afterlife will give the reader insight into how slaves viewed themselves and their relationship to God.

A potential meaning I assert is that not only were the slaves resisting certain kinds of authority, but they were also laying claim to a spiritual inheritance. Slaves talked not merely about getting to heaven, but they specifically sited the New Jerusalem by name and other things like streets of gold, tree of life, the book of life, and King Jesus' reign. The only people who could make it into the New Jerusalem were God's special chosen people, the elite of God—the Bride of Christ. Through an inner and inter textual analysis of the slave songs, I will argue that the slaves viewed themselves not only as full human beings (fully capable of resisting demeaning notions of inferiority), but also as God's special chosen who would lay hold of their spiritual birthright—as did the Jews. This could be a potential meaning for how slaves viewed themselves--the "Jews" of the modern era. This would certainly explain why Judgment Day songs are often upbeat and happy.

Scholars have already asserted that slaves viewed Jesus as being on their side. But what if they viewed Jesus as being their bridegroom? Of course, he is never mentioned as such, but they certainly may describe themselves as having characteristics of the Bride of Christ. This analysis will not only provide a micro-interpersonal analysis (what it meant to the slaves), but also has implications for a macro-interpersonal analysis (what it has meant to audiences throughout history).

Velma Thomas' book *No Man Can Hinder Me* describes the songs that represented the long journey of African Americans from Africa to their emancipation. Although her analysis is cursory, she captures the essence and background of several Negro spirituals: despite a black holocaust, African Americans have survived, most often empowering themselves through songs. Thomas appreciates the slave songs as an art form, but never entertains the idea that the slave songs present authentic Biblical interpretation. She certainly is aware of some Biblical references; she mentions several Biblical figures such

as Jesus and Moses. However, the Biblical scholarship stops there. She does not describe in detail the Biblical events to which the slave songs refer, and she does not mention any specific passages or verses in the Bible. Although she does state that the religion of the slaves helped them to cope with their circumstances, she gives no analysis, as Blount did, to show how the scriptures influenced the slaves' theology or their political aims—resistance to slavery. Her intent is to promote cultural awareness and pride in her community, rather than to perform an in-depth analysis. Although I intend to use the following songs for literary analysis, Thomas' background on the songs is critical to understanding how one can view the songs as Biblical Interpretation.

Howard Odum was a professor at the University of North Carolina. He, too, compiled a large book of songs sung by African Americans in the 1920s. *The Negro and His Songs* was used as an anthropological guide to understanding and explaining African Americans. In his analysis of the songs, he makes sweeping generalizations about African American culture and thought, with which current anthropologists would strongly disagree. He emphasizes the emotional beauty of “Negro songs,” and he acknowledges that slave songs often refer to Biblical characters. He never sites any specific verses, or does any sort of formal analysis. The following passage exemplifies the limits of his conclusions concerning African Americans and their religious life.

A rich variety of references to Scriptural characters is seen in the majority of the Negro spirituals, both of the past and of the present. The Negro portrays the conduct of heroes in the past with imaginative skill. His songs are often running stories of Scripture in which the effort is made to include as many characters as possible and at the same time draw conclusions which have suitable morals (Odum: 50).

Shortly after the end of slavery in America, William Francis Allen composed the book *Slave Songs in the United States*. Allen composed this book directly from the mouths of former slaves. The intent was to preserve the melodies that demonstrate the clear “musical capacity of the negro race” (Allen: i). The author appears moved by the talent exhibited in the slave songs; however, today, many would find his tone condescending and offensive. Of course, this book was originally published in 1867, a time that our collective social consciousness was greatly limited, even warped. The author takes no note of the Biblical references in the slave songs, and after the introduction, he gives no analysis of the songs

at all. He lists the songs along with the accompanying musical arrangement. Consequently, he does not list the entire song, but only the first verse. The reader is free to impose the musical score and pattern of repetition of the first verse onto the following verses.

For the purposes of this thesis, the slave songs have been grouped by subject in order to facilitate the process of an inter-textual analysis. The scriptures to which the slave songs refer are also included in order to help the comparison between the two. As the analysis unfolds, one begins to see the texture of the different texts emerge, and the multivalency of religious responses becomes apparent.

The Rapture/The Second Coming of Christ

The first set of songs refers to the Second Coming of Christ, commonly referred to among fundamentalist Christians as “The Rapture.” In academia this phenomenon is known as the Parousia. 1 Thessalonians 4 describes how the archangel will blow God’s trumpet, and Christ will return to get his people. First, the dead believers will rise to meet Christ in the air, and then those who are alive will also ascend to meet Jesus in the clouds. However, according to Matthew 24, and other various passages, the time that Christ will return is unknown. Consequently, believers should always be ready to leave this earth. Here the tone is Revolutionist rather than Reformist, for Jesus causes most of the purposeful action in rescuing his people. His followers need worry only about their personal relationship to God to be ready. For the slaves, Jesus is also rescuing them from their present suffering of slavery—what many may perceive as hell on earth—so Thaumaturgical elements are prevalent as well.

For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever (1 Thess 4:15-17).

Blow Your Trumpet, Gabriel

The first song describes the scene in 1 Thessalonians 4 where the believers in Christ are carried away, and its emphasis remains on the subject of the title. The song also weaves in several characters and objects from other parts of the Christian New Testament.

Blow Your Trumpet, Gabriel	
1. De talles' tree in Paradise, De Christian call de tree of life;	Rev 2:7 To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.
And I hope dat trump might blow me home	1 Thess 4:16 with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet...
To de New Jerusalem.	Rev 21:2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem...
Blow your trumpet, Gabriel, Blow louder, louder;	1 Thess 4:16 with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet Gabriel is present in Luke 1:19, 26
And I hope dat trump might blow me home To de new Jerusalem.	(see above)
2. Paul and Silas, bound in jail, Sing God's praise both night and day;	Acts 16:25-26 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened.
And I hope dat trump might blow me home To de new Jerusalem. Blow your trumpet, Gabriel, Blow louder, louder; And I hope dat trump might blow me home To de new Jerusalem (Allen: 3)	(see above)

This song begins with the tree of life and gives the location of the tree in Paradise (or the New Jerusalem), but the song omits the role that the tree plays in healing the nations. The blowing of the trumpet is present in 1 Thessalonians and signifies Christ's return to take his people away to heaven. The song, however, never refers to Jesus directly. Rather Gabriel takes center stage. The passage in 1 Thessalonians 4 does not refer to Gabriel by name as the trumpet blower, but only to "the Lord's Archangel."

Many of the slave songs weave in additional characters and events into the songs. Often the connection between the new additions and the subject of the song is not clear. Although this song focuses on the Second Coming of Christ, it introduces the story of Paul and Silas' imprisonment and miraculous rescue. It mentions Paul and Silas only as prisoners. Although their liberation may be implied, the song does not state that the praises from Paul and Silas led to their liberation. Yet the song itself shows the connection: by singing the song itself, the slaves, like Paul and Silas, are acknowledging God in the midst of their imprisonment. Implicit in the very structure of singing is the belief that praise from one's heart and faith in God will lead to a similar miraculous rescue. Thus, the interjection of Paul and Silas indicates a Thaumaturgical response in this verse.

A cursory analysis of the sensory-aesthetic texture shows the importance of the blowing of the trumpet. The repetitive texture of the word *blow* and the phrases dealing with the trumpet's blowing jumps out at the reader. The word *blow* appears eight times. And it is itself an ambiguous term. Since Gabriel's blowing a trumpet is an outwardly act upon an object, it would seem to fit into the category of purposeful action, and the blow itself transports the slaves to the New Jerusalem. However, blowing a trumpet implies mouth imagery, and it creates sound that is heard by others. It is also a startling, wake-up call. It calls one to attention to listen to the expression of the other characters, who use self-expressive speech. Paul and Silas sang, and the Christians "call" the tall tree the Tree of Life. It seems more appropriate to categorize this song as one that emphasizes self-expressive speech in the midst of suffering, rather than purposeful action. Yet there is the hope that someone else will startle the world to announce a miraculous rescue. Perhaps it recognizes that the slaves, like Paul and Silas, were powerless over their circumstances, but there was a higher power who could take charge, and they hoped for the time that the yoke of this world's suffering would be broken.

Fare Ye Well

The song, “Fare Ye Well,” is not referring to a natural goodbye, but rather to the time that the Savior returns and the slaves say goodbye to this world. Whereas a normal goodbye would express feelings of sadness, the tone of this song is an expression of excitement and anticipation.

Fare Ye Well	
<p>1. I'm gonna tell you about the coming of the Savior, Fare ye well, fare ye well. I'm gonna tell you about the coming of the Savior, Fare ye well, fare ye well.</p>	<p>Matt 24:42 Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.</p>
<p>There's a better day a-coming, Fare ye well, fare ye well. When my Lord speaks to his Father, Fare ye well, fare ye well. Say, Father I'm tired of bearing, Fare ye well, fare ye well. Tired of bearing for poor sinners, Fare ye well, fare ye well.</p>	<p>Heb 9:28 so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.</p>
<p>Oh preacher, fold your Bible, Fare ye well, fare ye well. Prayer-makers pray no more, Fare ye well, fare ye well.</p>	
<p>For the last soul's been converted, Fare ye well, fare ye well. For the last soul's been converted, Fare ye well, fare ye well.</p>	<p>Rom 11:25-26 So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “Out of Zion will come the Deliverer...”¹</p>
<p>4. In that great getti'-up morning, Fare ye well, fare ye well (Thomas: 35).</p>	

¹ Cf. 2 Esdras 4:35-37: “Did not the souls of the righteous in their chambers ask about these matters, saying, ‘How long are we to remain here? And when will the harvest of our reward come?’ And the archangel Jeremiel answered and said, ‘When the number of those like yourselves is completed; for he has weighed the age in the balance, and measured the times by measure, and numbered the times by number; and he will not move or arouse them until that measure is filled.’”

Although this song refers to the Second Coming of Christ, it makes no direct recitation of any portion of 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17. And the phrase “coming of the savior” is not found in the Christian New Testament. The conversation between God and Jesus in stanza two does not exist in the Christian New Testament. However, the description of Jesus as “bearing” sins is present in several Christian New Testament passages. A representative passage was chosen because it also referred to the Second Coming.

The third stanza explicitly states that the last soul has been converted. It is not clear if this means that the last soul is the last person to be converted from a predestined group or for all of humanity in general. In the case of the former, I found no references in the Christian New Testament. Concerning the latter, it would seem contradictory because not everyone, according to the book of Revelation, is going to heaven. Also, this song makes no mention of heaven or hell or the judgment that will lead to one’s eternal resting place.

However, some verses do state that there is a preset number of necessary conversions. In Romans, Paul links the prophecies of the Messiah in the Hebrew Bible to his journey to convert Gentiles. Here, he quotes from the book of Isaiah, stating that the Jesus will return and save Israel when the “full number” of Gentiles has been converted. Thus, it is up to him and others (including the slaves) to convert heathens in order to hasten Christ’s return. Since the subject matter of this song is the slaves’ leaving the earth, it appears that the slaves picked up the passage from Romans. One book from the Jewish Apocrypha, 2 Esdras 4:35-37, describes a scene where the righteous are waiting to receive their eternal reward. The Archangel refers to a preset number of righteous souls that must be converted in order for the reward to be given. Although this book is not in the Protestant or Catholic Bibles, it does support the idea about a “quota” of conversions that must be achieved.

This is another song that refers to the zone of self-expressive speech more than the other two body zones. The song begins by repeating the phrase “I’m gonna’ tell you about the coming of the Savior.” In stanza two, the slaves’ speaking is followed by Jesus’ speaking to his father. And in stanza three, those who pray are told that they no longer have to do so. Yet the song makes three references to purposeful action. Two are in stanza two, where Jesus is bearing the sins of the world. The slaves are also instructing preachers

to fold their Bibles. Apparently, no one needs to preach once everyone has been converted.

Brother, You’d Better Be A-Prayin’

Although the title of this song, “Brother You’d Better Be A-Prayin’,” indicates an admonition or even a criticism, the song moves in a different direction. The continual encouragement to pray is meant to prepare the audience for the Parousia and for Jesus’ reign.

Brother, You’d Better Be A-Prayin’	
Brother, you’d better be a prayin’ , Brother, you’d better be a prayin’, My brother, you’d better be a prayin’,	Luke 21:36 Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man... 1 Thess 5:17 pray without ceasing...
An’ I’ll be carried above, An’ I’ll be carried above, An’ I’ll be carried above.	1 Thess 4:17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air;
I’ll see King Jesus in his reign, An’ I’ll be carried above (Odum: 80).	Rev 20:4, 6 They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years... but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years

The admonition “Brother, you’d better be a prayin’” is repeated three times in this song. Although this admonition does not explicitly state that prayer is a prerequisite to being ready for the coming of the Lord, this meaning is strongly implied by the words of the next stanza, “An’ I’ll be carried above.” This is also the theme of similar Bible verses and other slave songs. This gives the song a Conversionist tone, for their prayers are their tickets to heaven. The verse “An’ I’ll be carried above” is spoken four times, and one can see the reference to the rapture of 1 Thessalonians 4. The reign of Christ is present in Revelation 20; however, there, Jesus is not referred to as King Jesus. Christ is never referred to as “King Jesus” in the Christian New Testament; however, in his crucifixion he is asked by Pilate if he is king of the Jews. Of course, Jesus’ reign on the earth implies that he will be king. In any case, the references to Revelation and 1 Thessalonians imply a

Revolutionist tone, for at that point Christ will have rescued his people and defeated evil through his power. This song reflects the experience of many slaves and contemporary Christians who attempt to keep themselves ready for the Lord's coming through continuing prayer. This is another way of transcending one's circumstances. One cannot change, control, or destroy the evil in the world, but one can change one's heart so that he can align with Jesus, who will do these things.

My Lord's Comin' Again

The tone and substance of this song is in line with its title. The song is celebratory, and again one can note the emphasis on encouraging others to stop lying, which may represent sinning as a whole.

My Lord's Comin' Again	
<p>1. Oh, my Lord's comin' again, Oh, my Lord's comin' again, (Talk about it:) Yes, my Lord's comin' again, It may be las' time, I don't know.</p>	<p>1 Thess 4:15 For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. Matthew 24:42 Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.</p>
<p>2. Well he's comin' to judge the worl', Well he's comin' to judge the worl', (Talk about it:) Yes my Lord's comin' to judge the worl', It may be las' time, I don't know.</p>	<p>John 9:39 Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." John 12:31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.</p>
<p>3. Well you had better put off lyin' shoes, Well you better put off lyin' shoes, (Talk about it:) Better put off lyin' shoes, For it may be las' time, I don't know (Odum: 74-75).</p>	<p>Matt 12:36-37 I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned Rev 14:5 and in their mouth no lie was found; they are blameless.</p>

“My Lord’s comin’ again” is spoken three times and is a reference to Jesus’ Second Coming that is described all over the Christian New Testament; 1 Thessalonians 4:15 is a representative passage, and it is also one of the most well known. However, this song does not site any specific events that occur with the Second Coming, such as a trumpet sound or rising in the clouds. The meaning of the phrase “it may be las’ time, I don’t know” is unclear. However, the location of the phrase at the end of each stanza implies that the singer acknowledges that the precise time of the Lord’s return is unknown. The words also suggest that this may be one’s last chance to get saved and stop one’s wicked ways. The song reflects the uncertainty of life, for the slave did not know whether he would live until the next day. Such personal uncertainty fits with the uncertainty of the timing of the world’s end.

Jesus’ bringing of judgment to the world occurs in various events in the Bible. Since the song never specifies the particular judgment that Jesus will bring, the verses from John can be taken as representative, because they have word usage similar to the song’s. An admonition in the third stanza is repeated three times. Although the slaves do not explicitly make the link between lying and going to hell, they imply one. This parallels several passages that explain that lying will prevent one from making it into heaven. This song creates the same tone and religious response. In both, Jesus is performing purposeful action that brings about a change in the world—a Revolutionist action. In the meantime, those who are waiting must maintain God’s law and encourage others to do the same: hence, Conversionist elements persist.

Steal Away

Although the song, “Steal Away,” is widely known for its double entendre, as it covertly encourages slaves to run away, it still draws upon several apocalyptic Biblical passages—specifically, 1 Thessalonians and Revelation.

Steal Away	
1. O the green trees a-blowin’	Rev 6:13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree drops its winter fruit when shaken by a gale.
An’ po’ sinner stan’ tremblin’	
Well, the trumpet soun’ in my soul,	1 Thess 4:16 with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet
An’ I ain’t got long to stay here.	Rev 22:20 “Surely, I am coming soon.”
2. O steal away, steal away. O steal away to my Jesus. Steal away, steal away, For I ain’t got long to stay here.	1 Thess 5:2 For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.
3. My Lord is a callin’, Po’ sinner he can’t answer. Well, the trumpet sound in my soul, An’ I ain’t got long to stay here (Odum: 139).	1 Thess 4:16 For the Lord himself , with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet , will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

Trees are present throughout the entire Bible; however, this song may be likening believers to green trees, but it does not specifically say so. If this were the case, one could point to several Hebrew Bible scriptures that describe God’s chosen as trees—such as Isaiah 61:3 and Psalm 1:3. Jesus, also, uses several parables where he compares people to trees, such as in Matthew 7. However, the image of a tree being shaken by wind is present in Revelation 6:13, which describes God’s pouring of judgment upon the earth through the seven seals.

The trumpet sound is a reference to 1 Thessalonians 4. The song cites the Lord's call, yet in Thessalonians, it is the archangel who makes the call. The song makes no other references to the scene in 1 Thessalonians, such as the rising of the dead in Christ, and the true believers' ascending to the clouds. The phrase, "I ain't got long to stay here," is the recitation of those verses that state that the Lord is coming soon. The phrase "Steal away," which is uttered five times throughout the song, is not present in the Christian New Testament; however, it conjures up imagery of thievery. This seems to be a recontextualization of the Lord's Second Coming, which is likened to a thief in the night, because one knows when it will happen.

1 Thessalonians 4 presents an encouraging scene for those who believe in Christ. The passage describes how Christ will return. In a royal display, the archangel will blow God's trumpet to announce the return; Christ will descend from heaven, and his followers will ascend to meet him, and they will live with him forever. This story seems to be a recontextualization of a celebratory scene where common people of the time would rush to the streets to greet a visiting ruler, whose arrival was denoted by a trumpet sound (HCSB: 2223).

The passage remains up beat and is meant to encourage believers, according 1 Thessalonians 4:18, which makes no mention of Christ's Judgment or Hell. One might say, according to this verse, that the story ends happily ever after. Many theologians conclude that following the Rapture, Christ's judgment will befall those who are left behind. The slaves do not seem to draw this conclusion. Only one out of the five songs in this section mentions judgment, "My Lord's Coming Again;" and this song never explicitly states whether the judgment will occur before or after the Rapture. However, only two of these songs make an explicit reference to the book of Revelation: one refers to the Millennial Reign and the other refers to the New Jerusalem. Thus, the slaves in these particular songs are unclear concerning their interpretation of the timeline concerning Christ's return and judgment.

The slaves' interpretation of this passage is uncertain. Although all of these songs refer to the Lord's Second Coming or Jesus' rescuing his true followers, only three mention the sound of the trumpet, and only one refers to an angel, and that song specifically names Gabriel as the one who blows the trumpet. 1 Thessalonians never identifies Gabriel, only that the archangel will blow the trumpet. None of the songs

mentions the dead in Christ rising first to meet him in the air. Songs of the dead rising do exist, but those usually refer to the dead being judged. This is a part of the 1 Thessalonians scene that is completely omitted. None of these songs states that believers will be caught up into the clouds with Christ. One song says “I’ll be carried away,” but this is not an explicit reference to the scene of ascension in 1 Thessalonians. Other songs do, in fact, make references to this aspect of the scene; however, the fact that it is not present in songs where Christ’s Second Coming is the focus seems to indicate that the religious response is Thaumaturgical rather than Revolutionist. The emphasis in these songs is deliverance and an end to suffering—living in Paradise, not Jesus’ restructuring of the universe to give everyone their just deserts.

Judgment and Tribulation

The next set of songs refers to God’s judgment and the tribulation period. Here, the songs often weave together different sections of the book of Revelation, passages from the book of Matthew, and other scriptures from the Christian New Testament. The imagery recreates some of the most graphic, terrifying scenes from the Christian New Testament. The anti-Christ comes to earth and reigns, killing those who stand against him. The forces of evil war against the forces of God. However, God demonstrates his omnipotence, for he brings down a number of plagues and horrors upon the earth by sending angels down to perform the acts of judgment. The slave songs cite particularly when God causes the stars to fall down to earth, burning up much of the world in their wake. The moon becomes red as blood; the elements of the earth (including all the human works) are melted, and great earthquakes rock the foundations of the world. Eventually, Christ will triumph and everyone, both dead and alive, will be judged. According to Revelation, those whose names are not written in the Lamb’s book of Life, i.e. sinners, will be cast into the lake of fire to burn for eternity. The primary passages that function as resources for the songs are as follows:

And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Acts 2:19-21).

When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and there came a great earthquake; the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree drops its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll rolling itself up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place (Rev 6:12-14).

The first angel blew his trumpet, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were hurled to the earth; and a third of the earth was up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up. The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea became blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water (Rev 8:7-10).

Despite these horrific scenes, many of the songs remain upbeat. According to Revelation, God's judgment is an instrument used to restructure the world, and to bring freedom and life to those who are chosen and death and hell to those who oppose God. The slaves identify themselves as people of God who will be spared such atrocities; thus, they eagerly wait for God's return. This would further contribute to the notion that the slaves' theology was Revolutionist rather than Reformist. Perhaps, the jovial tone of the songs comes not only from the slaves' gratitude for being spared but also from their satisfaction in knowing that evil slave masters will get their comeuppance.

The Day of Judgment

The song, "The Day of Judgment," has a notable repetitive texture, created by the repetition of the same clause three times at the beginning of each stanza. As the song progresses, it brings in apocalyptic discourse by describing specific events from the books of Revelation and Acts. The song concludes with specific imagery from Matthew's version of Christ's judgment.

The Day of Judgement	
<p>1. And de moon will turn to blood, And de moon will turn to blood, And de moon will turn to blood In dat day O-yoy, my soul! And de moon will turn to blood in dat day.</p>	<p>Rev 6:12 the full moon became like blood... Acts 2:20 The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.</p>
<p>2. And you'll see de stars a-fallin' And you'll see de stars a-fallin' And you'll see de stars a-fallin' In dat day O-yoy, my soul! And you'll see de stars a-fallin' in dat day.</p>	<p>Rev 6: 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale... Mark 13:25 and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.</p>
<p>3. And de world will be on fire And de world will be on fire And de world will be on fire In dat day O-yoy, my soul! And de world will be on fire in dat day.</p>	<p>Rev 8:7 The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, which fell on the earth; and a third of the earth was burnt up, and a third of the trees were burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up. Rev 8:10 The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the fountains of water.</p>
<p>4. And you'll hear de saints a-singin' And you'll hear de saints a-singin' And you'll hear de saints a-singin' In dat day O-yoy, my soul! And you'll hear de saints a-singin' in dat day.</p>	<p>Rev 14:3 and they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the one hundred forty-four thousand who have been redeemed from the earth.</p>

<p>5. And de Lord will say to de sheep. And de Lord will say to de sheep. And de Lord will say to de sheep. In dat day O-yoy, my soul! And de Lord will say to de sheep in dat day.</p> <p>6. For to go to Him right hand; For to go to Him right hand; For to go to Him right hand; In dat day O-yoy, my soul! For to go to Him right hand in dat day.</p> <p>7. But de goats must go to de left. But de goats must go to de left. But de goats must go to de left. In dat day O-yoy, my soul! But de goats must go to de left in dat day (Allen: 53).</p>	<p>Matt 25:31-32, 37 When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left... Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord..."</p>
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After the repetition of the same clause three times at the beginning of each stanza, the song repeats "In dat day O-yoy, my soul!," followed by a longer version of the clause than occurred at the beginning. Most of the imagery in this song comes from the book of Revelation, which directly states that the moon will turn to blood, the stars will fall from heaven, and the earth will be scorched. These events come from Revelation 6 and 8 where the seven seals are opened and the seven angels blow their trumpets. There are other catastrophic events in these chapters that this song does not site: for instance, Death and Hades kills a fourth of the earth's inhabitants through famine, disease, pestilence, violence,

and wild animals. This song does not pick up on the sea's turning into blood, great earthquakes, or the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars.

The song states that the saints will be singing; however, the "saints" do not sing in the book of Revelation. Those who sing in Revelation are the 144,000 who are redeemed from the earth by Jesus. The 144,000 are later described as those who will dwell with God and Christ in the New Jerusalem. Also, the four creatures and the twenty-four elders sing at the throne of God in Revelation 5. Perhaps this suggests that the slaves identify with these heavenly figures.

This song progresses through apocalyptic imagery in Revelation to the dramatic parable in Matthew 25. The song recites how Jesus will separate the sheep on his right hand from the goats on his left. Although one can clearly infer from the title that this song takes place on judgment day, this song does not specifically state the criteria by which people will be judged or the consequences of Jesus' judgment: the sheep are the righteous who will receive eternal life, and the goats are sinners who will receive eternal punishment.

An inner textual examination of the sensory-aesthetic texture shows a display of all three body zones. The zone of emotion-fused thought is present in stanza two, where the slaves describe the people who see the stars' falling; this phrase is sung four times. The zone of self-expressive speech is evoked eight times in this song. The first four times occur in stanza four when the slaves hear the saints' singing. The second set occurs in stanza five where Jesus speaks, issuing his judgment. The Lord's words bring about a purposeful action on the part of the people in stanzas six and seven. This zone is evoked eight times as the sheep and goats "go" to their respective sides. Although the slaves do understand the judgment that will befall the earth, the body-zone emphasis is on the interaction between Christ and the people of the earth, represented by the sheep and the goats.

The Judgement Day

The song, “Judgement Day,” is similar to the previous one in tone and subject matter. There are some differences in the texts to which this song refers. This song, however, does not describe Christ’s actual Judgment of the world and its inhabitants.

The Judgment Day	
My Lord, what a morning when de stars begin to fall	Rev 6: 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale... Mark 13:25 and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.
You’ll see de worl’ on fire	Rev 8:7 The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, which fell on the earth; and a third of the earth was burnt up, and a third of the trees were burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.
You’ll see de moon a bleedin’ an’ De moon will turn to blood,	Rev 6:12 the full moon became like blood...
Den you’ll see de elements a meltin’	2 Pet 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief... and the elements will be dissolved with fire...
You’ll see de stars a fallin’, O yes, de stars in de elements a fallin’, An’ de moon drips way in blood,	(See above)
When God goin’ call dem chilluns from de distant lan’	1 Thess 4:16 For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet...

<p>Den you see de coffins bustin’, Den you see de bones a creepin’, Den you see po’ sinner risin’, Den you hear de tombstones crackin’, An’ you see de graves a bustin’. Hell an’ seas gwine give up their daid,</p>	<p>1 Thess 4:16 ...and the dead in Christ will rise first. Revelation 20:13 And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done.</p>
<p>Den you see de forked lightnin’ Den yo hear de rollin’ thunder Earth shall reel an’ totter</p>	<p>Rev 16:18 And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a violent earthquake, such as had not occurred since people were upon the earth, so violent was that earthquake.</p>
<p>Hell shall be uncapped, De dragon be loosed—</p>	<p>Rev 20:2, 3, 7, 8 He seized the dragon...and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him... When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth.</p>
<p>Don’t you hear them sinners cryin? (Odum: 54).</p>	

The song “The Judgement Day” paints a much more dramatic picture than the previous song, “The Day of Judgement.” It weaves in several more passages from Revelation. Like the previous song, this song describes the stars’ falling, the world’s burning, and the moon’s turning to blood. However, the end of the song weaves in other catastrophes such as thunder, lightning, and earthquakes. All three occur together in Revelation 16:18. Like the last song, this song makes no mention of Death and Hades, the bloody seas, or the darkened sun and stars.

In the middle of the song lies a reference to the Parousia. The song states that God will be the one who calls, yet 1 Thessalonians states that the archangel will call and blow God’s trumpet. Then the song describes the dead rising from their graves. It is possible that this refers to the dead in Christ, who will ascend with him in the Parousia. However,

the last phrase that mentions the dead takes the reader back to Revelation 20, which is the Judgment seat of Christ. This song captures more of the horror of Revelation than the others do. This description might reflect the slaves' desire for retribution.

Towards the end of the song, Hell is uncapped, and the dragon is loosed. These two lines are the shortest in the song and do not specify much about the scene they describe. However, in Revelation 12-20, the dragon (and Satan) appears, is locked away, and reappears. When the dragon first appears in Revelation 12, it has not been loosed, but it appears in heaven and starts a war. When the dragon is defeated, he is thrown not down to hell but only to the earth. But later in chapter twenty, Christ locks the dragon in the pit for 1,000 years, after which he is released. Most likely, the last stanza of the song is referring to this scene in Revelation 20.

In this song, the interaction of body zones is more complex than in the previous song. Here, the emphasis is on seeing. The word see occurs nine times, each time referring to the slaves' observation of a supernatural catastrophe—the world on fire, the moon bleeding, and the dead rising. The zone of self-expressive speech also occurs to describe the audience's presence at the tribulation. The word "hear" occurs three times in conjunction with seeing, as the slaves witness the tragedies of the world. Self-expressive speech occurs twice more, once with God's call that causes the dead to rise, and again with the sinners' crying. Of course, crying could also be interpreted as a show of emotion-fused thought. Perhaps, in this song, the slave is expressing feelings and resentment that he cannot otherwise openly express.

Purposeful action is lacking relative to the other two zones. Although action is being taken, most examples do not occur inside a particular body zone, except for the sinners "risin'" from the dead in line 12. In any case, this song is exclusively apocalyptic in its Biblical sources, draws from a variety of passages and focuses on emotion-fused thought, for the slaves are creating a vision where they will soon see God restructure the world.

Lord Bless the Name

In this song, “Lord Bless The Name,” the slaves’ praise Jesus not only for what he already has done for them, but also for the judgment he will bring. But the judgment to which they refer is not the great catastrophes of the other songs, but the judgment of themselves and their actions.

Lord Bless The Name	
<p>1. I’ve got to go to judgment, I don’t know how soon, Lord bless the name, Lord bless the name; I’ve got to go to judgement to hear my sins, Lord bless the name, Lord bless the name.</p>	<p>2 Cor 5:10 For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil. Rev 20:12 And the dead were judged according to their works...</p>
<p>2. My Jesus fed me when I’s hungry, gave me drink when I’s dry, Lord bless the name, Lord bless the name. My Jesus clothed me when I was naked, Lord bless the name, Lord bless the name (Odum: 67).</p>	<p>Matt 25: 34-36 Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’</p>

Numerous passages throughout the Christian New Testament refer to Judgment Day. The first stanza in this song describes judgment as a place where people will be held accountable. 2 Corinthians and Revelation were placed beside them, because these are verses that describe an event where all will be judged by their own deeds. Neither Bible

verse states that the sinner will “hear” his sins as the song goes. The slaves have recited the verse and added a word from the zone of self-expressive speech.

The second stanza seems to have nothing to do with Judgment Day, because no key apocalyptic words describe the scene. However, this song uses a recitation from Matthew 25. This chapter in Matthew vividly describes Judgment Day. This scene is where Christ separates the sheep from the goats: the sheep receive eternal life (denoted with the right hand) while the goats receive eternal punishment (denoted with the left hand). The song makes no mention of any of this, yet the parts it recites are the criteria by which people are judged. It is interesting to note that the slaves have reversed the good deeds. In Matthew 25, people are asked to serve Christ by serving the less fortunate, but in the song, the slaves assert that Christ helped them by feeding them, clothing them, and giving them drink.

As one could conclude from the title, the sensory-aesthetic texture here focuses on self-expressive speech. The word “bless” occurs eight times in only two stanzas. The slaves will also hear their sins. The slaves mention going to judgment twice and hearing their sins. This tone seems to indicate a level of personal responsibility or that they are going willingly. It is interesting to note that there are no words that indicate emotions of fear at this judgment. In the second stanza, Jesus acts three times in order to assuage the suffering of slaves. The only zone of emotion-fused thought is the slaves’ acknowledgement of not knowing when this day will come. This praise song seems to emphasize, in a way that the apocalypse does not, the role that Christ plays in people’s lives.

King Jesus

“King Jesus” is the most diverse in its use of Christian New Testament references. Here, the slaves praise Jesus for his miraculous deeds. This song not only focuses on Jesus in his role as a king-type figure as in Revelation, but also presents a full spectrum of Jesus’ life from his birth in Matthew to his reign in Revelation.

King Jesus	
1. Now my Jesus bin’ so good an’ kind, My Jesus lowered his mercy down. An’ snatch me from de doors of hell,	1 Pet 3:18-20 For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey... ²
An’ took me in with him to dwell.	Rev 21:3 the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples,
2. Oh, Jesus tole you once befo’, To go in peace and sin no mo’ ,	John 8:11 And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.” Luke 7:50 And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace. "
3. I heard o’ my Jesus many one say, Could move po’ sinner’s sins away.	

² Cf. Gospel of Peter 10:4-5 And they heard a voice from the skies that said, “Have you preached to those who sleep?” And an answer was heard from the cross: “yes.”

4. Den Jesus he come ridin' by ,	Rev 19:11 Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True.
Gib me wings to ride an' fly.	1 Thess 4:17 Then we who are alive...will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air... Rev 12:14 But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle , so that she could fly from the serpent into the wilderness...
5. Jesus Christ the first and las' , No man walks like him;	Rev 1:17 Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last...
He built a platform in de air , He meets de saints from eve'ywhere	1 Thess 4:17 Then we who are alive...will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air...
6. Virgin Mary had one son ,	Luke 1:27 The virgin's name was Mary... Luke 2:7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth...
The cruel Jews had him hung	Acts 10:39 We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree...
7. Me an' my Jesus goin' live at ease , Me an' my Jesus goin' do as we please. 8. If you want' er die like Jesus died, Fold yo' arms an' clasp yo' eyes. 9. I tell you brethren an' I'll tell you twice, My soul done anchored in Jesus Christ.	John 14:2-3 In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. Rev 21:3-4 "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them... he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more... "

<p>10. Upon de hillside King Jesus spoke,</p>	<p>Matt 5:1-2 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain... Then he began to speak and taught them...</p>
<p>Out of his mouth come fire an' smoke,</p>	<p>Rev 19:15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron... Revelation 9:17 And this was how I saw the horses in my vision: the riders wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur; the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths...</p>
<p>11. Yer say yo' Jesus set you free; Why don' you let yo neighbors be? (Odum: 43).</p>	<p>Luke 4:18 He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives... Gal 5:13-15 For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.</p>

The central figure of this song is Jesus, whose name is mentioned twelve times. The first stanza describes how the slaves have been saved from Hell by Christ's mercy, and consequently, have been taken to dwell with him. In this part of the song, the slaves speak of Jesus' action in the past tense. These actions have already been taken; their redemption has already been completed. Although the song does not explicitly refer to the New Jerusalem, it is in this city, according to Revelation 21, where God's chosen will dwell with him.

The song begins with thanks to Jesus for snatching the slaves from the gates of Hell. This is a recontextualization of when Jesus is said to have gone down into Hell after his crucifixion. In the present tense of the song, Jesus has already rescued the slaves; however there are passages that describe what Jesus did when he died. 2 Peter states that Jesus made a proclamation to the souls in prison. This proclamation is not described, but given the context of the passage, Jesus is most likely forgiving sins of the imprisoned souls—those in Hell. The Gospel of Peter, which is a recently discovered text, also describes Jesus' action in death. He preached to those who "sleep" or the dead. The slaves have taken a Biblical passage and applied it to their current circumstances in a Thaumaturgical manner.

The fourth stanza describes Jesus as the rider who appears in Revelation 19. The song does not describe Jesus as riding to combat the forces of evil as in those verses, but it puts him in the role of delivering the saints. The reference appears to be to 1 Thessalonians 4, yet that scripture makes no mention of wings, flying, or riding. The only apocalyptic passage that refers to wings and flying is in Revelation 12, where the woman is given wings in order to escape the dragon.

Stanza five recites from Revelation, describing Christ as the first and the last, and it makes another reference to the Parousia, describing a platform in the air where Christ will meet the saints. Yet despite the song's creation of a different Parousia, it makes no mention of the actual events of 1 Thessalonians 4, namely the loud call, the trumpet sound, and the dead rising in Christ first then followed by the living. The omission of references to other characters and events in the passage serves to emphasize Jesus as the central figure.

In stanza seven the slaves state that they will live with Christ "at ease." Jesus himself promised that he was going to prepare his followers a place in his "Father's house." The phrases "at ease" and "do as we please" not only indicate a Thaumaturgical aspects in the religious response but also serve as a reference to Revelation 21. An absence of death, pain, and suffering, would imply great joy, pleasure, and freedom. And although the song makes no direct recitations from these passages, they have no doubt picked up on the idea of those passages.

The tenth stanza creates a different scene, combining two chapters of Revelation and interjecting something from the book of Matthew. The song states that fire and smoke

come out of Jesus' mouth, yet in Revelation 19, Jesus' mouth spews a sword, and in Revelation 9, horses with lion heads breathe smoke and fire. Also, in Revelation Jesus never speaks on a hillside. Only in Matthew 5 does Jesus go up a mountain and deliver a sermon. The song also gives no context for Jesus' action. There is no mention of judgment or similar words in this song, despite the fact that many of its references come from the book of Revelation. One could conclude that the slaves, who could not read, caught only bits and pieces of the scripture and pieced together their own vision, which has a wholeness and continuity that still fits with the archetypal patterns.

The sensory-aesthetic texture in this song is rich. Jesus is the dominant figure in this verse, and the dominant zone is purposeful action. Seven times Jesus acts—each time performing supernatural tasks. There are three references to Jesus' zone of self-expressive speech. Twice, Jesus is seen in his role of King and Conqueror in Revelation, and one example refers to Jesus' time on earth. Those body zones that refer to the slaves are still linked to Christ. When the slaves speak, they are speaking of Jesus, and when they act, they are imitating Jesus. Jesus is the central figure who forgives sins, delivers the slaves, and brings judgment. His dominance lends credence to the assertion that this song is Revolutionist in its response.

The book of Revelation is known for its host of different plagues, catastrophes, and cosmological consequences that are forced down upon the people of earth. During the tribulation period, God's wrath often comes in sets of seven: the Lamb opens seven seals; the angels blow seven trumpets; then, angels pour out seven bowls. There is a progressive pattern established within each of the three sets of seven. The first four of the set deal with bringing judgment to the world and on the inhabitants therein. The fifth and sixth often deal with cosmological order or supernatural figures, and the seventh seal reveals some message from God.

Few would expect the slaves to pick up on this pattern, and their songs do not indicate a full knowledge of all the events that transpire in Revelation. The catastrophic events that the slaves grasp are concentrated in the first three angels who blow trumpets. Although the slaves paint a gruesome picture, their construction of the Tribulation is mild compared to what actually occurs in the Bible. They omit the sections where the people of the earth are massacred by supernatural figures and where God restructures the cosmos.

Revelation also introduces the audience to a host of new characters. In addition to Satan, who is also referred to as the dragon and the serpent, we have the Beast, the Anti-Christ, and the Great Whore of Babylon. These characters are virtually ignored in the slave songs. The only one specifically named is the dragon—and he is mentioned only briefly in one song. It would seem that a heavily Revolutionist response would require God’s divine intervention against this gang of villains, yet they play no role in this drama. These omissions, once again, keep Jesus as the central figure, as the song preserves the essence of the story.

However, the songs do give Christ his full range of abilities. In these four songs, one gets the entire history of Christ. He is born of a virgin, provider for the needy, and unjustly crucified. He is the deliverer (at the Parousia). He is the rider. He is the wrathful one (fire and smoke come out of his mouth). He is the divine judge, and he is the first and the last. Even those songs that address the recompense of the wicked still make Christ the central figure and virtually ignore his supernatural opponents.

The religious response that dominates this section is Revolutionist. This is not surprising considering that the book of Revelation is Revolutionist in its response as well. Both put faith in a Christ to return to the world, destroy evil, and restructure the cosmos—everyone gets what they deserve through supernatural phenomena, not by direct resistance or by reforming the current system. Such a Revolutionist response may indicate that the slaves use their songs as escapist fantasies. However, although the Revolutionist response depends on divine intervention, it is more extreme in its view than a Reformist response. A Reformist response would seek to change society through changing its social structures. One may plausibly conclude that the Revolutionist finds reform of the system impossible—and it certainly would have seemed that way to most slaves. This type of response to the world should not be interpreted as complacency. Rather, it is the indomitable human spirit that clings to hope and possibility in the face of defeat.

Of course, the Revolutionist response is not the only way of viewing life. Other responses such as Thaumaturgical and Conversionist are present in these songs. Jesus often acts as a deliverer, and as one who provides for daily needs. In their songs, slaves admonished one another to keep themselves spiritually ready for the Second Coming and to stay in good standing with their neighbors. This emphasis on personal morality and spirituality falls in the Conversionist category.

The New Jerusalem

Another set of songs features the New Jerusalem. Slaves often articulated their future in heaven, a place where they no longer had to suffer. As the slaves sing about heaven, the possibility of freedom and bliss arises in their speaking—as Blount asserted—giving them access to a future that has not yet occurred. Often, the slaves specified heaven as the New Jerusalem from Revelation 21-22. The slaves cite objects inside the New Jerusalem, such as the tree of life and streets of gold. From a cursory reading, their choice of passages and word usage seems to be Utopian with Thaumaturgical overtones—rather than a Reformist response as Blount might suggest.

The last two chapters of the book of Revelation depict the paradise that God created for his followers. With the old earth and heaven having passed away due to war, judgment, and tribulation, God creates a new earth and a new heaven in Revelation 21. However, the centerpiece to God’s new order is the New Jerusalem that comes out of heaven. The city itself is described as the Bride of Christ. The radiant city is made entirely of pure gold, adorned with fine jewels. For these people, there is no more pain, suffering, or death. Inside, the tree of life bears fruit that heals the nations, for the nations are now united and follow God’s will. All of the inhabitants literally dwell with God and Christ forever, surrounded by his light and glory. The primary verses from Revelation 21-22 that function as resources for the songs in this section are as follows:

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God (Rev 21:9-10).

The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width; and he measured the city with his rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal (Rev 21:16).

The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass...and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass (Rev 21:18, 21).

But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life (Rev 21:27).

On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads (Rev 22:2-4).

My Father, How long!

“My Father, How Long!” is a supplication to God for deliverance. Here, the slaves describe their lives after they are carried away to the New Jerusalem. The song mentions few details of the New Jerusalem. One unique feature of this song, a rarity for slave songs, is the use of the word *fight*, a word that implies active resistance or even revolt.

My Father, How Long!	
1. My father, how long, My father, how long, My father, how long, Poor sinner suffer here? And it won’t be long, And it won’t be long, And it won’t be long, Poor sinner suffer here.	Rev 6:10 they cried out with a loud voice, "Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?"
2. We’ll soon be free, De Lord will call us home.	1 Thess 4:16 For the Lord himself, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven

<p>3. We'll walk de miry road Where pleasure never dies.</p>	<p>Rev 21:4 he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."</p>
<p>4. We'll walk de golden streets Of de New Jerusalem.</p>	<p>Rev 21:21 ...and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass.</p>
<p>5. My brudders do sing De praises of de Lord.</p>	
<p>6. We'll fight for liberty When de Lord will call us home (Allen: 93).</p>	<p>Rev 19:14 And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. (see above)</p>

The New Jerusalem is only mentioned once in this song, along with its golden streets. The book of Revelation describes the street and the city as being made of pure gold. The song starts with a reference to the tribulation period noted in Revelation 6:10. The slaves identify with the martyrs who cry to the Lord to judge and avenge their persecutors and to put an end to suffering. The verse that describes the “miry road where pleasure never dies” may allude to the New Jerusalem, where death, mourning, crying, and pain will be no more. The word *pleasure* itself is never mentioned in the chapters describing the New Jerusalem. The call of the Lord is likely a reference to 1 Thessalonians. However, nothing else in this song recites or recontextualizes anything from the Parousia scene. Nothing else refers to the book of Revelation—nothing about the Lamb, the book of life, or the tree of life, as mentioned in other songs.

An examination of the sensory-aesthetic texture of the song produces some interesting insights. The zone of emotion-fused thought is noticeably absent. However, twice, Christ's self-expressive speech inspires purposeful action among the slaves. The Lord's call in stanza two brings liberty and paradise, where they will be able to walk around freely as mentioned in stanzas three and four. In stanza six the Lord's call inspires the slaves to fight. To mention themselves as the ones who will fight is highly unusual—for such language could bring the slave master's punishment. There is a passage in Revelation 19 where Christ's armies fight with him against the beast and his earthly armies. The passage does not identify who makes up Christ's army. The slaves could reasonably infer that they would be fighting literally with Christ to save the world. Given the lack of any specific recitations of Revelation in that stanza and the phrase "fight for liberty," the slaves most likely are referring to fighting for their freedom here on earth, as in the Civil War.

The language in this song is clearly a Reformist response, for the slaves, inspired by Christ, overtly describe themselves as taking action to change their status in society. Beyond this, however, the use of strong language may indicate a Utopian response. Their paradise will be the product of fighting to overthrow the present system of slavery, not merely reforming it.

Sittin' Down Beside O' The Lamb

The next song, "Sittin' Down Beside O' The Lamb," focuses on how the slaves have positioned themselves next to the Lamb, a concept that is repeated in the chorus. Sitting down beside the Lamb implies that they will be at the exclusive marriage supper of the Lamb; thus, the slaves demonstrate their view of their special relationship to Jesus Christ.

<p>Sittin' Down Beside O' The Lamb</p>	
<p>1. New Jerusalem! New Jerusalem!</p>	<p>Rev 21:2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,</p>
<p>2. Sittin' down beside o' the Lamb Mourner mourn along! Sittin' down beside o' the Lamb Mourner mourn along! Sittin' down beside o' the Lamb (Chorus)</p>	<p>Rev 19:9 And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." Rev 21:4 he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."</p>
<p>3. Before I'd lay in hell one day, good Lord! I'd sing an' pray myself away good Lord! (Chorus)</p>	
<p>4. The tallest tree in Paradise, good Lord! The Christian calls it the Tree of Life, good Lord! (Chorus)</p>	<p>Rev 2:7 To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.</p>
<p>5. I'll let you know befo' I go Whether I love the Lord or no (Chorus) (Work: 58).</p>	

The first four words of this song (New Jerusalem! New Jerusalem!) give the reader the location in which the verses take place. The word mourn is used in Revelation to denote that mourning, tears, and death will no longer exist in the New Jerusalem; however

the sentence in which mourn is used in the song does not seem to refer directly to that passage in Revelation.

Sitting down beside the Lamb refers to the marriage supper—for no other passage in Revelation mentions sitting down with the Lamb. One could interpret this to mean that the slaves consider themselves part of the Bride of Christ—hence sitting next to the Lamb. Regardless of the specific role with which the slaves identify, they indicate that they view their relationship with Christ to be close and exalted.

The singer praises God for being spared from Hell. However, in the book of Revelation, Hell is thrown into the lake of fire (of which there is no mention in this song). The slaves' reference to the Tree of Life places them inside the New Jerusalem, although this song does not cite any other phenomena in the New Jerusalem—such as the street and walls of gold, adorned with fine jewels.

Although the Lamb is mentioned twelve times (three times per chorus), the Lamb contributes nothing to the sensory-aesthetic texture of the song. Most of the body zone imagery is associated with the slaves. The slaves sit down beside the Lamb twelve times throughout the song. In stanza three, the slaves state that they would be laying in hell. However, the wording implies that their own self-expression (through song and prayer) is the reason for their escape from Hell. The slaves intend to express their love of Christ before they go to the New Jerusalem. Here, the slaves take purposeful action and use their self-expressive speech without hearing any call from the Lord or any other celestial being. This type of independent action may indicate a Reformist response. Although they are inspired and strengthened by Christ, it is their own action that will give them their eternal reward.

I Want To Be Ready

The title of this next song indicates an admonition for people to be prepared for the Lord's Second Coming. However, unlike others, this song gives no explicit instructions to people, such as to pray or to stop lying. Rather, this song describes John in the New Jerusalem and Peter in Acts and calls the singers to imitate these great men.

I Want To Be Ready	
1. I want to be ready, I want to be ready	Matt 24:42 Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.
<p>I want to be ready to walk in Jerusalem like John.</p> <p>2. Oh John, O John what do you say? Walk in Jerusalem just like John, That I'll be there at the coming day, Walk in Jerusalem just like John.</p>	<p>Rev 21:9 And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.</p> <p>Rev 21:27 But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.</p>
<p>3. John said the city was just four square Walk in Jerusalem just like John, And he declared he'd meet me there Walk in Jerusalem just like John.</p>	Rev 21:16 The city lies foursquare , its length the same as its width...
<p>4. When Peter was preaching at Pentecost, Walk in Jerusalem just like John. He was endowed with the Holy Ghost Walk in Jerusalem just like John (Work: 50).</p>	Acts 2:1, 4 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

The singers of this song may have been trying to prepare themselves for the Lord's Second Coming; however, they mention nothing from the rapture scene in 1 Thessalonians 4. They describe the length of the New Jerusalem but make no mention of the gold and jewels of which it was constructed, and there is no mention of what goes on inside the city. This song is the only one in this section that brings in the apostle John, the author of the book of Revelation.

In a way that seems almost like a non sequitur, the song jumps to the second chapter of Acts and mentions the apostle Peter's preaching on the Day of Pentecost. However, directly after the Holy Spirit comes, Peter addresses the crowd and speaks about the last days in which the Holy Spirit will be poured out upon a wide variety of people—including slaves (Acts 2:17-21). Although the slave song does not explicitly refer to this passage, a connection can be inferred.

The Holy Ghost is the only member of the trinity that this song mentions. Most other songs refer to Jesus or God, but not to the Holy Ghost. In Revelation 21:9, it is the Holy Ghost, not the Lamb, that carries John to Jerusalem. Although this song does not clarify the role of the Holy Ghost, it implies that it will carry the slaves to the New Jerusalem. Perhaps, the Holy Ghost will carry them away to the New Jerusalem the same as it carried John.

The phrase "walk in Jerusalem" appears six times and creates a repetitive texture as well as sensory-aesthetic texture. It puts an emphasis on the purposeful action on the part of the slaves. The Apostles use self-expressive speech four times throughout the song, which creates a progressive texture. Each time they use their speech, the following line refers to the slaves' walking in Jerusalem. Eight of the fourteen lines show a pattern where the purposeful action of walking in the New Jerusalem follows the Apostle's speech. This establishes a progressive texture where the slaves act on the words of a Biblical figure.

One could conclude that this song has Reformist as well as Revolutionist tendencies. The verses from which the song draws are Revolutionist—for God and the Lamb create the New Jerusalem and destroy the old world. However, there is nothing to indicate that the paradise in which the slaves will walk is the product of God's action or the slaves' action, for the slaves are inspired by martyrs who took action to save the world. Thus, with the slaves appearing as the only ones who act, one must acknowledge the possibility of a Reformist response. However, the slaves' actions consist of enjoying the rewards of the revolution that God has wrought.

The Blood Done Sign My Name

This next song focuses on the power of the Blood of Jesus, and it weaves together different aspects of the Christian New Testament with references to the Hebrew Bible. This connection is insightful as well as scripturally sound.

The Blood Done Sign My Name	
<p>1. O de blood, O de blood, O de blood done sign my name; O Jesus said so, Jesus said so, O de blood done sign my name.</p>	<p>John 6:53-54 So Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day...</p> <p>Rev 22:3,4 But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads...</p>
<p>2. I believe it, for God he tole me, That the blood done sign my name, I believe it, for God he tole me, That the blood done sign my name, Yes, the blood done sign my name.</p> <p>3. How do you know so? God he said so, That the blood done sign my name.</p>	<p>Exod 24:7-8 Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said “all that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said “See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.</p>
<p>4. Well, it’s written in de Kingdom, That the blood done sign my name.</p>	<p>Rev 1:5-6 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.</p> <p>Rev 3:12 If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.</p>

<p>5. Well, in the Lamb's book it was written, That the blood done sign my name.</p>	<p>Rev 21:27 But nothing unclean will enter [the New Jerusalem], nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.</p>
<p>6. Well, the wheels a turnin', wheels a turnin', Blood done sign my name.</p> <p>7. I'm boun' for glory, boun' for glory, The blood done sign my name.</p> <p>8. On de mountain, on de mountain, The blood done sign my name.</p> <p>9. In the valley, in the valley, Blood done sign my name (Odum: 122, 123)</p>	<p>Ezek 1:15, 19-21 As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them. When the living creatures moved, the wheels moved beside them; and when the living creatures rose from the earth the wheels rose along with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.</p> <p>Luke 3:5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth...</p>

This song weaves two different aspects of Christian theology. First, the repetition of the word *blood* (14 times) most likely reflects their knowledge that the blood of Jesus contains redemption and eternal life. John 6:53-54 was chosen as a representative passage of the many that convey this message. Second, people who have their names written refers to the Lamb's book of life in Revelation. Those whose name is written are given access to the New Jerusalem and are spared the lake of fire. The author never mentions the dire consequences of the Lamb's book of Life. The song omits the New Jerusalem, Hell (the lake of fire), or of the fact that those whose names are written also have the name of Christ on their foreheads. The song's author likely concluded that the blood gives access to the book of life.

This song also incorporates aspects of the Hebrew Bible that tie in similar themes with the Christian New Testament. Turning wheels are present in the book of Ezekiel, as the prophet has a vision of a chariot's ascending into heaven—not too dissimilar from the

Parousia. And the stanza referring to God's promise concerning the blood may be a reference to the Blood of the Covenant in Exodus 24. It may also be a reference to the Passover in Exodus 11-12 when the blood on the doorway spared the children of Israel from the angel of death. Again, the slaves make their own inter-textual connection between the blood covenant of Exodus and the promises of eternal life through Jesus' blood. This suggests some fairly sophisticated reasoning, for the images of the Old Testament covenant become pictures, shadows, types, i.e. metaphors, for the Christian's experience with Christ in the New Testament.

In this song the blood signs the names in the book of Life. This evokes the imagery of a hand signing a document, which would be purposeful action. The first three stanzas demonstrate another progressive pattern where self-expressive speech leads to purposeful action. Four times, God and Jesus use their self-expressive speech to make promises, and the following verses describe how the blood signs the slaves' names in the book of life. However, in contrast to the previous song, the blood acts—not the slaves. The promises and the delivery of eternal life are all the result of the supernatural, not the action of the slaves. Thus, this song is most likely a Revolutionist response.

Chapters 21 and 22 are not only the closing texture for the book of Revelation but also for the entire Bible. While most of the book of Revelation deals with God's judgment on sinful people, the final chapters describe a paradise in which suffering ceases. The tone is one of majesty, joy, and completion. At this point, all evil has been wiped away. God has restructured the universe and has given all their just rewards. Just as the story of humans began in Genesis, it ends here in Revelation with a picture of eternal bliss, justice, and righteousness. Revelation's author was creating an awesome future for the saints of God that will never be overturned or disrupted. Sadness, suffering, and death have all disappeared. The inhabitants of the New Jerusalem dwell with God, and they experience a union with Him as none have before.

The New Jerusalem itself is the main subject of the last two chapters of Revelation. The word *city* appears ten times between Revelation 21:1 and 22:7. The city is a paradise. It is made of pure gold. Those inside eat from the tree of life, and all the nations follow God's will. The presence of God is so powerful that there is no need for light or for a place of worship. However, the city is also personified as the Bride of Christ. In Revelation 21:2, the New Jerusalem is "prepared as a bride." In Revelation 22:9, the New

Jerusalem is “the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” This imagery is built upon the previous notions that the church is the bride of Christ, and its members experience a relationship of oneness with God.

The slaves keenly pick up different pieces of the book of Revelation and put them together to construct their own response to the world. The slaves mention the New Jerusalem by name, and they are aware that it is a paradise (“Blow Your Trumpet, Gabriel” stanza 1 line 1)—with streets of gold (“My Father How Long” stanza 4 line 1), for God has promised them an eternal home in heaven. This would appear to be a Revolutionist response. However, the slaves also mention that Christ’s Second Coming means an end to slavery. Christ will deliver the liberty they desire (“My Father How Long” stanza 6 lines 1-2). Thus, to the extent the New Jerusalem represents an end to current social ills, the songs exhibit a Thaumaturgical response. They also claim to have a close relationship to Jesus, for they will be seated beside him at his marriage supper. This is an assertion of their spiritual inheritance: within the world of being in Jesus, there are no three-fifths human beings (as per the U.S. constitution’s democratically representative government).

There are some critical parts to the New Jerusalem discourse to which the slaves make no reference in these songs. The specific details of the city are not present: the names of the twelve tribes of Israel inscribed onto the twelve gates, and the twelve foundations with each bearing the name of the twelve apostles. The jewels with which the city is adorned are never cited. The slave songs never describe the inhabitants of the city—the kings of many nations and the overcomers, nor do they describe the light from the Lamb that illuminates the city and eliminates the need for a temple (or church). These details may exist in other slave songs and spirituals that were not recorded by my sources.

Since these songs that speak of paradise, some critics, those whom Blount refutes, may find these songs mere attempts to escape the harsh present world, for the slaves surely struggled to cope with the horrors of their world. Although slaves did find solace in religion, their theological response was not complacency in regard to their circumstances. In addition to coping through fantasies of the afterlife, slaves empowered themselves through their recreations of the apocalyptic discourse in their songs. They placed themselves in the New Jerusalem, a city reserved for the Bride of Christ, sitting at the side of the Lamb. According to “Sittin’ Down Beside O’ The Lamb,” the slaves achieve this status not through complacency, but through their own participation in singing, praising,

praying, forgiving, being pure in heart, and witnessing to others. As seen in “My Father How Long,” slaves knew that they would achieve paradise only through their own fighting. Although most slaves could not take up arms against slavery without risking total annihilation, their song did keep alive an awareness of the possibility of active resistance.

The slave songs show a range of responses to their world. Some actively resisted; others did not. In either case, the songs do not reveal the slaves to be complacent or accepting of their circumstances. Through spirituals, they asserted their equality and dignity, and their vision placed them among the spiritual elite in the New Jerusalem. By drawing upon many different Biblical passages, the slaves constructed a theology that identified themselves with Christ (making him their ally against slavery) and used their status as slaves to claim a spiritual inheritance, not only for the next world, but also as a possibility that impacted their lives in the present.

Conclusion

Few have studied the “Old Negro spirituals” for their academic value. Many would acknowledge that the slave songs express the struggle and emotions of their authors. What is not known, however, is that these slave songs also convey a range of religious responses to their world and incorporate a large number of Biblical passages. The songs that refer to the Second Coming and the book of Revelation do not have the absolute Reformist tendencies that Blount asserted in his book *Then the Whisper Put on Flesh*. Neither are their responses pure escapism as some critics have suggested. The songs demonstrate a complex relationship to Biblical passages and reveal an understanding of Biblical themes that empowers their identity in this world. Those songs that focus on the Parousia are often Thaumaturgical in nature, as they assert that Christ’s coming in the air will end slavery. Those songs that refer to the Tribulation and Judgment are Revolutionist overall, as they convey that only God’s divine and supernatural judgment can make the world right and assure each person of their comeuppance. The songs where the slaves place themselves in the New Jerusalem have strong Reformist tendencies, for the slaves had to take action to prepare themselves and others for paradise.

In a single stanza, the songs can summarize and weave together entire passages of the Bible. The slaves introduced a plethora of characters and events—demonstrating a profound knowledge of the Bible’s stories despite that they were forbidden to learn to read

and write. An inter-textual analysis shows that their reconstruction of events was keenly perceptive, and their interpretation of Biblical events were authentic and still hold value for many today. This theological construction is a most significant achievement of slaves that has for long gone unnoticed.

As historians teach slavery to the younger generation, what stands out are usually those who actively resisted. Slaves like Nat Turner revolted against their masters. Harriet Tubman rescued hundreds of slaves from the south through the underground railroad, and Fredrick Douglas ran away to tour the country as a powerful Abolitionist. These African Americans were leaders, who had the courage to pave the way for great change in this country. But the slave songs arose from the soul of common folk, and they reflect the genius of the human spirit to create myth and meaning to empower oneself to persevere and to triumph, to shift the paradigms that measure human worth, and to create new conversations that eventually change the consciousness of their oppressors. An academic analysis of these songs stands as a tribute to all the slaves who brought a profound sense of spirituality to their newly acquired Christianity in order to create and sustain a possibility of dignity, joy, and freedom that contradicted the reality of their circumstances.

Many authors seek to redefine religious discourse in the light of their community's current beliefs, needs, and concerns. For those who belong to minority groups who feel oppressed and marginalized by society, liberation theology has provided an avenue for experiencing religion on one's own terms. Yet liberation theology remains vulnerable to criticism from mainstream academia because it throws out what may be considered critical pieces of the text in order to further one's political goals. Blount urges authors who espouse minority viewpoints to create a solid foundation for their arguments. Toward this end, he recommends social-scientific methods of analysis and interpretation of Biblical texts. The approach he suggests provides boundary lines and allows outsiders to understand and engage with the argument as well. The study of slave songs in the present essay uses the work of Vernon K. Robbins to supply the tools to draw such boundary lines.

Combining the methods of Brian Blount and Vernon Robbins has been groundbreaking, for it integrates cultural interpretation with traditional Biblical strategies of analysis and interpretation. This essay creates a space for more work to be done with other slave songs. Although Blount worked with slave songs that focus on the Passion narratives, he did not incorporate Vernon Robbins' strategies for interpreting the inner and

intertextures of the songs or the Biblical passages on which the songs rely. Other scholars and students could contribute to this approach by re-visiting Blount's work or analyzing an entirely different set of slave songs. By integrating Robbins's and Blount's methodologies, one fosters a dialog between the mainstream academic and minority cultures. One need not know the entire history of slavery to compare the slave songs to Bible verses. An inquiring outsider may find a new appreciation for the works of the slaves, and the inquiry causes one to question and clarify one's own theology and Biblical interpretation.

Many more slave songs are worthy of this kind of analysis. Those songs that refer to the Parousia and the book of Revelation were not the majority of slave songs, but only about one fifth. Some songs speak about heaven—not the New Jerusalem. The vast majority of songs are about Jesus, as the slaves describe their relationship to him. They refer to actions that he took in the Christian New Testament (such as miracles or the crucifixion), and they pray for his help and guidance. Another group of songs describes Death and Hell, and slaves often talk about how close they were to Hell when Jesus saved them. Slave songs highlight other figures and events from the Bible, both from the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament. An analysis of these areas would provide a broader context for understanding the religious experience of the slaves. In fact, an examination of the full range of slave songs could identify verses and passages that are truly special and regularly emphasized by African American Christians—a canon within the Biblical canon. Just as other Christian denominations and ethnic groups have their own canon within the canon, the slaves have their own. Those verses that are particularly precious to that community have no doubt influenced the African American community and continue to do so. From a historical and anthropological perspective, examining such a canon could be valuable in understanding how slaves viewed themselves and how the worldview of African Americans has shifted over the centuries. This establishment of an African American canon gives more validity to those scholars who seek to interpret the Bible from their point of view.

Blount demonstrated in his first book that all authors are influenced by their cultural context. Just as the Jewish and Muslim communities regularly draw upon sources outside their main religious text, for insight and value, African Americans can draw upon these spirituals and other sources such as sermons and speeches. William H. Myers asserts

that for African Americans, the Negro spiritual—in addition to sermons, and other religious narratives—have achieved a near-canonical status in the community. These sources function as the medium by which the African American religious perspective is understood and communicated. The near-canonical materials contain information on how African American scholars interpret the Bible, as well as give insight into the identity issues of a community that has often had to struggle to survive in America. Myers echoes the sentiment of Blount. Both wish for African American scholars to engage with dominant mainstream academia (Felder: 53-6).

Through socio-rhetorical methods, this essay has created an interaction that contributes to the end of one dominant ideology that shapes the structure of academic research. This essay has taken a minority viewpoint and put it on a level that communicates its message to the dominant ideology. The slave songs are much more than unfounded liberation theology. They identify a world of material worth serious academic inclusion. Mainstream critics may deny the phenomenon of extra-canonical influences and, thus, invalidate the serious academic study of slave songs and sermons. However, few could deny that Martin Luther and John Calvin framed the understanding of how Protestants interpret and select special Biblical passages to form an ideology that has become dominant and authoritarian. African Americans use a correlate of external doctrines that help define their community's religious experience. The slave songs are an untapped wealth of resources that provide access to the ways that African American Christians understand the world and the Bible. By examining these slave songs, one can see one's own extra-canonical influences and seek to understand Biblical texts with greater awareness.

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