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WESTERN CHRISTIANITY AND THE ORIGINS OF ANTIBLACKNESS,
EUROCENTRISM, AND WHITE SUPREMACIST IDEOLOGY

By

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BFA Union Institute 1977
MSLS University of Kentucky 2006
MA University of Louisville 2007

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in Pan-African
Studies

Department of Pan-African
Studies University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

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A Dissertation Approved On

December 10, 2021

by the following Dissertation Committee:

Tyler Fleming, Dissertation Chair

Theresa Rajack-Talley, Dissertation Co-Chair

Charlton Yingling

Joy Carew

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated in memory of my parents

Mr. John W. Chenault, Sr.

and

Mrs. Mary L. Stonom Chenault

who cultivated my insatiable curiosity and love of books,
and set me on a remarkable journey of lifelong learning.

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ABSTRACT

WESTERN CHRISTIANITY AND THE ORIGINS OF ANTIBLACKNESS, EUROCENTRISM, AND WHITE SUPREMACY

John Chenault

November 10, 2021

This qualitative study investigates the cult(ural) and intellectual history of Western Christianity to address a significant gap in the literature pertaining to the origins of whiteness/antiblackness in the West and its subsequent socialization worldwide. Western Christianity's seminal role in the social construction of the whiteness/antiblackness dichotomy has been undertheorized, neglected, and ignored. This study finds early Christian theologians categorically imposed conceptual metaphors about *Blackness* on African people that depicted them as the exemplars of evil to teach Christian doctrine about sin and salvation. It connects these original antiblack discourses directly to the theological arguments Western European Christians used centuries later to justify African hereditary enslavement, western colonialism, and the ethos and polity of white supremacy. It contends this identical rhetoric currently facilitates the relegation and confinement of African Americans post-emancipation to a permanent racial underclass that constitutes an *afterlife of slavery* in its perpetuation of colonial-era structures of exploitation and oppression. It concludes by finding whiteness/antiblackness, i.e., white supremacy, is a form of religion, the belief system of a cult based on White Christian animus to *symbolic blackness* that literally is directed at real Africans and their descendants worldwide. In closing, it recommends re-envisioning the global "Black" struggle as a struggle for *re-*

existence It thus calls for Africana peoples to reject Western Christianity's symbolic blackness and re-imagine Africana identities with a self-awareness and social consciousness able to defeat the gravitational pull of the massive "white" hole of White Christian Supremacy and the negative valence of whiteness/antiblackness it manifests and maintains.

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INTRODUCTION

This qualitative study investigates the cult(ural) and intellectual history of Western Christianity to confront and address a significant gap in the literature pertaining to the origins of whiteness/antiblackness in Western Europe (Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany, France, and England) and its subsequent transplantation to the Americas. While the Latin [Roman Catholic] Church's authorization of the transatlantic slave trade has been well documented, its seminal role in the construction of *whiteness/antiblackness*, the predicates of racial slavery and antiblack racism, generally has gone unacknowledged. This study contends Christianity's founders took abstract and symbolic ideas about the color *black* that originated in ancient Greece and applied them categorically to African people to depict them as the exemplars of sin and evil for purposes of Christian exegesis and pedagogy. It identifies those original antiblack discourses as providing the theo-political basis for the arguments used centuries later by Western European Christians to sanction their transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans. Moreover, it shows how the identical discourses serve today to justify the relegation and confinement of African Americans post-abolition to a permanent social underclass and caste that constitutes an *afterlife of slavery* in its perpetuation of racial inequality and oppression.

Based on its analysis and findings this study argues the primary challenge facing African Americans in the struggle for liberation is not race(ism) as currently understood, but White Christian *religious* animus to symbolic *blackness* directed at real Africans and their descendants worldwide. In closing, it recommends re-envisioning the "Black" liberation struggle as a struggle for *re-existence* that calls for continental and diasporan Africans to reject Western Christianity's imposed blackness and re-imagine Africana

identities with a self-awareness and social consciousness able to defeat the massive gravitational pull of the white hole of White Christian Supremacy and the negative valence of whiteness/antiblackness that it structures, perpetuates, and maintains. To realize its discursive and didactic goals, this study theorizes and historicizes whiteness/antiblackness to achieve three key objectives:

- (1) to locate its roots in the formation of Western European Christianity.
- (2) to expose Christian Evangelism/Dominionism and its antiblack ideology as the thinly disguised engine of Western colonialism and imperialism.
- (3) to identify and reframe the Christian Intellectual Tradition (CIT) as the primary venue for the development and deployment of eurocentrism as a weapon of epistemic domination and hegemony to project, preserve, and protect white supremacy worldwide.

To pursue its analytical and expository objectives this study combines and employs two qualitative research methods: *social constructionism* and *critical theory*. This approach serves two purposes: (1) it facilitates an investigation of the cognitive mechanisms by which ideas and concepts are made socially real; and (2) it helps to identify, deconstruct, and dismantle the antiblack ideologies of dominance and oppression produced by those mechanisms. To complicate matters further, this study grounds its research process within the overall analytical framework of the *sociology of knowledge*—a sociological theory that conceptualizes human knowledge-making (epistemology) as a cognitive process that forms and informs human thought within the sociocultural contexts of human actions and interactions. In preparation for what follows, however, this project begins with a few basic questions central to its research agenda. What makes a person *Black*? What does it mean to be *Black* or to be *Blackened*? How do people know a person is *Black*? Do people truly *know* a person is *Black*? Or do people simply *believe* the term *Black* describes and denotes a *real* human being or group and defines their identity and culture only because historical circumstances in the West conditioned and socialized them to *think* that way? If persons so

identified have not always been *Black* then how, when, where, and why did they become *Black*? If *Blackness* (being *Black*) is an “abstract thing” (an idea) and not a “natural thing” (a product of nature and human evolution), where does the term get its ascriptive power to dehumanize and circumscribe the lives of human beings who have been branded *Black* by the West?

These questions go to the heart of this investigation of whiteness/antiblackness, its sociohistorical development in Western Europe, and its socialization worldwide. This research project examines these critical questions and others to interrogate and explicate the cognitive and social processes whereby the idea of Africans as *Black* became *known* and *normalized* in the West. It does so while applying its social constructionist and critical theory methods within the conceptual framework provided by the sociology of knowledge to show knowledge is not found or discovered in a world that already exists, but imagined, constructed, and reconstructed by people (social actors) acting and interacting to work out the cognitive, material, and social means of their survival and existence.

Social constructionism and critical theory furnish the analytical tools needed to expose and deconstruct the presumptive logic of whiteness/antiblackness that structures and determines the social status and conditions of life for those who have been labeled “Black” by the West. Therefore, they are essential to this effort to examine the constructedness of social categories like *race*, *gender*, and *class*, and uncover and dismantle the cognitive structures that conceptualize and reify them as immutable, permanent, and natural. However, like any research theory/praxis scholars must be mindful of their analytical limitations and problems. Of particular concern here is avoiding the paradox of re-essentializing the social category “Black” in new guises and disguises. As the philosopher Sally Haslanger cautions: “in claiming that race and gender are socially constructed, we seem to be treating each as a unified category—as if we can isolate what

it means to be a woman, or to be Black, by giving an analysis that applies in each and every case” (2012, p. 5). Haslanger amplifies this point by adding: [...] we are complex social beings with not *only* a gender or *only* a race, but with a gender, a race, a class, a nationality, a sexuality, an age, a collection of abilities and disabilities, and more” [author’s italics] (p. 5).

This study seeks therefore to destabilize and deracinate existing regimes of *truth* about “Black” identity and *Blackness* without supplying alternative conceptions that remain ideationally and ideologically grounded in the false constructs of bio-social categories of “race(ism)” born out of colonialism and human bondage. It pursues this objective by merging critical theory with social constructionism to produce “critical constructionism,” a theory-praxis designed to expand the analysis of systems of power and domination to account more robustly for power dynamics, relations of power, and the social reality of human agency and resistance:

For a start, it [critical constructionism] is not characterised by the assumption that any particular form of life possesses power over other groups and certainly does not assume that power is one-way and uncontested. Rather than constructing a particular form of life as a stable entity with properties and possessions, a critical constructionism theorises power as a relational process. Power is an ongoing, relational construction, able both to open up and to close down possibilities. So all acts (texts) ‘act into’ processes that are already ongoing (con-texts) and so may contribute to the ongoing (re)production of power relations (Hosking, 2007).

Critical constructionism thus emphasizes the contested nature of power relations and enables scholars to incorporate the perspectives, attitudes, and values of those historically deemed powerless according to the characteristics and reality of their oppressed social position and condition.

Black/Blackness/Blackening

Before examining the convoluted social history of whiteness/antiblackness, it is useful at this juncture to reiterate the primary critical assumption upon which this study is founded and grounded. This inquiry operates from the perspective abstract notions of black/blackness that pervaded Western cult(ure) and furnished the conceptual basis for the deliberate *blackening* of real people to mark them as inferior (sub-human) to commodify them are entirely a product of the European imaginary. Many people today, including some scientists, continue to accept as fact nineteenth century pseudoscience and its false claims that human beings socially or self-identified as “Black” or “White” evolved and exist in the natural world as distinct “natural kinds” (races) (Roberts, 2011; Saini, 2019). Scholars working within diverse academic disciplines in the late twentieth century determined the concept of biological races to be a sociohistorical invention with deep roots in Western Christianity, philosophy, science, socioeconomics, and bio-politics (Allen, 1994, 1997; Chao et al., 2013; Coates, 2003; Davis, 1997; Gravlee, 2009; Heng, 2018; Shulman & Glasgow, 2010). Therefore, it is of singular importance here to identify the specific circumstances in which whiteness/antiblackness became a normalized social convention and condition of cultural life in the West. Antiblackness, however, does not commence with the invasion and colonization of the New World and the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans. Western Christian animus in the cult’s formative years against “Pagan” Africans furnished, fifteen centuries later, the justifications for the capture, enslavement, and transoceanic transport of twelve million of them over a period than spanned more than four centuries. Accordingly, this study finds antiblackness ideology precedes the European slave trade as its predicate and is not a product thereof as many scholars claim.

Forthcoming discussions show the roots of antiblackness in the West extend deep into the history of Western Christianity. This study identifies the cradle of Christianity’s

antiblack ideology in Egypt in the first centuries of the Common Era. It then traces and documents its development and dissemination as it cohered in the theo-political dogma of the Roman Catholic Church. The revised genealogy of antiblackness locates its origins in the second century CE when the color *black* was metaphorically and allegorically transferred and applied to Africans collectively as Christians defined their cult's concepts of sin and salvation. This study thus argues metaphor and allegory furnished the semantic basis for the conception and dissemination of antiblack discourses in the West. Accordingly, it seeks to identify the sources of and inspiration for the Christian cult's social construction of whiteness/antiblackness as spiritual tropology rather than solely focusing on the ways peoples in antiquity perceived genuine physiognomic and physical differences.

The words black/blackness and their various cognates and connotations function semantically in the abstract in ways that synonymously signal and invoke a host of negative characteristics and conditions. Every standard English dictionary, for example, defines black as *impure, dirty, ugly, guilty, evil* in juxtaposition to white as *pure, clean, beautiful, innocent, holy*. How did this dichotomy develop? Through what knowledge-making processes did these terms come to be defined in asymmetrical opposition to each other? Asymmetry aptly describes their relationship because the valence of white/whiteness clearly outweighs black/blackness in terms of social value, status, and power. But how did black acquire its negative meaning compared to white? And where and when did these ideas take root?

Neither of the two words nor any of their numerous connotations are exclusively English in derivation; nonetheless, they achieved a certain prominence and centrality in its lexicon based on common and frequent usage throughout the Anglosphere (the English-speaking world). Moreover, black/blackness exists as rubrics in all the Romance languages (languages derived from the colloquial Latin spoken in the Western Roman Empire). In

each case the cognates categorize and convene a coherent set of ideas that collectively produce a shared social reality based on a color consciousness and hermeneutics invented in the West. But again, how did they acquire their meanings? How did black/blackness come to denote, connote, and describe (in negative terms) so many more objects, emotions, situations, groups than its counterpart *white* does in English or in the Romance languages of French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian? And, key to this study's effort to theorize and historicize antiblackness, how did *black* become a nearly universally recognized and accepted pejorative term to identify and label people of African origin and descent as categorically intellectually, morally, and physiologically inferior?

As delineated and explicated in the nine chapters that follow, abstract ideas of blackness and tropes of symbolic blackness—which historically have held negative meanings and connotations in many cultures around the world—often possess a linguistic and semantic history separate from and prior to the use of *black* as a referent for Africans or other non-Europeans. This study aims therefore to determine and demonstrate how such ideas came to be associated primarily with African peoples and cultures. It thus refutes at the outset the widespread assumption it is appropriate to label Africans and their descendants worldwide with a generic term that is not even an accurate descriptor of skin color given the obvious heterogeneity of African pigmentation.

To achieve its discursive and didactic goals this dissertation commences by defining its *Theoretical Locus*. The nine chapters that follow delineate its investigatory steps and explicate its findings and conclusion. Thematically the chapters explore and examine the following topics: Chapter (1) *Ancient Greek Poetry and the Origins of Antiblack Discourses* analyzes the social construction of human blackness in its originating literary, mythological, biblical, and geo-temporal contexts—which it locates in the Mediterranean world of archaic and classical antiquity. Chapter (2) *The Colonial Matrix of Christianity*

investigates the sociohistorical contexts in which the cult emerged to identify how Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans may have impacted its development. Chapter (3) *Monotheism, Othering, and Christian Identity* breaks new ground in its analysis of monotheism as the source of the *believer/non-believer* dichotomy which this study shows provides the original a template the construction of the “White European Self” in opposition to the “Black African Other.” Chapter (4) *The Hebrew Bible and Early Christianity* rules out Jewish scholars and literature as the direct sources of antiblack ideology and shows how Christians appropriated and re-interpreted the Hebrew Bible to serve their own discursive and didactic needs. Chapter (5) *The Development of Antiblack Discourses in Christianity* identifies and analyzes the mechanisms of their construction, the motive behind antiblack idioms and allegories, and their pioneer and most prominent promoter. Chapter (6) *Dominionism, Christendom, and the Origins of Europe and Europeans* document how Christian belief in a Great Commission from Jesus to go forth and convert the world to their faith launched the cult to conduct a brutal campaign of evangelism first in Europe and then abroad in efforts to colonize the entire planet.

Chapter (7) *English Colonialism and the Dominionist Legacy in the United States* reveals the inconvenient truth the US has always been a “Christian nation” despite the ratification of a constitutional article to separate church and state. This chapter illustrates how US Christians are conducting their form of dominionist warfare within the United States and across the globe in some instances with taxpayer funds. Chapter (8) *Redefining the Western Intellectual Tradition* shows Christian theo-political ideology and doctrine pervades and thus informs the modern disciplines of western science and argues they originated with the intent of advancing Christian bible studies and beliefs. Chapter (9) *The Enlightenment* continues the discussion of the Christian Intellectual Tradition to illustrate how Christian belief pervades and thus informs the modern disciplines of western science

because Christian “scientists” conceptualized them with the stated intent of using the new methods to reform and scientize Christian theology and hermeneutics.

The *Conclusion* brings this research project to an end with the recommendation that so-called “Black” people—continental Africans and peoples of African descent residing in the African diaspora—decolonize their thought and thinking by first re-defining their identities within the context of Africana traditions and reject the imposed “blackness” which perpetuates the most enduring dehumanization of a people in history. Finally, this dissertation includes an *Appendix* that deconstructs the concept of “religion” to expose it as an invention of the West to serve the hegemonic interests of global Christianization.

THEORETICAL LOCUS

Using the qualifier “Africana” is consistent with the practice of naming intellectual traditions and practices in terms of the national, geographic, cultural, racial, and/or ethnic descriptor or identity of the persons who initiated and were/are the primary practitioners—and/or are the subjects and objects—of the practices in question (e.g., “American,” “British,” “French,” “German,” or “continental” philosophy) (Outlaw, 1992)

This research project originates within the Africana Intellectual Tradition (AIT). The term AIT denotes the multifaceted, multidisciplinary scholar-activist tradition that defines and informs the diasporan and continental African struggles waged worldwide for centuries against the cumulative and ongoing injustices of western domination. Although the term “Black” became a common and popular self-identifier for African Americans in the 1960s and remains so today, evidence from the English colonies in the 1700s shows the first *free* “African Americans” in the Atlantic world preferred *African* over the word “Black” for self-identification and for naming their social institutions and organizations (Bruce, 2001). The pioneers of the AIT undoubtedly acquired the term “African” from their European enslavers, as evidence shows the diverse populations in West Africa never used it as a self-identifier or geographic term (Tsri, 2016a, 2016b). Nevertheless, “free” and enslaved Africans in the early US initially viewed it as a somewhat neutral or less malignant form of self-identification compared to the utterly negative connotations clearly associated with the word “Black.”

As this study shows blackening African peoples follows a long tradition in the West. In the fifteenth century, however, it took on the added purpose of literally branding West Africans to label and market them as fungible objects for trade in a transoceanic market. Portuguese and Spanish enslavers originally branded their captives *negro* (black)

to mean “slave.” The English and other Western European enslavers followed suit. Nevertheless, the earliest enslaved Africans in North America upon whose backs the US built its wealth and empire did not identify as “Black.” Evidence from the English colonies in the 1700s shows “African Americans” chose the word *African* for self-identification and for naming their social institutions and organizations (Bruce, 1995, 2001). This dissertation recognizes and values the genius of the early Africana activist-scholars who constructed a generic social identity with which to unify diverse West African ethnicities in a collective struggle against European oppression. Even though most enslaved persons probably heard the word “African” for the first time when their European and Euro-American enslavers uttered it, they nonetheless accepted it as suitable for collective (transnational/multiethnic) self-identification. For this reason, this study advocates replacing “Black” as a self and social identifier with the word *Africana*. It thus calls for restoring the original tradition established by the founders of the AIT. However, it is important to note this tradition did not endure and why.

Even though early African activist-scholars instinctively rejected “Black” in the 1700s, events in the 1800s forced them to reassess their social identity as it directly impacted their status in North America. Notably and with good cause “free” African Americans began to see themselves as distinctly “American” in part because of generations of intermixing with Euro-Americans since the arrival of the founding Africana population in 1619 (Berlin, 1998; Bruce, 1995, 2001). “Whites” nevertheless continued to view all “Blacks” as “Others” in the sense of social inferiors and outcasts. Rather than easing over time, White racial animus grew in concert with the steady increase of free persons in major cities. So-called “Whites” perceived the presence of “free Blacks” as subverting the social

status quo of white supremacy and thus constituting a mortal threat to the maintenance and security of the nation's slaveocracy. The very notion of a "free negro" continues to be an anathema to white supremacists. The policing of African Americans in the twenty-first century for walking while Black, driving while Black, or shopping while Black conclusively demonstrates the idea of "Black" social equality and "freedom" is highly contested today. In the 1800s concrete steps were taken to forego this demographic eventuality by excising "free Blacks" from the nation's body politic by any means necessary. Those efforts resulted in the founding of the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1816 (Spooner, 2014).

Some of the nation's most prominent citizens joined the ACS to lobby and campaign for the removal from the US of "free" African Americans and their resettlement in Africa or Latin America. The targets of this campaign mostly resisted it. Evidence shows many did so by strategically re-thinking their social identities to assert their rights to remain in the of their birth (Bruce, 1995). The words "colored" and "negro" thus emerged in the 1800s, mainly in urban African America, as common forms of individual and collective self-identification (Bruce, 1995; Fagan, 2011; Smith, 1992). Many used the terms as a subterfuge, as protective cover, yet also literally believed in their *Americanness* (Bruce, 1995; Fagan, 2011). Given their integral role in the nation's development and its growing prosperity and wealth, they believed they had earned every right to remain and prosper too.

Even though enslaved African Americans assisted their "free" brothers and sisters in building African-named urban institutions, the ACS targeted only so-called "free negroes" for deportation and permanent exile. Despite demographic fears about the future of the nation from its growing "Black" population, enslaved persons simply were too

valuable to the economy to deport. In the end, despite the establishment of Liberia in 1816 for resettlement, and the transport and relocation there of hundreds of “free Blacks,” the ACS utterly failed in its objectives.

In advocating for the term *Africana*, this study thus refers and defers to the social circumstances and contexts of its initial conception and broad usage by early “free” and enslaved Africans in the Americas. It views it as an appropriate term to designate diasporan and continental African peoples and traditions. Hence it offers two related working definitions as follows:

- (1) **Africana** identifies the peoples of continental Africa and their descendants in the diaspora and thus serves as a rubric for Africans, African Americans, Afro-Cubans, Afro-Columbians, Afro-Brazilians, et cetera, and their cultural creations, aesthetics, and customs.
- (2) The **Africana Intellectual Tradition** coheres and embodies the theories and praxes Africana activist-scholars develop and deploy to resist racial bondage and antiblackness in the Atlantic world beginning in the early sixteenth century.

From this perspective, the Africana Intellectual Tradition (AIT) comprises a critical theory and social science of resistance in addition to constituting an epistemology, archive, cultural repository, and history and historiography of the collective experiences of continental and diasporic Africans. This intellectual tradition of activism and scholarship began and coalesced primarily within the African experience in the colonial Atlantic world and has endured for more than five centuries. However, the common tendency to think of critical theory solely in terms of texts and textual analyses obscures the fact subversive and revolutionary social critiques develop directly out of human conflict and are thereby articulated and expressed in violence. The psychiatrist Frantz Fanon in his pioneering work on the psychology of the oppressed identified violence as the “language” of colonization and colonial rule (1963). He thus argued the subaltern (colonized subjects), in formulating

their discourses of resistance and liberation, must speak the vocabulary and grammar of violence to be heard and understood by their enslavers and oppressors.

Considering the lack of African voices and texts available from the first century of enslavement in the Americas, serious challenges confront any research effort to investigate the social history of antiblackness, or anything related to Africana resistance in the early colonial Atlantic world from an Africana perspective. How then do we establish what Africans thought about the European enslavers who perpetrated and profited from their denigration and oppression? Or determine how they self-identified despite the actions of their enslavers to convert them into dehumanized fungible objects for trade and exploitation? Or learn what motivated some to resist, escape, and establish their own ways of living in the New World despite the immense challenges of remaining free?

Not a single so-called “slave” narrative has been found in colonial Virginia (1607-1783); hence the lack of first-hand accounts of early colonial life in North America from an Africana perspective (University Library, 2004). Notices and representations of Africans in print in the colony come down to us mainly from court records (including freedom suits filed by enslaved women and men against their enslavers), colonial legislation, plantation documents, and newspaper advertisements for slave auctions or for the capture of fugitives fleeing bondage (Berlin, 1998; Finkelman, 1997; Gallant, 1992; Loren, 2014; Meaders, 2014; Windley, 1983). Consequently, the voices encountered in those texts or textual fragments consist primarily of the voices of enslavers. Colonial archives, it can be said, conceal as much as they reveal and thus impede efforts to uncover and discover the behaviors, attitudes, and identities of the enslaved. This reality indicates the need for alternative methods that enable scholars to learn to read the bodies of Africans

as involuntary texts to comprehend the nature of Africana (*Black*) identity, agency, and resistance in the early colonial era. It thus means reading them in motion, in the suicidal leaps into the ocean from the decks of slave ships crossing the Atlantic; in the flailing arms and legs seeming to defy gravity in desperate flights of escape across the Virginia countryside with dogs and patrollers in hot pursuit; and in the agonized gyrations of women and men chained to whipping posts while being bloodied, mutilated, and tortured to submit to a tyrannical regime from which escape was made to appear impossible. Court documents and fugitive slave advertisements convey those brutal episodes and events with a relentless monotony and persistence. Yet reading them in hindsight often results in the failure to recognize the nature and meaning of the discourses African bodies convey by their actions, movements, resistance. That they are speaking, uttering volumes, screaming even, in their rejection of the dehumanizing system of antiblackness and chattel bondage cannot be denied. But what methods can scholars use to excavate, translate, and document lacerated flesh and broken bodies as evidence of a revolutionary critical theory and praxis?

From this perspective, any efforts to recover African voices from the deafening silences of colonialism must begin by exposing the European Christian Supremacist logic and history that denies Africans possessed the intellect and agency for self-determination or indeed any attributes or abilities other than those suited for permanent and hereditary servitude. Hence the first step in this process requires stripping away layers of hyperbolic antiblack discourses and white supremacist propaganda that rationalizes, justifies, and represents colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade as necessary stages in the conduct of a noble crusade to spread Western Christian civilization across the globe to benefit all humanity. To accomplish this task this study identifies and analyzes the social contexts and

cognitive mechanisms that facilitated the conception and normalization of the ideology of white superiority/black inferiority in the West. Having identified the social structures of that knowledge and its knowledge-making apparatus, it performs the next step of dismantling those structural impediments to get at evidence it distorts, conceals, or attempts to erase.

In the specific case of the English colonies in the Americas, it is necessary to look through and beyond the ideological framing of African identity and culture by enslavers and colonists seeking to establish and maintain a racial hierarchy based on chattel bondage. English colonialist discourses like others originating in Western Europe deliberately categorized and depicted African peoples as benighted savages who deserved enslavement according to the Christian Bible. Christian imperialist propaganda went even further in rationalizing African oppression by portraying them as acquiescent to and complicit with their condition of permanent servitude. It also added insult to injury with the preposterous assertion Africans were the prime beneficiaries of the system because slavery introduced them to Western Christianity and the purported salvation of their heathen souls through baptism and conversion. Western Christian “logic” thus systematically distorted, diminished, and suppressed evidence of African intelligence, humanity, and self-determination. By removing those dehumanizing frames and looking closely at colonial records and archival materials this study finds abundant dispositive evidence of African genius and ingenuity in thousands of reports of African resistance in public and private documents (Baptist & Block, 2016; Gallant, 1992; Meaders, 2014; Wada, 2006). The very efforts of enslavers to dehumanize Africans paradoxically reveals their humanity, just as efforts at their erasure renders them visible. Hence their acts of resistance constitute a

documentary record that current scholar-activists should recognize and classify as evidence of the use of “critical theory” and related practices by Africana activist-intellectuals from the beginning of colonialism.

This approach thus decolonizes the histories of qualitative research methods like critical theory and the sociology of knowledge by arguing scholarly activism occurs in ways that do not always involve the production of texts. Expanding the category of persons who fit the criteria of activist-scholars/scholar-activists to be more inclusive enables researchers to recognize and acknowledge a host of African women and men—most of whom are simply portrayed in the West as *renegades*—who pioneered critical theory in the Atlantic world. The following selected list of Africana liberation fighters in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries barely scratches the surface but exemplifies this issue: Gaspar Yanga (circa 1545-?), who led a major rebellion in Mexico and established a maroon society (safe haven for fugitives from enslavement) the history of which is preserved in a town that bears his name in Veracruz; King Benkos-Biohó and his wife Queen Wiwa (late 16th century-1621), who established a *palenque* (maroon society) in Colombia known as Matuna that exists today as the community of San Basilio; Ganga Zumba (circa 1630-1678) and Zumbi (1655-1695), who built *Palmares*, the largest *quilombo* (maroon society) in Brazil, a fortified multiethnic community which lasted nearly a century before its destruction; and Queen Nanny (1686-1733), the Ghana-born, Ashanti woman-warrior who is celebrated as a national hero in Jamaica for her leadership in the First Maroon War against the British (Rodriguez, 2007).

Where is the scholarship in their activism? Where is the activism in their scholarship? What makes this argument about the cognitive nature and components of

Africana resistance anything more than sentimental historical revisionism dressed up as intellectual history? To deny the intellect and agency of Africans in the Americas, to ignore genius that does not come packaged between book covers, constitutes a typical form of silencing and erasure of Africans and “Others” as architects of their own lives and authors of their own histories (Trouillot, 1995). The women and men listed above represent countless others regarded here as formidable intellects, experts, and authorities in the sciences of rebellion and social engineering, geniuses who wrote their histories with machetes, cutlasses, and muskets as they forged multiethnic societies of freed Africans and “*Others*” on the periphery and outskirts of New World slave societies. While they did not conceptualize what they were doing as “theory,” critical or otherwise, they practiced it nonetheless in both instinctive and self-conscious ways.

In addition to the diverse accounts of African resistance reported and recorded by New World colonists, there also exists an important collection of Africana texts written in English and other European languages by the first cohort of Africana writers in the Atlantic world. That group includes Benjamin Banneker (1731-1806), Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797), Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784), and Quobna Ottobah Cuguano (1757-1791) (Bruce, 2001; Carretta, 2013; Carretta & Gould, 2001). Each lived in the same period as Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who is credited as a pioneer of critique and critical theory. That any of them knew of Kant or his work is not at issue. The point here is that even a cursory review of their published texts effectively dispels any notion that critical theory originated solely in Western philosophy and academia. The surviving writings of the first cohort of Atlantic Africana intellectuals broadly critique and counter the dehumanizing discourses of antiblackness that structured and determined the social reality of colonial life. This brief

excerpt from a letter published in 1787 by a formerly enslaved person writing anonymously demonstrates how Africana intellectuals aimed their criticism directly at the presumptive logic of antiblackness and antiblack racism in Euro-American culture:

Can it be contended, that a difference in colour alone can constitute a difference in species?—if not, in what single circumstance are we all different from mankind? What variety is there in our organization? What inferiority of art in the fashioning of our bodies? What imperfections in the faculties of our minds?—Has not a negro eyes? Has not a negro hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? (quoted in Bey, 2000, p. 16).

Somewhat evocative of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* in the style and manner it questions and deconstructs the central premises of antiblackness in the newly independent US, this erudite and authoritatively written comment exemplifies the use of critical theory in Africana intellectual discourses. Published two years before the ratification of the US Constitution, it strategically targets and dismantles the socially constructed discourses of "race" and antiblackness. Moreover, it also shows the systematic denial of education to enslaved Africans did not prevent a determined minority from acquiring the critical tools needed to conduct intellectual warfare in print. Whether literate or not, the necessity of physical and psychological survival compelled Africana women and men to deconstruct and analyze the oppressive systems that circumscribed their lives. Some became social activist-scholars (agents of resistance) in the process either by default or deliberation. However, despite the fact they count among the earliest proponents of decolonial thinking and intellectual warfare against Western imperialism, they remain unacknowledged and thus invisible in the history of the critical theory and sociology of knowledge traditions. In an erudite discussion of the historiography of Ancient Egypt and the *Black Athena* debate that roiled academia in the 1990s, Maghan Keita points out the absurdity of discounting or

erasing critical texts by Africana intellectuals that evidence their engagement with the sociology of knowledge:

Within the context of this debate, that is the debate concerning race, historiography, and the sociology of knowledge—it is the height of historical dereliction to entertain such a discussion, such a debate, such a discourse, without the inclusion of the intellectuals of African descent who spoke to this very issue and who preceded Bernal by so many years and decades (2000, pp. 43-44).

Keita references speeches, pamphlets, and books by David Walker, Lydia Marie Childs, George Washington Williams, Frederick Douglass, and Edward Wilmot Blyden to argue Africana intellectuals:

“have been consistent in addressing the ways in which knowledge about them, their history, and their culture has been constructed, interpreted, and disseminated. In fact, a crucial component of what has come to be called ‘Afrocentric’ thought is just that—the sociology of knowledge [...] (2000, pp. 45-46).

The historian Demetrius L. Eudell makes an important observation about slave narratives that also is noteworthy in this context: “Thus rather than autobiography, slave narratives should be seen, in the vein of Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative*, as a form of sociography, indeed as one of the first iterations of American sociology or counter sociology since at this moment the field was taking shape ...” (2015, p. 27).

Africana intellectual warfare against antiblackness in colonial Virginia began in the seventeenth century with the arrival of the first Africans in the year 1619. By the 1700s, an unknown percentage of enslaved and free Africans had become literate in Western languages. This Africana intellectual vanguard thus pioneered and established the basis for Africana thought in general and the sub-discipline of *Afrocentric* thought Keita mentions above. Their efforts mark the beginnings of the Africana Intellectual Tradition in the Atlantic world and the development of several key themes pertaining to African history and identity around which Africana intellectuals began to construct and disseminate a set

of standardized metanarratives designed to counter antiblackness and antiblack racism in Euro-America (Bruce, 2001).

The original colonial tropes and stereotypes of black inferiority, however, continue to define and inform contemporary antiblack rhetoric without missing a beat. Reconstituted and redeployed during Jim Crow, antiblackness now operates in a neo-colonial modality referred to here as an *afterlife of slavery* (Hartman, 1997) that serves to maintain the racial hierarchy and status quo of White Christian Supremacy in perpetuity. This study came about because the Africana intellectual vanguard today continues to undertheorize whiteness/antiblackness in terms of its epistemology and the sociohistorical contexts in which it developed. Antiblackness remains undertheorized because few Africana scholar-activists seem inclined or able to confront Western Christianity's role in the racial and socioeconomic oppression of African Americans. Moreover, those that do critique it mainly operate from insider positions as reformers of the faith who seek accommodation rather than revolution. The facts, however, are not in dispute. White Christian nationalists in the US established, fund, and support a host of virulently racist terrorist groups and organizations including: the Klu Klux Klan, Aryan Nation, Army of God, Family of God, and the neo-confederate Republican Party—a political party White Christian politicians rebuilt in the 1970s based on a “Southern Strategy” designed to maintain white supremacy through white control of government (Hedges, 2008; Jones, 2020). This reticence of Africana scholars to conduct intellectual warfare without compromise or respite against the white supremacist theo-politics of Western Christianity perhaps can be explained by the following daunting facts:

Nearly eight-in-ten black Americans (79%) identify as Christian, according to Pew Research Center's 2014 Religious Landscape Study. By comparison, seven-in-ten

Americans overall (71%) say they are Christian, including 70% of whites, 77% of Latinos and just 34% of Asian Americans. Meanwhile, about seven-in-ten blacks are Protestant, compared with less than half of the public overall (47%), including 48% of whites, roughly a quarter of Latinos and 17% of Asian Americans (Madsen et al., 2018 para 2).

The Protestant Christian sect emerged and split from Roman Catholicism or Latin Christianity in Western Europe in the sixteenth century CE as the result of major doctrinal disputes (Johnson, 2012). The implications of their sectarian differences in terms of antiblackness is addressed later. Here it is important to note many early African intellectuals in the Atlantic advocated for conversion to Western Christianity as a path to liberation (Bruce, 2001). In fact, most who learned to read and write acquired their literacy through the bible (Bruce, 2001). Their writings clearly reveal an indoctrination to Western Christianity and suggest a generally uncritical orientation to their faith which compromised their rhetorical and discursive efforts to confront and contest antiblackness (Harvey, 2011). Their public expressions of faith and appeals to Christian morality did attract much needed support for the abolition of slavery from liberal and progressive members of the Christian community. Still, most Christians opposed the abolition of slavery and backed instead the widely shared sentiments of enslavers and their allies that Africans were unfit for freedom and citizenship (Smith, 1985; Tise, 1987). Recent surveys of “White” Christians in the US show the majority continue to discount or dismiss African American arguments about institutionalized antiblack racism (Pew Research Center, 2021). A decade ago, Eric Tranby and Douglass Hartmann investigated the racial attitudes of evangelical Christians and documented the deeply entrenched nature of antiblackness in their worldview:

In short, for these respondents, the problem of race is reinterpreted as a threat against the hegemony and homogeneity of the existing white nation. Yet, neither this white cultural hegemony nor the structural privileges that go with it are ever

acknowledged, most likely because they are taken for granted, allowing the respondents to put the race problem back on the shoulders of “misfit” minorities. (2008).

Most of the explanations offered for such findings thus far point to the history and legacy of racial slavery as the source of the negative attitudes the West holds about African peoples. This study argues instead the seemingly intractable nature and characteristics of whiteness/antiblackness in Europe and Euro-America cannot be explained by slavery alone. It rejects outright the commonly held beliefs about the origins of antiblackness in the English colonies in the New World, and posits an alternative, evidence-based view that antiblack concepts and ideology are innate to Western European Christianity and Christian identity. It thus finds that antiblackness had already permeated the culture and consciousness of the West, including medieval England, before the “discovery” of the New World and the advent of the transatlantic trade in stolen Africans:

Black as an essentially negative non-color symbolizing evil in essence and manifestation permeated the Middle Ages and dominated the era of Christendom, but the English linkage of diabolical blackness with black people developed as a convention before they enslaved blacks, erupting suddenly after blacks and Englishmen were in physical contact. Enslavement of black people was neither the cause of nor the condition for blacks being despised and rejected; it was one of the effects of being black and not the most significant one (Washington, 1984).

Winthrop D. Jordan (1968) argued fifty years ago in his prize-winning study of “American attitudes toward the Negro,” that antiblackness was already embedded in English consciousness and culture when they founded the Virginia colony in 1607 and therefore was present to greet the first enslaved Africans who arrived twelve years later. His argument has been substantiated by recent research conducted in English archives that reveal a larger number of Africans than previously acknowledged resided in England prior to its colonialist expansion in the 1600s (Habib, 2008; Olusoga, 2016; Onyeka, 2013).

These new studies show England's experience with "Blacks" in the English homeland, and the social attitudes they developed from their initial forays into the European transatlantic slave trade, are evidenced and reflected in every aspect of English life—art, literature, drama, religion, economics, and government. Hence the need for more research focused on identifying the cognitive roots of whiteness/antiblackness in Western Europe to account for its subsequent dissemination and socialization across the Atlantic world and beyond.

The successes of the African Intellectual Tradition in deconstructing white supremacy—and its failures in not deconstructing Western Christianity—serve as stark reminders of the singular importance of being critically self-conscious of the analytical processes, procedures, and perspectives used in the conduct of research. The self-conscious critical analysis deployed here is designed to avoid the problem of taking for granted and failing to investigate any hypotheses and knowledge claims associated with this subject including those of Africana intellectuals. This approach also explains why this study devotes so much attention to structural analysis. Structural analysis refers here to deconstructing the Western European cognitive structures (epistemology) that frame and filter social knowledge and history from a European perspective thereby obstructing the analysis and evaluation of the social history of whiteness/antiblackness on its own terms. From this perspective, the failure to conduct a structural analysis compromises any endeavor to historicize a subject. In other words, researchers cannot theoretically discern the African forest from the European trees that dominate the historiographical landscape without first identifying the western concepts and discourses that cognitively structure the soil, landscape, and categories of western "knowledge" that inform, influence, and determine social perceptions of what is real and true. Consequently, this approach follows

Philippe Descola and others who argue that a structural analysis of phenomena should precede an historical analysis or historicism:

In opposition to historicism and the naïve faith that it places in explanations based on antecedent causes, we should emphatically remind ourselves that only knowledge of the structure of any phenomenon can make it possible to inquire relevantly into its origins. For Marx, a critical theory of the categories of political economy had necessarily to precede any inquiry into the order of appearance of the phenomena that those categories set out to distinguish. In just the same way, a genealogy of the constitutive elements of different ways of relating to the world and to others would be impossible to establish before first identifying the stable forms in which those elements are combined. Such an approach is not unhistorical (2013, p. xviii).

Where should such an investigation be directed? What structures in this case require examination and deconstruction? This study targets western epistemology, eurocentrism, and colonialism to uncover their origins in Western Christianity and to document their roles in providing the cognitive bases and historical contexts for the conceptualization and socialization of whiteness/antiblackness in the West. It analyzes those structures throughout the course of this investigation to identify their “constitutive elements,” as per Descola, and to locate and historicize their roots in Christian intellectualism and dogma.

As with any analytical procedure, this study also recognizes and considers its potential flaws and limitations. Problems commonly occur with structural analyses when investigating epistemic structures pertaining to human social identities such as *gender*, *class*, and *race*. A failure to recognize them as *mental models* of reality—as socially constructed intellectual concepts (discourses) and regard them instead as the products of nature and human evolution—results in their essentialization and reification despite the fact they do not possess an ontological existence outside of human imagination (Descola, 2013; Knorr-Cetina, 1981; van Dijk, 2014). Thus, care is exercised here not to take those categories for granted, especially given the West’s predilections to perceive and treat them

as normative, universal, and natural. The idea of “race” exemplifies this type of social cognition (knowledge-concept) which has no basis in nature (no ontological reality). Nevertheless, from its reified position in Euro-American thought, it produces and perpetuates an epistemology of ignorance with real consequences in terms of structuring and circumscribing the lives and life outcomes of millions of people categorized and racialized as “Black” in the US and across the globe.

The structural and conceptual analyses that follow may seem a tedious path to take to achieve this study’s research objectives; nevertheless, they constitute necessary investigatory steps, the omission of which would prevent the identification of the cognitive structures of the “objects” being discussed and thereby compromise the coherence and accuracy of attempts to document their historical import and specificity. The “objects” referred to here come in two flavors: the products of epistemology (knowledge-making) that produce the social reality of everyday life in accordance with what human beings perceive and recognize as facts and truths; and the products (discourses) of sociology and historiography that academics deploy and disseminate as key term/concepts in scholarly research, i.e., *religion, race, gender, class, modern, renaissance, medieval, ancient*, et cetera (Kurzman, 1994; Medina, 2013).

In the case of academic term/concepts, instead of taking them for granted many scholars today approach these common and conventional categories with a great degree of skepticism and caution. This wariness and doubt come from the growing recognition the terms tend to be overused, ill-defined, or purposed to support a specific argument or epistemic agenda, i.e., white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, or the eurocentric projection of Europe’s history as the universal history of the world (Araújo & Maeso, 2015; Delanty,

2006; Wallerstein, 1997). Nevertheless, they remain embedded in and central to European and Euro-American academic discourses where they continue to pose significant challenges especially for studies designed to confront and contest the hegemony of western knowledge and knowledge practices.

Another related issue also needs to be addressed before moving on. The utter lack of a vocabulary, technical or lay, for the purposes of analyzing and discussing “blackness” on its own terms, also compels us to engage in seemingly interminable discussions to define concepts and terminology essential to the conduct of this research. The historian Maghan Keita frames the problem thusly:

“Black” / “blackness” has never been defined in terms of itself or as a positive, but always in opposition to white—as its negative, as negation itself. This definition is complicated because within the realm of physical reality, “black” and “white” do not exist. As terms, they are descriptive abstractions, just like “dark” and “light” (2000, p. 30).

The inability to discuss blackness and so-called “Black” people outside the Western paradigm of race(ism) reduces us to antiblackness serving as the mediator of these inquiries. This situation prevails because Western European languages permanently trap continental and diasporan Africans within a hostile and alien thought-world where reality is socio-linguistically constructed, perceived, and experienced as a realm of white enchantment—i.e., white religion, white history, white supremacy, white language, white semantics—imagined, authorized, and enforced by white-defined social identities and entities. Whiteness thus pervades the social spaces and social reality of Europe and Euro-America thereby blinding their populace to the possibilities of imagining other realities and other worlds free of antiblackness and white supremacy. While alternate social spaces (internal colonies deemed *hoods*, *barrios*, *reservations*) exist within the white social spaces

of the West, they too serve as exemplars of non-white being and existence that prove the rule and normativity of whiteness and white hegemony rather than contradict it. Even the non-white cultural products that erupt out of those white colonized spaces cease over time to threaten the status quo of white superiority/black inferiority. The same machinery of whiteness that has always profited socioeconomically from the blackness it invented, systematically expropriates, and redeploys “Black” cultural products like blues, jazz, and hip hop to benefit and maintain the racial status quo.

The Africana Intellectual Tradition despite the challenges it faces internally and externally has elevated Africana scholarship over the centuries to a critical stage of analysis in confronting and contesting the historical manifestations and operations of antiblackness. This study, however, advocates a new direction going forward that focuses attention on recovering the roots of whiteness/antiblackness in Western Christianity to explain both the social history of racial slavery and its current afterlife. It also argues for a re-imagining of Africana identity, one that is not centered in or informed by the idioms and semantics of black/blackness. This study thus contributes to the ongoing discursive and didactic efforts of the AIT to liberate continental and diasporan Africans (and “Others”) from the white enchantment of antiblackness that claims and possesses the hearts and minds of billions of people. By theorizing and historicizing whiteness/antiblackness it reveals its genetic relationship to Western Christianity and Christian imperialism, a relationship that historically has been undertheorized even by Africana scholar-activists because of its historical conceptualization within the framework of European-centered Christian thought (eurocentrism) which deliberately effaces and erases its sociohistorical import.

Rather than being incidental to “whiteness”—in the same manner economists have deemed “Black” chattelization incidental to the socioeconomic development of the global economy—antiblackness is viewed here as instrumental in the social construction of “White” people, white power, and the United States of White Supremacy. From this perspective, the failure or refusal of most researchers to analyze antiblackness within the contexts of Western Christianity can only result in incoherent accounts of its conception and socialization in the West. This dissertation thus aims in part to confront and contest those flawed narratives. Arguing that antiblack ideologies developed and became normative in the cognitive and social spaces of Western Christianity, this study intends to show Christian beliefs and doctrine provide a basis for “Othering” human beings in ways that resulted in imagining and treating African peoples as the exemplars of an accursed identity and condition. It thus aims to furnish a more theoretically grounded, albeit fragmentary, genealogy, history, and trajectory of antiblackness that better accounts for the endurance and tenacity of the racial oppression experienced by African Americans currently relegated to an *afterlife of slavery* in the U.S.

In redefining and reframing “Black” identity using the term *Africana*, this study advocates applying it specifically to the liberation movements, human rights struggles, cultural traditions, and artistic products of continental and diasporan Africans. It also applies it to the social identities of African-descended persons and groups worldwide. This revised framework is designed to collectivize diverse populations under a rubric that would be more widely acceptable. Continental Africans do not refer to themselves as “Black,” a reality that creates a huge disconnect with African-descendent peoples in Europe and the Americas (Tsri, 2016a). Thus, the term remains divisive even among those it purports to

unite. Hence this study proposes the rejection of “Black” as a descriptor, and the retention of African American, Afro-Brazilian, Afro-Mexican, Afro-Cuban and the like as ethnic, geographic, and cultural labels. In addition, as indicated above, this study also recommends using the term “Africana” to denote their shared history of six centuries of Western Christian enslavement, racial oppression, and economic exploitation. This critical name change, which constitutes a form of “conceptual liberation” (Tsri, 2016a), is viewed here as an essential first step in the global Africana struggle to end white supremacy.

Decolonizing Theory and Praxis

The biggest problem posed by this study’s self-conscious approach to theorizing and historicizing blackness/antiblackness is not the challenge of navigating between two analytical traditions, Africana and European. It is identified here instead as the critical need to avoid a common analytical trap. The following cautionary dictum from philosophy scholar Samuel Weber articulates it precisely: “a social historical critique which does not consider the conflictual structure of its own discursive operations will only reproduce the constraints it is seeking to displace” (quoted in Young, 1990, p. 129). Given the eurocentric nature of the dominant structures of knowledge and knowledge-making in the West, this study remains critically alert and vigilant to avoid compromising and subverting the general conduct its research from within. As Indigenous Studies scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues, the very idea of research historically is deeply complicit with Western colonialism as a means for acquiring “knowledge” about colonized subjects to refine the methods of their enchainment to Western capitalism (2013). Smith drives this point home with her blunt declaration: “‘Research’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the

indigenous world's vocabulary" (2013, p. 1). The takeaway here could not be clearer: scholars must comprehend and acknowledge how their work can be compromised due to the general failure to recognize the historical linkages between research practices and the colonization of the spaces, history, and hearts and minds of non-Europeans. This concern applies equally to the two intellectual traditions discussed above: it pertains to European-centered thought for its ethnocentricity and hegemonic episteme, and to Africana theories and methods that originated within the eurocentric framework of western epistemology because of the psychosocial origins of Atlantic Africana thought being located mainly in the West even for those Africana thinkers not physically present in Europe or Euro-America.

The need to contest and counter the dominance of eurocentric epistemology evokes a highly celebrated aphorism from an Africana scholar-activist that also deserves mention. Audre Lorde's famous declaration: "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" is aimed specifically at Africana intellectuals as an insider's warning about the problems Weber identifies (1984, p. 112). She insists: "They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (1984, p. 112). Lorde combined queer theory (a method she helped to pioneer) with an incisive and groundbreaking Africana ("Black") feminist perspective to illuminate the challenges Africana scholars face in the efforts to dismantle the dominant cognitive structures of heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and white supremacy that permeate global society. Yet contrary to the claims and implications of her argument, this study contends Africana scholar-activists should not concede the ownership of such tools to the titular "master" class because history shows they are not the sole creations of the West. Moreover,

in the conduct of intellectual warfare against western epistemic dominance to confront and contest its hegemonic violence, this study argues no such intellectual weapons (tools) should ever be declared off-limits in the effort.

Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon, two prominent scholars of Africana philosophy, concur with this point. Accordingly, they suggest a more productive approach to conducting research from an Africana perspective would focus on “transcending rather than dismantling [the] Western ideas” that structure and inform the master’s house (Gordon & Gordon, 2006, p. x). Their critique of Lorde’s axiom thus argues against the abandonment of “theoretical frameworks” that direct and determine the production of knowledge. They contend without reservation or qualification: “Theory is not only a tool of the master. It belongs to us all since it is that without which we could not build our own thought. There is, then, an important role for theoretical work in Black Studies/African American Studies/Africana Studies” (2006, p. xi). As the Gordons envision and articulate it, that role is to facilitate the subversive agenda of “*decolonizing the minds of people, especially black people*” from the “epistemological colonization” of the West [authors’ italics] (2006, pp. x-xi).

Given the clear issues at stake here, the conduct of this study thus demands a subversive research process that goes beyond the routine acts of recovering and reexamining historical facts about blackness/antiblackness in archives, books, and articles, or even reinterpreting and revising older findings according to new data and theoretical insights. The process chosen here employs what has come to be known in recent decades as a *decolonial* methodology. Decolonial or *decoloniality* denotes a practice designed to confront and contest *coloniality*—a term that describes the legacy of colonialism that

persists in the world as evidenced by the West's current forms of epistemic and economic domination. Conceived and developed to a large extent by scholar-activists based in Latin America and influenced in key respects by the work of Frantz Fanon, decoloniality constitutes a thought-practice designed to break the enchantment of the eurocentric episteme (Dussel, 2000; Mignolo, 2013; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Quijano, 2000).

Decoloniality operates in part by exposing the eurocentric frames the knowledge-making apparatus in the West imposes on social knowledge and social reality through its normal and routine operations (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). It not only uncovers the hegemonic logic and epistemology of ignorance embedded in the eurocentric framework, in this case it also reveals the conceptual building blocks used to construct antiblack discourses and explains their selection, justification, dissemination, and socialization. Accordingly, decoloniality comprises both a perspective and a specialized set of intellectual tools needed to confront and contest the dominant eurocentric logic that deems and controls what is factual and what is not, what is presented and how, and what is excluded and why. With this approach scholars can look through and beyond centuries of western epistemic hegemony to recognize and comprehend the current global system of white supremacy as a virtual reality—albeit one with real historical and social consequences—and that it rests entirely on the foundation of an epistemology of ignorance and opportunism for which the idea and invention of whiteness and “white” people serve as exemplars.

Excavating and reading the history of blackness/antiblackness in the West from a decolonial perspective requires *unreading* its eurocentric frames. Unreading unveils the basic social processes in Europe (minus the hyperbole of European exceptionalism and

superiority) that determined how antiblackness was institutionalized under the auspices and directions of elite social actors. Unreading thus constitutes a cognitive means of escape, a way to break out of the social conditioning and mental captivity referred to here as the *Enchantment of Eurocentrism*—the global virtual reality induced by its dominant episteme. Disenchantment, however, does not mean throwing the western canon out with western colonialism and its epistemic terrorism:

One does not need to apologize for loving Shakespeare or Diderot. It is not Eurocentric to love Beethoven or Proust; it becomes Eurocentric only when one "wields" a Beethoven or a Proust as a weapon, as "proof" of a general and inherent European superiority, as in Saul Bellows' infamous "Where is the Zulu Proust?" (Shohat & Stam, 2009, p. 139)

Unreading, therefore, does not in any circumstances mean *not* reading European texts. The idea of rejecting or discarding Dante, Cervantes, Shakespeare or even Locke, Kant, and Hume, simply because they are European, is absurd and appears strikingly eurocentrist in its theory and purpose. Unreading instead means placing the European canon in its appropriate historical contexts and relationships with other traditions and the traditions of "Others". "Provincializing" European-centered thought thus describes both the intent and outcome of decolonialist theory/praxis. A term/concept devised by the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, provincializing Europeans means treating it, without exception, as simply another a knowledge-making entity and tradition among many across the world. This approach deliberately rejects the West's claims that its knowledge, history, culture, and worldview are universal (Chakrabarty, 2000). This application of decolonial thinking and thought thus contributes to and supports ongoing efforts by Africana scholars and others inside and outside the West to overcome western epistemic dominance to re-imagine global relations according to a new ethics and consciousness of human identity and existence.

As theory, a decolonizing approach is purposed and deployed to identify and expose the eurocentric frames of knowledge-making and social knowledge production. As praxis, it provides a critical method with which to dismantle and eliminate those structures. Praxis and theory as conceived and used in this study, however, go beyond the basic processes or actions of engaging or enacting a theory, idea, or skill, as traditionally defined. The decolonial thinking imagined here requires scholar-activists to reject the standard and traditional Aristotelian formulation in the West that theory precedes practice and practice constitutes applied theory (Mignolo, 1999). The alternative framework used here views and treats theory/praxis as a coincidental rather than sequential process. Hence the two elements, theory/praxis, praxis/theory, function as conjoined operations. They thus jointly produce what the cultural studies scholar Catherine Walsh describes as: “a decolonial and decolonizing methodological-pedological-praxistical stance” when applied, as in this case, with the intentionality of a critical theory agenda for social change (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 20).

The complex cognitive stance delineated by Walsh above comprises more than a simple anticolonial standpoint or ideology. It also offers an intellectual locus and a set of analytical tools to aid in the tasks of re-conceptualizing world history minus the eurocentric frames and the logic of white supremacy. However, disenchanting thought and thinking from the magic kingdom of white supremacist ideology represents only a preliminary step in contesting and dismantling this epistemology of “White” ignorance. Problems also occur when it comes to interpreting and rewriting the past. The late Chicana scholar-activist Gloria Anzaldúa identified this challenge as: “how to write (produce) without being inscribed (re-produced) in the dominant white structure and how to write without

reinscribing and reproducing what we rebel against” (2015, pp. 7-8). Also citing Anzaldúa on this point, Walsh emphasizes the need to think beyond the normal practices of research writing:

The intention here is not to write about, nor it is to develop a narrative by simply citing a plethora of authors, contexts, and texts. Rather it is to think from and with standpoints, struggles, and practices, from and with praxical theorizings, conceptual theorizings, theoretical conceptualizings, and theory-building actionings (Walsh, 2018, p. 20).

“Theory-building actionings,” “praxical theorizing”—the radical and liberationist forms of thinking-practices referred to by Walsh above—contemplate and argue the need for a decolonial attitude and agenda to avoid the discursive dilemma of reinscribing eurocentric ideology in decolonialist studies due to the inability or failure to act-think from a decolonial stance. Hence the genuine concern here that the word “Black”—as a label or referent for self-described or socially described peoples of African descent—automatically reinscribes and reifies the negative concept of “nigger” and the negation of African identity wherever and whenever it is deployed regardless of the source.

Again, to look beyond the eurocentric framework is a form of unreading it. To unread it is to facilitate a re-thinking of the past and present from another “thinking,” a re-thinking from a decolonial place of thought that transcends the Western paradigm. But as both Walsh and Anzaldúa warn, scholar-activists must recognize, deconstruct, and dismantle Western-centered thought in their research practices and writing or face the dangers of subverting and sabotaging their liberationist intentions and agendas internally. Hence, from this perspective, Weber’s axiom warns Afrocentric theorists who attempt to make Africa the “center” of thinking and thought as a counter to eurocentrism. Well-intentioned Afrocentrists fell into the tautological trap of critiquing eurocentrism from a

eurocentric perspective beginning in the early nineteenth century. They did so by appropriating the western concept of “race” to create a type of strategic essentialism for self-defense and self-preservation designed to contest and counter the existential reality of antiblack racism (Moses, 1998). In doing so, they made a major conceptual mistake the first generation of Africana scholars somehow avoided even though they self-identified as “African.”

The Africana literary tradition in the West, which commences in the eighteenth century with the first cohort of brilliant Atlantic-world activist-scholars—Wheatley, Equiano, Banneker, et al.—began as a polemical critique of racial bondage and its antiblack premises and justifications. Whether literary or biographical, its early discourses mainly focused on dismantling the master’s house of white supremacy to counter the dehumanizing violence of lifetime and hereditary enslavement (Bruce, 2001). The generations of Africana scholars who followed embraced this intellectual tradition, and rightly so. However, relying solely on western historiography to stock their intellectual arsenal, some scholar-activists wound up conducting intellectual warfare using eurocentric concepts and logic. In reconstituting and redeploying those concepts as Afrocentric thought, they went beyond their forebears’ critiques of eurocentric discourses to establish a logic and framework for African-centered historicizing (Moses, 1998). Historicizing from an African-centered perspective thus ensnared them in the fallacy of eurocentric historicizing because well-intentioned efforts of “centering” Africa replicated and reinscribed eurocentric biases, including its ethnocentrism, heteropatriarchy, social inequities, and sexual anxieties and inhibitions (Chenault, 2007). Hence the warning here to Africana scholars to examine and evaluate the structures of their discourses and

discursive operations to avoid compromising them at the outset when confronting western thought and its epistemic hegemony.

This criticism also applies in key respects to works by Marx, Foucault, Derrida, and a host of other scholars investigating issues of knowledge/power and its socialization from within European and Euro-American intellectual traditions. To the extent they rely on the contents (history) and methods (historiography) of European-centered thought to pose counter arguments to western hegemony their work will reflexively and tautologically circle the wagons around western epistemic dominance. This intellectual stasis is due to the fact the West established a loci of enunciation, a cognitive and sociopolitical location in time and space, from which, as Walter Mignolo states, the “world became unthinkable beyond European (and, later North Atlantic) epistemology” (2002, p. 90). In other words, non-Western views of world history have been excluded or erased and therefore have been “unthinkable” since the “discovery” of the New World.

The West achieved its cognitive and epistemic dominance worldwide by violently supplanting and erasing the knowledge of “Others” and other knowledges. It also whitewashed key aspects of its colonial history by treating Amerindian genocide and African chattel bondage as minor episodes in the metanarrative of Europe’s progress to modernity. The “official” history of the development of “modern” world thus appears as a heroic romance with Western European Christians as the sole protagonists. This eurocentric “script” replaces local histories to present European history as universal and Europeans as the exemplars of humankind. These notions, which are grounded in a white supremacist ideology, make the very idea of “Blacks” as humans “unthinkable.” Indeed, even the academic disciplines to study the lived reality and histories of African Americans,

Latinos/as, Amerindians, Asians, LGBTQs, and Women remained “unthinkable” until the campus revolutions of the 1960s and 70s forced their recognition. Being “unthinkable” thus explains the visibility/invisibility paradox of “Black” existence in the West. The relegation of Africana people to a permanent underclass is designed to render them invisible and “unthinkable.” They only become visible and thought about in “White” America to signal the presence of a mortal threat to the imagined biological purity of self-identified “Whites” and the nation’s racial hierarchy.

As noted above, the “white” world (which by definition and design is antiblack) creates a virtual reality that owes its existence to a sociology of knowledge/ignorance created by the violence of western colonialism in aid of the globalization of Western Christianity and capitalism. If this global social reality is in fact a virtual reality—if all reality is indeed virtual by virtue of its sociology of knowledge and social construction—then it stands to reason continental and diasporan Africans, and allied “Others” can create a new virtual reality to *re-exist* on their own terms rather than simply existing to resist on terms defined by their oppressors (Albán, 2013). This issue of re-existence outside the hegemonic Western episteme and its eurocentric paradigm will be revisited in this study’s conclusion.

In summary, this dissertation’s theoretical locus and methodological tools serve the singular purpose of exposing and dismantling the master’s house of Western Christian imperialism/dominionism from its eurocentric roof to its white supremacist foundations. Hence, they provide the arsenal of weapons used to conduct this study’s form of intellectual warfare to advance the Africana liberation struggle. The following chapters present this unapologetically polemical research and its findings within the broad conceptual

framework of the Africana Intellectual Tradition. Within this multidisciplinary field Africana scholar-activists, especially those working from a Pan Africanist perspective, have a long history of turning academic silos into bridges to achieve their discursive and didactic goals and objectives.

This dissertation builds on the AIT's extraordinary tradition of multidisciplinary praxis by selecting and analyzing relevant studies from the fields of history, sociology, classical studies, philosophy, linguistics, cognitive science, mythology, and biblical studies. It crosses academic boundaries as needed to conceptualize and conduct its structural analysis of the complex genealogy of whiteness/antiblackness. While it recognizes and appreciates the achievements of the academic specialties that make this research possible, academia nevertheless remains among the most powerful venues today—alongside medicine, politics, and Christianity—for the production and dissemination of white supremacist ideology. Consequently, this study's structural analysis aims right at the foundation of the ivory tower to expose the singular role of the Christian Intellectual Tradition (CIT) in its establishment and to dismantle the eurocentric epistemology of whiteness/antiblackness that it disseminates and promotes. At the same time—as illustrated in the chapters that follow—it relies heavily upon the research of western scholar-activists who are conducting intellectual warfare to decolonize knowledge production and dismantle the eurocentric framework of Christian ideology and dogma that animates and supports it. This process begins here with analyzing the historic origins of the concept of human blackness.

CHAPTER ONE:

ANCIENT GREEK POETRY AND THE ORIGINS OF ANTIBLACKNESS

We can explain why people held a belief by placing it in the context of their webs of belief. In addition, we can begin to explain why they held these webs of belief by placing them in the context of the traditions from which they set out (Bevir, 2000, pp. 403-404).

Introduction

This chapter investigates the social construction of whiteness/antiblackness in its originating literary, mythological, biblical, and geo-temporal contexts—which it identifies and locates in the Mediterranean world of archaic and classical antiquity. Viewed collectively, the complex web of archaic and classical-era legends, myths, stereotypes, and beliefs about Africans and Africa can be said to constitute the origins of “black” discourses in the ancient world. As per the historical conventions of the West, archaic and classical antiquity collectively encompass the thirteen centuries between the eighth century BCE and the sixth century CE. The archaic era, a term most frequently used by art historians, refers to the period from the eighth to the fifth centuries BCE (Toohey, 1997). As a geographical locus the designation “Mediterranean,” as used here in relation to Greco-Roman classical antiquity, refers primarily to the Eastern Mediterranean. However, this investigation shifts to the Western Mediterranean when it turns to the Latin Church’s authorization of the Portuguese enslavement and commodification of West Africans in the 1400s.

Although this study recognizes the Eastern Mediterranean as the geocultural seedbed of antiblack beliefs, it identifies the Western Mediterranean and Western Europe

as the critical region where notions of White Christian supremacy coalesced and cohered to establish the theological, economic, philosophical, and scientific justifications for hereditary African enslavement. Hence even though different Mediterranean cultures (Greek, Roman, Jewish) contributed to the social construction of black/antiblack discourses over many centuries, the evidence presented below establishes Latin Christianity as the primary venue for their development and dissemination prior to and during the long centuries of western colonialism.

Abstract ideas of blackness and tropes of symbolic blackness—which historically have held negative meanings and connotations in many cultures around the world—possess a linguistic and semantic history separate from and prior to the use of *black* as a referent for Africans or other non-Europeans (Gergen, 1967; Harvey, 2013; Pastoreau, 2008). This study therefore investigates how such ideas came to be associated with African people, identity, and culture, and why it is assumed to be appropriate to label them and their descendants worldwide with a generic term that is not even an accurate descriptor of skin color given the obvious heterogeneity of African pigmentation. It conducts this investigation to address and answer a series of critical questions as follows.

When and how did Africans become pejoratively *black* and therefore the objects of debasement, exploitation, and enslavement? Under what circumstances did the social need arise in Western Europe to “blacken” the character, history, identity, and *skin* of African peoples to accommodate the West’s own psychosocial, semiotic, and ideological needs? Did the ancient Greeks ever self-identify as “white” people? If so, what terms did they use? What can be said about the self-identity of the Romans, the conquerors, and intellectual and spiritual heirs of Greek (Hellenic) civilization? Did imaginary whiteness frame and

determine their social relations and interactions with those they enslaved and colonized during the centuries they dominated the Mediterranean, North Africa, the Near East, and Western Europe? This search for answers begins with an investigation of the ancient Greek literary tradition to examine its role in conceptualizing human blackness.

“Burnt-faced” Ethiopians and the Birth of Human Blackness

The Homeric tradition of ancient Greek epic poetry provides what appears to be the earliest term used to designate and describe Africans in the Greco-Roman classical world based on skin color. Homer’s neologism Αἰθίοψ (*Aithiops/Ethiopians*) derives from two Greek words: αἶθω (*aitho*, 'I burn') + ὤψ (*ops*, 'face') that when combined form a noun that translates as “burnt-face” and when used as an adjective conveys the notion of “red-brown” (Liddell & Scott, 1940). It makes its first appearance in Homer’s *Iliad* where it is used twice, and next appears in the *Odyssey* in three notable instances. Scholars view the two epic poems as the foundational texts of Western literature and literary culture (Fagles, 1991, 1996). Although the compositions date from around the late eighth or early seventh centuries, they did not appear in writing until the sixth century BCE. Groundbreaking and remarkable in countless ways from a literary perspective, these widely known and celebrated texts present an unusually positive, albeit brief, account of African people and culture. Based on legends and folklore circulating in the Mediterranean at least as early as the eighth century BCE, Homer proclaimed and depicted Ethiopians as highly favored and respected by the Greek gods:

Only yesterday Zeus went off to the Ocean River
to feast with the Aethiopians, loyal, lordly men,
and all the gods went with him (Fagles, 1991, pp. 90-91).

Homer's passage is extraordinary for two reasons. Its characterization of Ethiopians is overwhelmingly positive, and it reveals Homeric-era Greeks viewed the spiritual beliefs of a people as distant from their homeland as they could imagine as identical to their own. Although they differed in physical appearance, language, and culture, it appears the ancient Greeks nonetheless imagined, embraced, and celebrated Ethiopians as fellow adherents to the same diverse system of "Pagan" beliefs which dominated the ancient world before the advent of the monotheistic cults of Judaism and Christianity (Assmann, 1996a).

In the centuries that followed Homer's texts became what the historian Robert A. Williams describes as "Western civilization's first best sellers ... copied down on papyrus, and then recited word for word, book for book, at festivals and religious celebrations" (2012, p. 15). Williams goes on to state: "Homer's beloved poems became the bible of the Greeks, closely read, studied, and memorized as sacred texts, often in their entirety" (p. 15). Given Homer's early canonization and his massive influence on the Greco-Roman classical-era literature that followed, including the composition of the Gospels of the New Testament (Elsom, 1987; MacDonald, 2000), it is not unsurprising that over the course of the next six centuries generations of Greek writers followed his literary example. No Greek writer, however, wrote with more high regard of Ἀιθίοψ than Diodorus Siculus, a first century BCE Greek historian who lived approximately six centuries after Homer:

And they say that they [Ethiopians] were the first to be taught to honour the gods and to hold sacrifices and processions and festivals and the other rites by which men honour the deity; and that in consequence their piety has been published abroad among all men, and it is generally held that the sacrifices practised among the Ethiopians are those which are the most pleasing to heaven. As witness to this they call upon the poet who is perhaps the oldest and certainly the most venerated among the Greeks; for in the Iliad he represents both Zeus and the rest of the gods with him as absent on a visit to Ethiopia to share in the sacrifices and the banquet which were given annually by the Ethiopians for all the gods together (Oldfather, 1967, p. 91).

By Diodorus's time Ethiopians had departed the realm of fabulist literature to become historical figures and their Greek name had become an eponym in Greek literature for nearly all people of "African" origin and descent as well as dark-skinned peoples in India (Gruen, 2011; Herodotus, 2013; Keita, 1994; Snowden, 1970). Yet, as noted, the histories, epic poems, and dramas composed by Homer's literary successors maintained positive views of them: "Greek narratives continue to hold its [Ethiopia's] people in high esteem. As Pliny [the Roman naturalist] strikingly put it, who would have ever believed the Ethiopians had actually existed before actually seeing them?" (Gruen, 2011, p. 201). Diodorus also espouses in his widely circulated writings an early African-centered view of humanity's origins. He cites and argues from Greek standard histories and mythic traditions of his time that Ethiopians were the first humans on Earth by virtue of natural evolution:

Now the Ethiopians, as historians relate, were the first of all men and the proofs of this statement, they say, are manifest. For that they did not come into their land as immigrants from abroad but were natives of it and so justly bear the name of "autochthones" is, they maintain, conceded by practically all men; furthermore, that those who dwell beneath the noon-day sun were, in all likelihood, the first to be generated by the earth, is, clear to all; since, inasmuch as it was the warmth of the sun which, at the generation of the universe, dried up the earth when it was still wet and impregnated it with life, it is reasonable to suppose that the region which was nearest the sun was the first to bring forth living creatures.

Being burnt-faced and born beneath the noon-day sun, which here means the tropical region of Africa, was noted with respect and even a sense of awe by Diodorus. Since this study aims to identify how black/blackness came to be applied pejoratively to Africans, it is essential to point out Diodorus wrote his histories after six centuries of the canonical and pervasive Homeric tradition with its frequent negative uses of "black" as adjective and metaphor: *black terror, black death, black doom, black wind, black blood, black hour, black sack of trouble, black and drear, black day, death's black fury, black pain* (Fagles,

1991, 1996). Judging by the works of Hesiod, Herodotus, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and numerous other archaic and classical era Greek writers, it appears the negative characteristics of the color *black* were not metaphorically and discursively transferred to Ethiopians in the six hundred years between Homer and Diodorus (Keita, 2005; Snowden, 1970; Snowden, 1991). The early Greeks who labeled Africans as “burnt-face” apparently did not venture beyond its basic descriptive function and attach to it the host of other negative characteristics its usage evoked in subsequent eras.

Although this finding is not entirely dispositive, surveys and analyses of the surviving texts consistently show the ancient Greeks deployed Αἰθίοψ as an ethnonym (a name of an ethnic group created by another ethnic group) for people of “African” origin based on pigmentation and geographical location without denigrating them as “black” metaphorically (Keita, 2000, 2005; Snowden, 1960, 1970). The late Frank M. Snowden, an authority on the image of the African in Greco-Roman civilization supplies a useful overview of several other “color terms” applied to Africans’ skin color by the ancient Greeks and Romans:

The most common Greek words applied to the Ethiopian’s color were μέλας [dark or black] and its compounds — μελάμβροτος and μελανόχροος, αἰδαλους, κελαινός and χυανεός [dark blue], were also found. In Latin the adjective most frequently used for this purpose was *niger* [dark or black]. Used also were *ater*, *acquilus*, *exustus* (*perustus*) [burnt], *fuscus*, and *percoctus* [baked]. (1970, p. 3).

This study now examines the important color term μέλας (dark or black) to determine what role it played, if any, in “racial” stereotyping Africans in Greek antiquity.

From Eponymous Black (Αιθίοψ) to Generic Black (μέλας)

By the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, Africana peoples the Greeks described as dark or black (μέλας) had become well known as residents within the Greek city-states, as evidenced by the abundance of visual images that:

... show up as figures on wall paintings, as statues, as busts, as lamps, as terra cotta figures, in every medium. Although their features are generally recognizable without difficulty, they form no collective stereotype, they are rarely subject to caricature, and they are not singled out as a separate species—let alone a marginalized species (Gruen, 2011, p. 211)

The abundance and variety of this imagery suggests many more dark-skinned peoples with identifiable Africoid characteristics and features lived in ancient Greece than modern Euro-American scholars generally acknowledge or admit (Keita, 1994; Snow, 1980; Snowden, 1948, 1970; Snowden, 1991). However, the Greek use of μέλας requires further unpacking and contextualizing because, as shown later, two of the earliest Christian texts written in Greek in the first and second centuries CE demonize blackness using the word μέλας rather than Αιθίοψ. Hence the need to examine how early Christians used μέλας in their discourses after their cult rose to power. Before that discussion, however, this section analyzes its use in pre-Christian ancient Greek texts, particularly the Homeric texts that provided the foundation of Greek (Hellenic) literature and education. The prominence and popularity of Homer and his literary style in Greek literature helped to establish and standardize Greek language and idioms. As the historian Brotóns Merino notes, Homeric terms for color endured in Greece for centuries:

The Homeric poems can be considered a reference to know the colour adjectives in Ancient Greek from the eighth century BCE onwards. In these testimonies the most elementary forms of colour, white and black, are predominant. The formal epithets in the Homeric poems preserve the meanings of an archaic period of the language, leading us to believe that the colour terms used by archaic poets would correspond

to the forms they used in everyday language, which means that their audience ought to know these colour references (2018, p. 9).

Notably, archaic “colour adjectives” maintain the same basic and multiple connotations throughout Greek history. However, its multiple meanings have been reduced and homogenized by many translators. As Brotóns Merino explains, μέλας continued:

to denote the lack of brightness, i.e., the dark tone of other colours as blue, red, etc. For example μέλας describes the colour of blood (Il. 4, 149: ὡς εἶδεν μέλαν αἷμα, “seeing the black blood”), of waves (Il. 23, 693: μέλαν ἐξ ἑ κῶμα, “the black wave”), of wine (Od. 5, 265: μέλανος οἴνοιο, “the black wine”), etc. Even though translations keep the colour term black because probably it suits better to the poetic style of Homeric translations, it is clear that Homer seems to use μέλας to name the dark colour of the referent of a specific tone by itself: dark red of blood and wine, and dark blue of waves. Nevertheless, μέλας is also used in Homer to denote black. And thus it refers to μελαίνησ νυκτὸς (“black night”) in Il. 15, 324, as does Hesiod in Th. 20: νύκτα μελάιναν (2018, pp. 9-10).

With translators consistently translating μέλας by only using the word “black,” it is not surprising it has acquired an unwarranted precision and specificity. This choice, even for poetic reasons, ignores its various uses as evidenced by the archaic and classical corpus of Greek texts. In Hippocratic writing about diseases, for example, μέλας has negative connotations, particularly in reference to death. Plato uses it to refer to a “defective skin color and is the source of this enigmatic statement: “μέλανασ δὲ ἰνδρικοὺς ἰδεῖν, λευκοὺς δὲ θεῶν παῖδας εἶναι (“the swarthy are of manly aspect, the white are children of the gods”) (Brotóns Merino, 2018, p. 10). Not unexpectedly, numerous instances occur in Greek literature where μέλας possesses a negative meaning or inference. Yet to view it as a pejorative to describe African people in this original and early usage is erroneous. Even though “skin” is listed, in the “contexts” in which it is “blackened” μέλας clearly refers to and characterizes illness and death. Hence it cannot be interpreted in such instances to relate to notions of phenotype or ethnicity. Nevertheless, these common uses of μέλας

provide a precedence and cognitive pathway for the transfer and assignment of negative characteristics to African people based on notions of skin coloration, as will be shown later.

Following the archaic era of literature of Hesiod and Homer, the earliest and most important classical source of Greek views of Africans is found in Herodotus's *Histories* written in the fifth century BCE (2013). Herodotus uses μέλας frequently. His text aims in part to make Egyptian history and culture intelligible to his Greek readers. It does so in a way that treats the African nation as extraordinarily accomplished and repulsive at the same time (Samuels, 2015). Like other Greek writers, he tends to view Egyptian customs as the inverse of that of the Greeks. However, as noted, Herodotus also famously proclaims the Ethiopians, whom he regards as the forebears of the Egyptians, to be the tallest and most beautiful of all people (Herodotus, 2013). His statement seems to confirm a distinction in Greek writing between the use of μέλας as a generic color term, versus Αιθίοψ, the neologism that means “burnt-faced” or “sunburnt” constructed by Homer.

The situation in antiquity clearly is never as black or white as some scholars would prefer. In other words, like Αιθίοψ, the evidence simply does not exist to conclude μέλας was commonly used to denigrate Africans. Moreover, its use is complicated and further confounded by the Greeks' accounts of their own genealogical histories. Various mythological narratives indicate they believed their legendary ancestral founders were non-Greek in origin, and in some cases, definitively African:

As an example, there is the mythical personality of Danae, mother of Perseus. Her genealogy is instructive of how the Greeks may have seen themselves and their relation to Africa. Danae was the great granddaughter of Danaus, the founder of Argos. The importance of Danaus begins before his immigration to Argos; Danaus and his twin brother Aigyptos were, respectively, the kings of Libya and Egypt. Some traditions also link them as siblings to the king of Ethiopia as well. In any case, conflict between Aigyptos and Danaus and the disastrous marriages of their fifty sons and fifty daughters led Danaus to flee his native land, with his fifty

daughters and his only remaining son-in-law, for Argos. It is from this stock that Herodotus and the Dorians trace the heritage of Danae (Keita, 1994, p. 150).

The greatest of the Greek heroes, Heracles (Hercules) purportedly descended directly from Danaus through his daughter Hypermestra. These examples, however, barely scratch the surface, as is documented in the work of Martin Bernal. Bernal's research in the three-volume study he titled *Black Athena* relies primarily on linguistic analyses to demonstrate the historicity of the Greek myths that cite their Egyptian and Near Eastern origins and influences (Bernal, 1987). Perhaps this perceived genealogical relationship with people from North Africa and the Levant inspired Homer to dub the people south of Egypt "the blameless Ethiopians," and the historian Herodotus, who visited Egypt circa 454 BCE, to proclaim them to be the tallest and handsomest of men (Fagles, 1991; Herodotus, 2013). This supposition is not unreasonable given the fact generations of Greek writers clearly found reasons to assert, amplify, transmit, and preserve what should be regarded as Homer's mythic and idealistic treatment of Ethiopians.

As shown below, Greek environmental theory also linked Ethiopian skin color to life at the extremes of the earth. The presence of these ideas, combined with the use of μέλας in association with death and the underworld, imbued the word "black" with a host of negative denotations and connotations that this study argues early Christian writers drew from and employed for their own discursive and didactic purposes. The following section discusses Greek environmental theories to refute the claims that environmental determinism in Greek thought indicates the existence of proto-racism and extreme forms of "Othering" non-Greeks.

Greek Environmental Determinism and Antiblackness

Greek writers commented frequently on the human phenotypic variation of the diverse peoples they encountered or that they imagined existed in the far regions of the earth (Gruen, 2011, 2020; Isaac, 2004, 2006; Keita, 2000, 2005). They typically attributed human differences to environmental and geographic factors, and often drew negative inferences about “foreign” peoples based on a belief environment deeply impacts the physical and psychological development of human populations. A primary source of this ancient Greek theory can be found in a treatise attributed to Hippocrates, *Air, Water, Places*, that dates approximately to the fifth century BCE (Hippocrates, 2013; Presti, 2012; Wear, 2008). Its authorship remains in dispute, but its design as a handbook for physicians places it in the corpus of works that have been defined as Hippocratic in subject and style. *Air, Water, Places* notably makes a clear causal connection between the mentality, moral character, and physical characteristics of a particular population and the environment and climate in which they are born:

Climate, then, is the greatest factor in diversity among people. Next come the land in which one is raised and the waters there. You will find for the most part, that the physique of a man and his habits are formed by the nature of the land. Where the soil is rich, soft and well-watered and where surface water is drunk, which is warm in summer and cold in winter, and where the seasons are favorable, you will find the people fleshy, their joints obscured, and they have watery constitutions (Hippocrates, 2013).

Air, Water, Places unquestionably asserts that peoples living in moderate climates (like the Greeks according to their own perceptions) differ radically in terms of physique and temperament from those at the extremes of the earth, whose health, physiology, and moral character are purportedly disadvantaged by their geographical locations and environments. Hence it provides a basis for viewing human groups as distinguishable in ways that

facilitate organizing them into “hierarchies based on purported inherent qualities, qualities that are derived from their location of origins” (Kennedy, 2016).

However, it is one thing to posit a theory, and yet another to turn it into a meaningful social practice. Evidence the ancient Greeks applied their environmental theories to justify discrimination against various peoples is lacking, as even the classical historian Benjamin Isaac admits (2004). Most importantly, the fact the treatise comes from the Hippocratic school of medicine suggests it performed a vital role in health promotion, education, and practice (Tountas, 2009). The Hippocratic system was built on principles of humanism and natural philosophy that defined “health as a state of balance between internal and external environment” (Tountas, 2009, p. 191). Accordingly, Greek physicians viewed a person’s social and ecological circumstances as integral to her or his well-being and of great importance for curing and treating illness and disease. Hence, rather than seeing the treatise as solely divisive in its construction of human diversity, it alternatively can be understood as representing an ethics of healing designed to treat the whole person based on individual circumstances and needs (Chemhuru, 2017; Tountas, 2009). This ancient notion of the “social determinants of health” became a standard theory in US medicine in recent decades (Davidson, 2019).

Isaac labels the early Greek environmental theories and beliefs “proto-racist” because he views them as constituting “patterns of thought in antiquity ... that were adopted by early modern racists” (2004, p. 15; 2006). It is a distinction with a difference, but one that from this perspective falls demonstrably short when applied to ancient Greco-Roman cultures. Isaac argues:

Racism here is taken as representing a form of rationalizing and systematically justifying various forms of prejudice, a conceptual process which was part of the

Greek intellectual development in general. The forms which this proto-racism took were different from those encountered in the twentieth century and they did not lead to systematic persecution, but they were influential at the time and deeply influenced later authors in the age of the Enlightenment and afterwards, who accepted these ideas together with others which they found in the Greek and Latin literature (2006, p. 32).

The fact such ideas were “influential at the time” hardly translates into proto-racist concepts systemically permeating social thought in Greco-Roman antiquity. The historian David Hackett Fischer has identified this type of analytical flaw as a *genetic fallacy*: a failure to distinguish between the becoming of a thing and the thing it has become. He states: “it is an erroneous idea that an actual history of any science, art, or social institution can take the place of a [nontemporal] logical analysis of its structure” (1970, p. 155). His warning to avoid this form of historicism is why this study conducts a structural analysis of whiteness/antiblackness. Therefore, in arguing Greeks and Romans *were* “proto-racists” rather than the fact that their speculative ideas about environmental determinism appear racist or proto-racist from a “modern” perspective hardly seems appropriate or accurate without the identification of some corresponding and validating social structures, actions, and activities.

The limitations of Isaac’s approach and analysis thus become particularly evident given his declaration his research is not concerned with: “the actual treatment of foreigners in Greece and Rome, but with opinions and concepts encountered in the literature.... the history of discriminatory ideas rather than acts” (2004, p. 2). It seems unlikely if actual discriminatory policies and practices existed based on proto-racist ideology in Greco-Roman civilization that Isaac would have failed to include salient examples in an exhaustive tome that spans over 500 pages. Nevertheless, what Isaac clearly gets right is centuries later Enlightenment-era Western Christian thinkers acted upon those ideas with

racist intent unlike the ancient writers they claimed as their intellectual forebears (Hannaford, 1996; Said, 1978).

The Hippocratic theory of environmental determinism also found its expression in the Greek plastic arts. It inspired the artistic creation of what are known as Janiform vases which depict and juxtapose back-to-back portraits of the heads of Scythians (a European population located north of Greece) and Ethiopians (Snowden, 1970; Snowden, 1991). The vases appear to illustrate in sculptural form the Greek theory of climate variation on populations at the distant extremes of the earth. Snowden accounts for these common decorative objects as follows: “By combining in Janiform vases the heads of whites and Negroes, the artists contrasted whites and blacks, feature by feature, and thus brought out effectively the physical differences as to color, hair, nose, lips, prognathism and the absence thereof” (1970, p. 25).

Unfortunately, Snowden routinely deploys the term “Negro” to label Africana populations and views the contrast between the two groups as indicative of a black/white dichotomy when it arguably applies only in the “ancient” sense to the stark contrast of two populations distant to the Greeks to illustrate their environmental theories. Since neither the Greeks nor Romans self-identified as “white” people, as shown below, no black/white dichotomy informed their relations with those they deemed “Others” (Dee, 2003; Samuels, 2015). From this study’s perspective, therefore, the *Air, Water, Places* treatise does not use environmental determinism specifically to propound or support theories of Greek superiority. Instead, it offers a theory about geography that is intended to apply universally to all human beings. Its reception and elaboration by thinkers in the Greco-Roman era led to its revival by Western scholars centuries later. As the Isaac notes: “It had an enormous

influence not only on ancient philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, or the medical author Galen, but also on early modern authors, among others Jean Bodin, John Arbuthnot, Montesquieu, Hume, and Herder” (2004, p. 60).

Having engaged the environmental issue, this study now turns to confront a related topic. Many scholars view the ancient Greek concept of “Barbarians” as providing irrefutable evidence they imagined and constructed their social identity (Self) based on perceptions of “Others” they deliberately debased and denigrated to elevate themselves and their civilization.

Barbarians, Polarities, and Opposites in Greek Thought

The question of how the Greeks imagined themselves and their distinctive history and place in the world as compared to “non-Greeks” looms over every study of the ancient Mediterranean history. It endures because the orthodox and dominant paradigm of Greek antiquity constructed in the West deliberately distorts, minimizes, or erases Greece’s multicultural origins to reify it as the pristine source of western culture and civilization (Vlassopoulos, 2007). This eurocentric myth of ancient Greece as a “paradigm of biocultural purity”—a society unsullied or influenced by other cultures and the cultures of “Others”—replaces historical facts with a narrative of triumphalism and exceptionalism scholars have dubbed the “European Miracle” (Blaut, 1993, 2000). According to this eurocentric discourse, Europeans progressed spiritually, intellectually, scientifically, and socioeconomically in advance of peoples in other societies across the globe (Diamond, 2013; Jones, 2003). As western propaganda, it sanitizes and justifies the genocidal campaigns conducted by Western European Christians to conquer and colonize the world.

Hence it characterizes and represents western hegemony as the natural consequence of Europe's innate geographical and ecological advantages (a kind of environmental determinism on steroids) and its impact on global society as the inevitable result, in a teleological sense, of the god-given physical, intellectual, and spiritual superiority of Europeans based on the fiction of whiteness and "white" racial identity (Blaut, 1993, 2000; Goody, 2006; Hobson, 2004).

Many scholars today believe the Greeks divided the peoples of the world—as they imagined it with themselves in the center (Mediterranean = Middle-Earth)—into two major classes: *civilized* and *barbarian*. This division, however, is not a legacy of ancient Greek thought. As shown here, it emerges in the early middle ages with the establishment of Christendom, a theo-political construct which fostered the invention and use of eurocentric ideology as a discursive tool to claim and center the world's social and scientific achievements in the "civilized" West. This conception of the asymmetrical psychosocial binary of *civilized/barbarian*, as the cognitive foundation of Self/Other, ultimately contributed to the development of the sociohistorical identity of Western Europeans as the god-ordained rulers of all humankind. As discussed below, eurocentrists directly link Western European identity and culture to imagined ancestral roots in Greco-Roman civilizations. They use this historiographic sleight-of-hand to re-invent themselves as the "heirs" to ancient Mediterranean cultures rather than accept the documented historical fact they too were victims of centuries of Roman conquest, colonization, and rule (Blaut, 1993, 2000; Waswo, 1997; Williams, 2012).

While the ancient Greeks famously classified non-Greek-speaking peoples (i.e., foreigners) as *βαρ-βαρ* (*bar-bar/barbaros/barbarian*), this designation did not define their

social relations with “Others” as generally is claimed in the West (Gruen, 2011, 2020; Hall, 1989). Some societies fitting the Greek description of *βαρ-βαρ*—based on the narrow criteria of language—possessed civilizations, languages, and literature far older and more developed than the term implies. Moreover, various ancient Greek texts indicate that rather than simply designating other peoples as bio-culturally inferior to Greeks, the term frequently denoted a highly sophisticated and dangerous foe. Edith Hall in her comprehensive study of the concept finds its generic application to all non-Greeks received its impetus in the Greek conflict with Persia, and offers this useful explanation of the term’s origination:

The idea of the barbarian as the generic opponent to Greek civilization was the result of this heightening in Hellenic self-consciousness caused by the rise of Persia. This is reasonably clear from the development of the word *barbaros* itself. Before the fifth century its reference remained tied to language, and it is never used in the plural to denote the entire non-Greek world (1989, p. 9).

Hall explains the linguistic formation of *barbaros* is a result of a “reduplicative onomatopoeia”... cleverly crafted to create “an adjective representing the sound of incomprehensible speech” (1989, p. 4). She indicates its use to identify non-Greek speakers initially did not apply to the “entire non-Greek world.” However, events that impacted Greek culture in the fifth century, as Hall convincingly argues, led to the term’s expansion to encompass all non-Greeks. The classical historian Erich Gruen confirms Hall’s argument and further clarifies how the Greeks used the term:

Persians were the *barbaroi* par excellence. Herodotus applies that label to them in well over a hundred instances. But the meaning of that designation needs to be noticed. It is nowhere accompanied by pejorative epithets like “savage”, “fierce”, “uncultivated”, or “uncivilized”. In fact, it carries a rather simple and bland connotation, namely, “the enemy”. In the vast majority of passages, it serves as a mere synonym for “Persian”. Or, even blander, it follows the conventional Hellenic conception that divided the whole world into Greeks and non-Greeks. *Barbaros*

meant nothing more than non-Greek. It did not come with the baggage of barbarity (2020, p. 13)

Despite its original meaning, the Greek notion of *barbaroi* eventually became synonymous with the word *savage*. With that emphasis it thus cohered and formed and informed the *civilization/barbarism* dichotomy in western ideology (Diop, 1991). Its social construction served the paradigmatic function of juxtaposing Western Europe in opposition to the rest of the world to justify Western Christian imperialist/dominionist expansion across the globe (Waswo, 1997; Williams, 2012). This asymmetrical binary should be seen as a much later dichotomy, one imposed by medieval Western Europeans on the ancient set of polarities early Greek philosophers devised to classify and comprehend the natural world. G.E.R. Lloyd, a scholar of ancient philosophy and science, explains the concept's cognitive role and descriptive function in ancient Greek thought:

Opposites form the basis of many of the theories which early Greek philosophers and medical writers put forth in their attempts to account for natural phenomena ... opposites provide a simple and apparently comprehensive framework by which other things may be described or classified (1992, p. 86).

Lloyd argues polarity (opposites) and analogy constitute the two principal types of argumentations in ancient Greece. The earliest references to these practices appear in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (2004). In Aristotle's text Lloyd identifies ten pairs of opposites he contends represent the principles of reality according to the Pythagorean school of Greek philosophy:

limited	unlimited
odd	even
unity	plurality
right	left
male	female
rest	motion
straight	crooked
light	darkness

good	bad
square	oblong

While the *Table of Opposites*, as this framework is commonly known, may appear neutral on its face, the ancient Greeks viewed items in the column on the left as “positive” and those on the right as “negative” (Goldin, 2015). An understanding of this structure’s purpose therefore is indispensable because it provides the basis in the West for the conception and socialization of “negative” beliefs about women and about African people. Thus by combining Hall’s findings about the origins of *βαρ-βαρ* and its eventual application to the entire non-Greek world, with Lloyd’s analysis of argumentation in Greek thought as based on analogy and polarity, and Aristotle’s claims the *Table of Opposites* represent legitimate causal relationships (Goldin, 2015), this study successfully identifies key epistemic building blocks in the social construction of whiteness/antiblackness in the West.

Aristotle “apparently takes the table to serve as a legitimate endoxon [belief], from which metaphysical, scientific, and ethical inquiries are to begin, and by which such accounts are to be tested” (Goldin, 2015, p. 2). As a founding father of Western thought, one whose influence in Christian intellectual circles eventually exceeds that of Plato, Aristotle’s treatises inspired generations of early modern scholars to apply his theories and methods during the height of western colonialism (Harrison, 2002, 2015; Keel, 2018). Although not included as polarities on the *Table of Opposites*, the dichotomy of *barbarism/civilization*, which figures so decisively in early modern Western European thought, conforms to this epistemic framework. Of crucial importance to this study’s argument, Aristotle viewed some barbarians as “natural slaves” and took the additional step of advocating for Greeks to conquer and rule over them in accordance with what he

argued was “natural law” (Burns, 2003; Dobbs, 1994; Heath, 2008; Smith, 1983; Waswo, 1996). This concept of natural slavery also became a mainstay in the early discourses the West devised to justify African dehumanization and enslavement and as a counter argument to combat the growing threat of abolitionism in the early nineteenth century (Burns, 2003; Dobbs, 1994; Harrington, 1989; Jiménez, 2014; Smith, 1983).

Monstrous Beings and “Othering” in the Greek Imagination

Hall identifies the Greek conflict with Persia in the fifth century as the main catalyst for the construction of a Greek identity conceived to unite Greek polities against a formidable common foe. Nearly three centuries prior to the Greek-Persian wars, however, the Greek writers Hesiod, Homer, and Herodotus imagined and introduced another species of being that proved of immense import in the construction of antiblack tropes and discourses in Western Europe in the medieval era. These early Greek authors introduced and described a plethora of monstrous creatures who purportedly inhabited what they regarded as the extremes of the earth, especially Africa and India (Clay, 1993; Davies, 2016; Friedman, 2000). Generations of schoolchildren in the West learned of these monstrous beings through Greek mythology and Homer’s descriptions of the Cyclops, Sirens, and other fabulous creatures that inhabited the worlds of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Their common features and characteristics can be described as follows:

Generally speaking, Greek monsters are hybrid creatures that unite normally disparate elements, for example, the human and the bestial, or combine distinct species. Frequently, too, they involve a multiplication of human or animal features or, conversely, a subtraction and isolation of features that usually occur in pairs.... The monsters all diverge from an implied canonical form that is simultaneously theo- and anthropomorphic (Clay, 1993, p. 106).

In the fifth century BCE, the Greek historian Herodotus repeated the mythical tales of monsters that had been circulating since Homer and Hesiod, and introduced a new series of creatures that later writers featured and embellished over the course of the next millennium (Herodotus, 2013; Trianosky, 2013). Herodotus's novel catalog of savage and monstrous Africans established three classes of inhabitants of the continent: the highly civilized and respected Ethiopians, barbarians of the normal human variety, and monstrous beings with extraordinarily hybrid features and characteristics (Herodotus, 2013). The enduring impact of these creatures on the Western European imaginary can be traced primarily to the widely celebrated work of Pliny the Elder in the first century CE:

The monstrous races first make their appearance in ancient Greek writings; but the most influential source of information about them during the Middle Ages is unquestionably the *Historia Naturalis* of Pliny the Elder (23-79 C.E.). Identical descriptions or obvious variations on Pliny's appear repeatedly and with nearly-identical illustrations, from the important and widely-read work of Isidorus of Seville (560-636 C.E.) to the margins of the Hereford Mappa mundi (1290), to the Travels of Sir John Mandeville (circa 1357). (Trianosky, 2013, p. 8)

Their treatment and coverage in Pliny's famous *Naturalis Historia*—a “monstrous” collection of materials about the inhabitants, flora, and fauna of the Roman Empire compiled in a mere thirty-seven volumes—profoundly impacted Western views of the world. Compared to Herodotus:

It was Pliny's *Historia*, however, that enjoyed the greater longevity; it shaped generations of scholarship for more than 1,500 years as learned authors emulated both its encyclopedic method and the imperial ethos of Pliny's perspective on a vast expanse of human societies. As European merchants and colonial agents began traveling throughout West Central Africa in the 1500s and 1600s, they produced prolific claims of monstrous peoples who, like Pliny's monstrous races, hopped around on one leg (monopods), were headless with eyes in their torsos, cavorted sexually like untamed beasts, and feasted on the flesh of their own kin (Johnson, 2015, p. 183).

The claims of monster sightings also enlivened the accounts of New World explorers. They too were eager to verify the existence of Pliny's monsters for gullible audiences in Western Europe who clamored for information about previously unknown regions of the globe (Davies, 2016; Trianosky, 2013). These fantastical narratives—and the equally fanciful portraits of the “beasts” European artists crafted to illustrate the texts—permeated western consciousness at the same time Western Christians were colonizing the globe and inventing race(ism) (Davies, 2016).

The work of Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778 CE)—the Swedish zoologist and physician who invented the system of taxonomy still used today—evinces and exemplifies the modernization and continuation of these mythic creatures in the guise of western science (Trianosky, 2013). *Systema Naturae*, Linnaeus's groundbreaking text, appeared in 1735 during the height of Western European colonialism. In it, he classified and grouped human beings in the taxon *Animalia* and divided them into six so-called “varieties” or “types” (he never uses the word “race”) that he categorized and placed in a hierarchy. He organized and color-coded or classified them as follows: *Europaeus albus*, European white; *Americanus rubescens*, American reddish; *Asiaticus fuscus*, Asian tawny; *Africanus niger*, African black; *Ferus*, Wild or Savage, and *Monstrosus*. The latter two varieties included dwarves, giants, genetic mutants, and “wild men” who purportedly were hairy, mute, and lacking the ability to reason. As the philosophy scholar Gregory Trianosky states: “It is this transfer of old, mythologized concepts to newly-discovered, living peoples, virtually completed in the very moment of discovery, that is the fountainhead of late modern conceptions of race” (2013, p. 2). In other words, at the precise moment of its conception scientific race(ism) included clearly identifiable beliefs derived from Greek

mythology to support the ideology of European bio-cultural superiority. With the terms Αιθίοψ and βαρ-βαρ as a backdrop, this study now turns to examine the specific nomenclature “modern” historians claim the ancient Greeks used for purposes of self-identification.

Greek Self-Identification in Antiquity

The notion the ancient Greeks and Romans developed and expressed proto-racist beliefs and values is based in part on the terms some scholars claim they used to distinguish themselves from other populations. The historian Lloyd Thompson, in his groundbreaking study *Romans and Blacks*, offers a well-researched yet problematic take on this issue (Thompson, 1989). He argues for a tripartite scheme of skin color classification in the ancient world that places Ethiopians and other dark-skinned populations at one extreme, Northern “barbarians” like the Celts and Germans at the other, and the Greeks and Romans in the middle (1989). Even though Thompson rejects the existence of race(ism) in ancient Rome he insists “the Mediterranean somatic norm is albus (‘white,’ in the sense of pale brown),” an assertion he makes repeatedly (p. 65). He also claims the Greek word λεῦκος (leukós/white) is synonymous with the Latin *albus* (white) as a referent for the Mediterranean somatic norm.

The historian James Dee questions why Thompson “seem(s) so desirous of retaining (or, to borrow vogue terminology, “privileging”) the English word “white” for a category of pigmentation, that ... is not literally white at all, but *Mediterranean olive or pale brown*”? [author’s italics] (2003, p. 159). In what appears to be a glaring contradiction, Thompson defends the ancients from anachronistic charges of racism while perpetuating

the common eurocentric practice of translating certain ancient words to label and historicize certain ancient peoples as “white.” However, any close reading and analysis of ancient texts undermines such efforts to racialize, whitewash, and rewrite the past. Based on an analysis of the same textual sources, Dee summarily dismisses Thompson’s claims about *albus* and warns us to reject the idea the Greek term λεῦκος (leûkos), meaning “white,” was used as a Greek self-referent and general descriptor of the somatic norm of Mediterranean populations. He contends: “This will be clearer if we simply list the principal categories of mankind for whom, in the eyes of the Greeks, ‘white’ skin was an accepted and expected characteristic: women, barbarians living north of the Alps, the perilously ill, pasty-faced philosophers, and cowards” (2003, p. 162). The historian Richard Buxton further describes the undesirability of being labeled “white” in Greco-Roman antiquity as follows:

For a man, to be λευκός can be a sign of effeminacy. To be *white-livered*, λευκηπατίας, or, even worse, *white-arsed*, λευκόπρωκτος or λευκόπυγος—these are signs of cowardice. Although several of the passages linking whiteness with lack of manliness come from comedy, whiteness is presented negatively in other genres too (Buxton, 2010, p. 5).

By no known criteria can this list be viewed as an enumeration of desirable characteristics. In ancient Greek thought labeling men as “white-anything” clearly served to identify and designate them as weak and unmanly. Thus “whiteness” as skin color served as a marker of gender differences, a lack of courage, and poor health. This brief list of adjectival phrases and their objects explains why “white” did not come into common usage in Greco-Roman antiquity to self-identify. To use the term as a self-referent would have constituted an act of self-debasement given the cultural values of ancient Greeks and Romans.

One more point to consider before moving on. Setting aside the routine European and Euro-American practice of whitewashing Greco-Roman antiquity using specious translations, is it possible to find any linguistic evidence that supports and substantiates Thompson's claims? The short answer is no. No evidence has been offered by Thompson or others that ancient Greco-Roman color terms for "white" furnished a standard set of referents for them in their own societies or in others they colonized and dominated (Dee, 2003). Moreover, given the massive linguistic influence of Greek and Latin (especially Latin) on the development of Western European languages, evidence the basic color terms were retained and passed down across the centuries that followed should be easy to ascertain and document. Instead, as Dee informs us, "a habit of referring to and thinking of themselves as "white" with such expression as *albi homines* [white men] or *alba gens* [white people]," did not exist. (2003, p. 160). Moreover, use of the word *albus* was universally replaced in Western Europe over time. Dee states:

the inherited words for the fundamental colors black, red, green—as well as yellow and purple—have obvious classical origins, whereas the principle word for white in Italian, Spanish, and French is a Germanic latecomer (*bianco*, *blanco*, *blanc*), with *albus* surviving primarily in a specialized feminine form meaning "dawn" (2003, p. 169)

The current English word "white" comes to us from the Proto-Germanic **hweit-*, as does the word "black" (**blak*) (Oxford English Dictionary, 1971a). As a number of scholars have plausibly suggested in recent years, perhaps the Germanic language came to the fore as the language of race(ism) and white supremacy in Western Europe because German Enlightenment scholars like Blumenbach, Kant, and Herder were instrumental in the invention of race(ism) (Eigen & Larrimore, 2006).

Skin Color Prejudice versus Antiblack Racism in Greco-Roman Antiquity

Much of the foregoing discussion has concerned the “intellectual imperialism” of Greeks, and whether it involved proto-racist perceptions of non-Greek peoples, especially Africans. The use of the eponym “burnt-faced” to designate peoples south of Egypt began in the eighth century BCE before the Greeks possessed any detailed knowledge of them. By the fifth century BCE, however, African peoples the Greeks also described with the word *melas* (dark or black) were well known as residents of Greek city-states. This claim is buttressed by the abundance of visual images that:

... show up as figures on wall paintings, as statues, as busts, as lamps, as terra cotta figures, in every medium. Although their features are generally recognizable without difficulty, they form no collective stereotype, they are rarely subject to caricature, and they are not singled out as a separate species—let alone a marginalized species (Gruen, 2011, p. 211)

Gruen’s comment above comports with Frank Snowden’s findings from his detailed studies of Greco-Roman art, and with Maghan Keita’s exhaustive analyses of the treatment of Africans in the classical-era texts by Homer, Herodotus, and others. Their studies contradict the standard and dominant eurocentric histories of Greco-Roman antiquity by finding an absence or lack of anything that can be called a normative antiblack ideology. Moreover, they find relationships between ancient Greeks and Africans were immensely more complex and nuanced than many western scholars admit or allow. They assert these findings while also recognizing that classical-era Greek artists (playwrights, sculptors, poets) in some instances mocked the physical appearance of Africans and made them the objects of humor and entertainment. In his exhaustive study of blackface comic traditions Robert Hornback, a professor of English, convincingly traces the roots of the Harlequin fool to Greek drama. He provides a genealogy that shows how the comic character morphed

and endured for centuries, traveling from the Eastern Mediterranean to Western Europe, and from there to the antebellum US where it informed the immensely popular genre of Blackface Minstrelsy (Hornback, 2018). However, his compelling findings also must be analyzed and treated within the broader contexts of Greek drama and its roster of ethnic characters, comedic or otherwise.

The existence of various stereotypes in Greco-Roman antiquity cannot be ignored; nor should scholars dismiss the possibility they negatively impacted targeted populations. Still, it is important to keep in mind their uncritical acceptance in the West and their zealous use to support specious claims about the existence of ancient antiblackness to explain and justify modern racism. Viewed within the larger context of Greek chauvinism, this study finds that Africans were not singled-out by the ancient Greeks as the unique or preferred objects of ridicule or opprobrium due to skin color prejudice (Gruen, 2011; Keita, 1994, 2000, 2005; Snowden, 1991). Moreover, evidence shows the images in question exhibit a wide range of artistic skill and technique that belie the notion their purpose and intent is to ridicule and debase their subjects. Snowden's conclusive insights into this issue are worth quoting at-length:

To see caricature and mockery in an artist's use of thick lips, flat noses, and exaggerated prognathism or to consider most of the Greco-Roman portrayals of blacks as "hideous and implicitly racist in perspective" shows a complete misunderstanding of the artists' interest in Negroid types. Whites of many races, as well as gods and heroes, appeared in comic or satirical scenes. If Negroes had been depicted only as caricatures or had been the rule and not the exception, there might be some justification for a negative view of blacks. The majority of scholars, however, see in the blacks of ancient art an astonishing variety and vitality, and penetrating depictions of types which appealed to craftsmen for several reasons. Negro models presented the artists with a challenge to their skill at representing by texture and paint the distinctive features of blacks and with an opportunity to express the infinite variety of a common human nature by contrasting blacks with Mediterranean types. The obvious aesthetic attractiveness of Negro models to many artists—some the finest from ancient workshops—and the numerous sympathetic

portrayals of Negroes have given rise to a common view that ancient artists were free from prejudice in their depictions of blacks (1997, p. 33).

Snowden typically is far too generous to western scholars in claiming that most view the depiction of African subjects with the perspicuity and appreciation he brought to the study of classical artworks. Moreover, even if he is correct that such a consensus exists, the fact remains classicists have done little to educate the masses accordingly. Eurocentric historiography maintains its hegemony in classical studies because the past (world history) has been colonized along with the geographic spaces of the globe. This intellectual and epistemic colonization was accomplished in part by Western Europeans claiming ancient Greeks and Romans as their “white” genetic and cultural forebears. By these means, they constructed and presented the history of the world as the inevitable advance of whiteness and “white” civilization against the forces of darkness and evil.

The establishment and normalization of the demonstrably false idea Africans comprised and represented a typically debased and enslaved population in the ancient Greco-Roman world is one of the signature falsehoods of eurocentric historiography. This deliberate fabrication continues to permeate popular media and culture. It also means, from a linguistic standpoint, every instance where the words “Negro” and “white” magically appear in modern translations of ancient thought and speech must be flagged as eurocentric, anachronistic, and counterfactual. Their value exists only as evidence of how the West colonizes the past to serve its hegemonic interests. Additionally, the eurocentric custom of translating ancient words like *ethne/ethnos* and *genos* to mean “race” deliberately misrepresents the social attitudes and values of the ancient Greeks and Romans. As Gruen has shown, their original usages in antiquity were far too imprecise and malleable to be

restricted to modern Euro-American terms that serve to define and essentialize purported human differences (2011, 2020).

Among the defenders of this translation practice, Denise Kimber Buell, a professor of religion, offers perhaps the best argument for its continuation: “we can place modern categories into conversations with ancient ones without effacing their differences, even while we must also acknowledge that we can only understand those differences through the lens of our present” (2005, p. 14). From this perspective, Buell’s position simply indicates an unwillingness to construct a new vocabulary that better “translates” or approximates the views of the ancients. Instead of trying to bridge the cognitive/temporal abyss that separates the present from antiquity by using anachronistic terms with precise meanings that cannot be ignored because of their centrality in our current vocabulary and thought, why not simply create a new lexicon? Furthermore, if our cognitive limitations are such that we can only comprehend the past through a distorted white supremacist framework and vantage point then perhaps it should be left alone rather than disinterring and interpreting it with strategies and tools that reify Western ideology when the facts prove inconvenient.

In the late 1980s, the linguist and historian Martin Bernal perceptively labeled this particular form of eurocentric historiography the “Aryan Model,” based on its overtly racist design and intent (1987). The Aryan Model forces us to read the history of classical antiquity through the distorted lens of centuries of antiblackness in the West. It thus precludes formulating views of ancient cultures and peoples that approximate their own attitudes, values, or beliefs. Instead, it reifies a “white” mythology that pervades and dominates all form of western thought and media (Young, 1990). From this study’s

perspective, the false and dehumanizing eurocentric trope that all Africans in the Greco-Roman world of classical antiquity were despised and enslaved exists solely to legitimize and perpetuate the current ideology of white supremacy.

This study thus refutes the notion antiblack racism began in ancient Greece with the invention of the Homeric term “Ethiopian” as its starting point. What it does not debate, however, is how Greeks and Romans—as each of their societies respectively became empires—distinguished and emphasized their status as rulers in part by ridiculing and mocking the foreign peoples they ruled (including northern Europeans) regardless of their purported ethnicity or physical features. Indeed, as conquerors, enslavers, and colonizers, Greeks and Romans sought to exhibit and exercise their cultural chauvinism over whomever they held power. Yet, the constant attention given by eurocentric scholars to purported Greco-Roman antiblack caricatures obscures the fact northern Europeans and various peoples in the so-called Near East were similarly mocked, lampooned, and stereotyped (Snowden, 1970). Therefore, when critically examining the vast corpus of relevant images and texts from classical antiquity it becomes apparent western preconceptions and biases inflate and characterize the issue far beyond what the evidence shows:

In the first place, it should be emphasized that in the entire corpus of classical literature, with its countless references to Ethiopians, and in other relevant ancient sources, often confirmed by repeated events of history, there are only a few ancient concepts or notions that have been interpreted by some scholars as evidence of antiblack sentiment. And they are primarily these: the so-called ugliness of Negroes of classical artists, the somatic norm image, black-white symbolism, and certain physiognomical beliefs (Snowden, 2001, p. 253).

Aside from exposing the blatant and egregious misrepresentations of eurocentrists, the main point here is while some terms can be perceived as mocking (“sunburnt” and “burnt-

faced,” for example), their intent does not appear to be utterly malicious or demeaning. Unfortunately, many “modern” scholars translate Αἰθίοψ and μέλας into English using the pejorative term “Negro.” Its appearance in ancient texts thus perpetuates a false and eurocentric reading of the past in support of white supremacist ideology. In his groundbreaking work on Ancient Egyptian history, the Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop includes a chapter titled “Birth of the Negro Myth,” in which he delineates the word’s racist origins and history as follows:

“Negro” became a synonym for primitive being, “inferior,” endowed with a pre-logical mentality.... The desire to legitimize colonization and the slave trade—in other words, the social condition of the Negro in the modern world—engendered an entire literature to describe the so-called inferior traits of the Black (1974, pp. 24-25).

Despite the dehumanizing intentions of falsely placing a purported early variant of the word “Negro” in the mouths of the ancient Greeks and Romans, Dee, Gruen, Snowden, and Thompson clearly show the actual nomenclature in question was never used to formulate antiblack discourses or practices. No signs existed anywhere in the ancient world that comport with the modern admonition: “No *Darkies* allowed.” Still, as noted, this study does not interpret the rarity or lack of pejorative uses of color terms for Africans or other so-called dark-skinned peoples as indicating a total absence of skin color prejudice in Greco-Roman civilizations. Instead, it regards their varied, irregular, and inconsistent usage as evidence that skin color did not define or determine social status in the Greco-Roman world as conquest and colonization did (Gruen, 2011; Hall, 1989; Isaac, 2004; Keita, 2000; Snowden, 1997).

“Othering” and Imaginary “Whiteness” versus the “Translatability of Culture”

This study’s decoloniality methodology unreads and unthinks the assumptive logic of eurocentric historiography to expose as ahistorical the claims by Isaac and others the ancient Greeks invented racism or proto-racism. It does so in part by documenting the notable absence of terms in antiquity designed to denigrate Africans based on their purported biocultural characteristics. In contemporary academia this practice of eponymously naming (stereotyping) a particular group is defined as “Othering” or constructing the “Other” (Brons, 2015; Gergen, 1996, 2011; Gruen, 2011; Meisenhelder, 2003).

This study’s decolonial analyses finds the practice of “Othering” in the West exists and functions primarily to debase non-Europeans to facilitate and preserve the West’s domination of wealth and knowledge production worldwide. Ontological denigration of the “Other” therefore is not incidental but central to the western conception of “Self” and its socioeconomic and epistemic agendas. In fact, this study argues the primary outcome and expression of western “self-fashioning” appears today in the form of the white/black dichotomy. This racialized/essentialized asymmetrical binary inarguably constitutes the most salient marker of social identity in westernized societies. “Othering,” as shown here, should not be regarded as a neutral or harmless cognitive procedure, but as divisive and dehumanizing by design. Hence this study’s effort to trace and uncover the roots of this theory/praxis has two important aims: (1) to determine when and how it developed, and (2) to demonstrate the negative social consequences for those who exist on the “Other” side of the Self/Other equation in the West. The definition that follows confirms its asymmetrical

structure and identifies the precise methods it uses to construct the “Self” by debasing “Others.”

Othering is the simultaneous construction of the self or in-group and the other or out-group in mutual and unequal opposition through identification of some desirable characteristic that the self/in-group has and the other/out-group lacks and/or some undesirable characteristic that the other/out-group has and the self/in-group lacks. Othering thus sets up a superior self/in-group in contrast to an inferior other/out-group, but this superiority/inferiority is nearly always left implicit (Brons, 2015, p. 70).

The definition also describes the construction of Self/Other as a simultaneous process. This study, for purposes of analysis, views and presents it as a two-step procedure. For example, the Greek use of “burnt-faced” as a nickname for certain African peoples is identified here as the first cognitive step in the “Othering” process. The second step (which finalizes the process) consists of the reflexive fashioning of the Greek “Self” in response. That final step required the ancient Greeks to devise another set of terms conceived specifically to distinguish their Greek “Selves” from Ethiopian “Others.” The facts presented thus far indicate the Greeks observed and made *distinctions* between themselves and Ethiopians but did not conceive or construct racialized or essentialized *differences* in the process.

Based on its historical research this study rejects the widespread hypothesis the Self/Other dichotomy has existed from time immemorial. Instead, it posits an exact timeframe for the emergence of “Othering” in antiquity based on its analysis of primary sources from classical-era Greece and Rome. For further evidentiary support it draws from an impressive body of secondary studies published in the mid-twentieth century by Snowden and Diop, and more recently by Bernal, Keita, Gruen, Hall, Vlassopoulos, Budick, Brons, and Assmann. It uses their research findings to refute and reject two eurocentric claims: (1) the idea the Self/Other theory/praxis is innate in human cognition; and (2) that

it constituted the standard method of self-fashioning in antiquity and thereby established a precedent and framework for its continued operations into the modern era. How and why the Self/Other theory/praxis became and remains a fixture in western historiography is explained here by Erich Gruen:

Analysis of such self-fashioning through disparagement of alien societies has been a staple of academic discourses for more than three decades. A collective self-image, so it is commonly asserted, demands a contrast with other peoples and cultures. Or rather a contrast with the perceptions and representations of other peoples. They can serve as images and creations, indeed as stereotypes and caricatures. Denigration of the “Other” seems essential to shape the inner portrait, the marginalization that defines the center, the reverse mirror that distorts the reflection of the opposite and enhances that of the holder. “Othering” has even taken on verbal form, a discouraging form of linguistic pollution (2011, p. 1).

Viewed within this study’s decoloniality framework, this “staple of academic discourse,” as Gruen refers to it, serves the critical societal purpose in Europe and Euro-America of upholding the myth of “white” biocultural superiority. The “collective self-image” Gruen describes as demanding “a contrast with other peoples” is identified here as *biologized whiteness* and its corollary, *white identity*. The primary role of the Self/Other dichotomy in the West, therefore, is to establish and maintain a cult of imaginary “whiteness”—a cult that socially manifests as white power, privilege, and supremacy. This psychosocial obsession in the US is best illustrated by the fictitious “one drop rule” as expressed in the legal mumbo-jumbo of blood quantum laws historically enacted at the state-level to identify invisible “blackness” to police and enforce an imaginary “colorline” (Hickman, 1996; Higginbotham Jr, 1978; Jordan, 2014; Khanna, 2010; Sharfstein, 2006; Sweet, 2005). “Othering” in this sense functions as part of the legal apparatus used in the West to consign targeted groups to a permanent social underclass and caste:

The apparent identity of what appear to be cultural units - human beings, words, meanings, ideas, philosophical systems, social organizations - are maintained only

through constitutive repression, an active process of exclusion, opposition, and hierarchization. A phenomenon maintains its identity in semiotic systems only if other units are represented as foreign or “other” through a hierarchical dualism in which the first is privileged or favored while the other is deprivileged or devalued in some way. This process must itself be hidden or covered up, so that the hierarchy can be assumed inherent in the nature of the phenomena, rather than a motivated construction (Brons, 2015, p. 75).

The procedures outlined above not only explain the cognitive steps used to invent “white” people, but also how the fiction of whiteness as “natural” and “normative” is established and maintained. The taxonomic classification of human populations into purportedly fixed and immutable biocultural groups or “races” enabled western scholars to erect a purportedly “natural” biosocial hierarchy that placed Europeans at the pinnacle of human development. The presentation and marketing of antiblackness in the guise of science (scientific racism) thus “covered up” the socioeconomic motives and benefits accrued by the West for imposing lifetime and hereditary enslavement on Africans. This propaganda normalized white supremacy and made it the founding polity and ethos of the US. It serves today to exonerate so-called “Whites” for systemic racism by blaming the victims, so-called “Blacks” and other racialized groups, for their social repression, exploitation, and exclusion.

Some scholars trace the discursive roots of the Self/Other theory/praxis to Hegel’s “Master-Slave Dialectic,” and to later critical analyses and interpretations of it by Simone De Beauvoir and Franz Fanon (De Beauvoir, 2010; Fanon, 2008; Hegel, 2007). Jacques Lacan also features it in his psychoanalytical studies, and it has undergone further elaboration in the work of the philosopher Jacques Derrida (Derrida, 2020; Lacan, 1977a, 1977b). Although it continues to enjoy a kind of ubiquity in some academic disciplines, current scholarly understanding of it often is premised on the false idea it constitutes an

innate principle and characteristic of human cognition. For example, Simone De Beauvoir, the renowned feminist scholar/activist, makes the following authoritative claim:

The category of the Other is as fundamental as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies, in the most antique mythologies, one finds a duality, that of the Self and the Other (translated and cited in Brons, 2015, p. 75).

The primary sources cited here disprove De Beauvoir's assertion. They illustrate how and why the concept's explanatory power falls spectacularly short when applied to so-called "primitive societies" and "antique mythologies." As discussed below, they also indicate "Othering"—as currently defined and understood—did not emerge as a method of identity formation until late antiquity. Hence, the need to reject outright the notion of the concept's innateness and construct a timeline that delineates its actual appearance and adoption. This argument finds further support from evidence that indicates "Othering" operates at several different stages of expression, enactment, and performance. Lajos Brons, a scholar of philosophy, identifies three basic categories or aspects of its social operations as follows:

three different aspects or phases of self-other distanciation can be distinguished: (i) the encounter with the other and the bare recognition of that other as not-self (that is, without or before stressing otherness), (ii) the attribution of otherness to the other, and (iii) the motivation and/or payoff of that attribution of otherness (2015, p. 77).

Brons' analysis shows the Self/Other theory/praxis did not appear in "primitive" human societies as an intact, fully-formed, and therefore, innate feature of human "social" cognition, as De Beauvoir and others contend. Brons' research thus supports the conclusions reached here about the lack of evidence of ancient Greek "Othering." This study examined in detail the validity of the claim an incipient, collective identity (ethnocentrism) existed in ancient Greece that not only facilitated "Othering" but also specifically targeted other cultures for purposes of contrast and comparison (self-

identification and distantiation). It found no such evidence. Nor did purported examples of Greco-Roman “racialized” nomenclature hold up to analysis. In addition, its investigation of the Greek/Barbarian binary—the most widely recognized and acknowledged social distinction in classical studies—also concluded it too is counterfactual, ahistorical, and a product of European-centered thought (eurocentrism). Collectively, these findings raise a question of profound significance for future studies of ancient history, and especially for the structural analysis of whiteness/antiblackness convened here: *What if the Self/Other psychosocial binary, as currently posited in western academia, did not exist in early antiquity?*

The sociohistorical implications of this question and the intellectual stakes involved are immense. Delimiting the concept’s applicability opens the intellectual space for scholars to investigate ancient social identities and relations—especially those purportedly associated with the invention of whiteness/blackness—on their own terms within their originating sociohistorical contexts. In fact, as shown here, the simple removal of eurocentric framing reveals ancient cultures did not reflexively engage in “self-other distantiation” (to borrow Brons’ term) during initial or subsequent encounters. This finding leaves in its wake the critical question: if ancient societies did not reflexively denigrate “Others,” how exactly did they interact? Until recently, this question has been nearly impossible to formulate let alone investigate due to centuries of western epistemic domination foreclosing such inquiries. With new methods and materials now available, scholars are now reaching conclusions formerly unimaginable in the West. Most remarkably, when viewed collectively, these new analyses indicate identity formation in antiquity involved a deliberate search for cultural commonalities and common ground. In

other words, rather than reflexively essentializing biocultural differences, early ancient societies ingeniously worked to define and establish intercultural relationships based on widely held beliefs in the *oneness of humankind* (Assmann, 1996a, 1996b, 1997, 2010; Gruen, 2011, 2020).

Ancient peoples apparently made *distinctions without differences* when encountering “others” (presented in lower-case here to de-emphasize both its valence and applicability in early antiquity). This means the biocultural characteristics that inspired Homer to coin the nickname “burnt-faced” did not in turn inspire the construction of a Greek collectivized (corporate) identity that established them as not only “different” from, but “superior” to African “others.” A form of benign recognition and acknowledgement proved to be the case rather than the exception, regardless of the basis or criteria of evaluation (physical appearance, customs, languages, etc.). From this decolonial perspective, the eurocentric construct of an ancient world—as defined according to a purportedly innate and immutable “ethnoracial” animus—exists primarily to justify the “modern” Western European practice of “Othering.”

Further refutation of this theory/praxis as innate, universal, and transhistorical is evidenced by the three stages of “self-other distantiation” delineated by Brons. Not only does the process comprise a range of possible expressions and enactments, Brons’ first phase shows cultural encounters with “others” could occur with only “bare recognition” of the “other as not self,” or, in other words, without “stressing otherness” (2015, p. 77). This erudite notion of “otherness” without “Othering” (or distinctions without differences), further highlights the tendencies and tradition in eurocentric scholarship for branding ancient peoples as bigots and racists to justify its own historicism and ideology. To both

ascertain and demonstrate the validity and significance of Brons' findings, this study investigates his hypothesis within the context and framework of the *translatability of cultures* or *cultural translatability*.

The term/concept *translatability of cultures*, as used here, identifies a remarkable set of transcultural normative beliefs and practices that enabled ancient societies to establish intercultural communications and relations (Assmann, 1996b; Buden et al., 2009; Budick, 1996; Conway, 2012; Iser, 2015; Maitland, 2017). The purpose and characteristic features of this ingenious system are explained here by the German Egyptologist, Jan Assmann:

During the last three millennia B.C.E., religion appears to have been the promoter of intercultural translatability. The argument for this function runs as follows: peoples, cultures, political systems may be sharply different. But as long as they have a religion and worship some definable gods, they are comparable and contractable because these gods must necessarily be the same as those worshipped by other peoples under different names. The names, iconographies, and rites—in short, the culture—differ, but the gods are the same. In the realm of culture, religion appears as a principle counteracting what Erik H. Erikson called 'pseudo-speciation.' Erikson coined the term to describe the formation of artificial subgroups within the same biological species. In the human world pseudo-speciation is the effect of cultural differentiation. The formation of cultural specificity and identity necessarily produces difference and otherness vis-à-vis other groups (1996b, p. 27).

Assmann's comment, however, requires unpacking in keeping with this study's efforts to identify mistranslated and misused terms for purposes of historical accuracy. The offender in this case is Assmann's use of "religion" to describe ancient belief systems. Despite its ubiquity and popularity, this study rejects the term as inappropriate and incorrect when applied to non-monotheist or so-called "Pagan" beliefs. As explained later, based on their histories and doctrines, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as variants of the same monotheist tradition, are the only "religions" by definition. This argument is based on an exhaustive

analysis of “*religio*,” the Latin roots of the word and its meanings and uses in ancient Rome, and its subsequent use as a rubric by Western Christian scholars in the eighteenth century to denote every type of spiritual/symbolic belief conceived by humankind, past and present (Engler & Miller, 2006; Frankfurter, 2015; Harrison, 2002; McCutcheon, 1997; Smith, 1998; Stroumsa, 2010). Where Assmann and others use the word “religion” to refer to Pagan traditions, this study inserts “beliefs,” or “belief systems” as alternatives to the eurocentric ideology the word embodies and conveys (Chidester, 2014; Dubuisson, 2003; Frankfurter, 2015; Masuzawa, 2005; Shaw, 1990; Smith, 1998).

Assmann identifies “religion” in antiquity as the “promoter of intercultural translatability.” His statement, however, clearly refers to Paganism—the pejorative label in the West applied to all human beliefs prior to the advent of monotheism. Pagans therefore invented *cultural translatability*—a practice “religions” (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) reject outright. Moreover, it is precisely Paganism that Christians deliberately destroyed and supplanted with Christian “religion.” Inspired and driven by the uncompromising belief in their faith as universal (“Catholic”), transhistorical, and *sui generis*, early Christians zealously crusaded to exterminate all other beliefs and their believers, if necessary, to achieve their “god-given” mission of worldwide dominion. As show below, Christians deliberately ruptured existing systems of cultural reciprocity that had existed for millennia not just to seize power, but also to cover up their deep indebtedness to Paganism for key elements of their own mythology (Fox, 1987; MacDonald, 2000; Thompson, 2009).

In hindsight, pre-Christian Pagan systems deserve to be recognized as comprising a genuine “universal” tradition of such cultural sophistication that syncretism, rather than

conquest and forced conversions, remained its standard methodology for millennia. Pagans believed all things came into existence as the creations of cosmic entities or forces of nature (so-called “divinities” or “gods”) and shared a cosmic identity that encompassed and typified all life. Yet, none apparently saw a need to enact and impose an “official” doctrine on other societies to eradicate local beliefs, rituals, and customs. Plurality in unity seems to be their prevailing attitude and value until the advent of the dogmatic monotheisms that demanded unwavering obedience and devotion to a single god (Assmann, 1996a, 1996b, 1997).

The notion cosmic “unity” required the exclusive worship of one “creator” (monotheism), first appeared in Egypt in the thirteenth century BCE in the reign of the Pharaoh Akhenaten. It is evidenced by his exclusive worship of *Aten*, a solar principal and symbol of life. However, Akhenaten’s idea did not survive in Egypt (it lasted less than two decades) (Assmann, 1996a, 1997; Hoffmeier, 2015). The ancient Hebrew-Israelite-Judeans apparently recovered or reinvented the idea, circa seventh century BCE (Assmann, 1997; Römer, 2015b, 2018; Smith, 2001). Still, history shows Jewish monotheism (Judaism) never posed an existential threat to Paganism at any point in its development and history (Assmann, 1996a, 1997). Hebrew-Israelite-Jewish monotheism preceded Christianity by six centuries before giving birth to the Christian cult in its originating form of a Jewish-Christian sect. Nevertheless, this study finds early Christians to be singularly responsible for the systematic destruction of the tradition of *cultural translation* and not the Jews with their earlier version of monotheism. Further support for this contention comes from Assmann’s citation of Erickson’s term “pseudo-speciation” to denote the role of “religion”

in the formation of “cultural specificity and identity” (Erikson, 1966). Erickson, a behavioral scientist, explains the term thusly:

man has evolved (by whatever kind of evolution and for whatever adaptive reasons) in *pseudo-species*, i.e., tribes, clans, etc., which behave as if they were separate species created at the beginning of time by supernatural will, and each superimposing on the geographic and economic facts of its existence a cosmogony, as well as a theocracy and an image of man, all its own. Thus, each develops a *distinct sense of identity*, held to be *the* human identity, and fortified against other pseudo-species by prejudices which mark them as extra-specific and, in fact, inimical to the only ‘genuine’ human endeavour. Paradoxically, however, newly born man can fit into any number of such pseudo-species and must, therefore, become specialized during a prolonged childhood—certainly a basic fact in the ontogeny of *familiarization by ritualization* [author’s emphasis] (1966, p. 340).

Erickson clearly subscribes to the notion of “Othering” as an innate characteristic of human social behavior grounded in human evolution. While this study disagrees with his perspective, it appropriates the term “pseudo-speciation” for its own purposes, as Assmann does, because it accurately denotes the practices used to form the Christian cult and its identity. In fact, it precisely delineates and conveys the standard policy and practice of the cult’s monotheist, theo-political doctrine, which required Christians to essentialize non-believers and their beliefs. From this perspective, pseudo-speciation—a term also synonymous with the social construction of “race”—must be seen as a dehumanizing process and outcome. Contrary to Erickson, in archaic and classical antiquity so-called “tribes, clans, etc.,” did not invent separate ontologies (distinct identities) based on separate and distinct cosmic conceptions, but instead held a common view in the oneness of the universe and humanity’s place in it. Therefore, this study views pseudo-speciation as a technical term for the socio-cognitive processes by which monotheism (religion) ruptured *cultural translatability* by imposing “cultural specificity and identity” to create the asymmetrical and dehumanizing binary of *believers/non-believers*, or more specifically,

Christians/Pagans. This study holds this social construction constitutes the first instance of “Othering” as a mode of identity construction for social distancing in the ancient world.

From this perspective, Christianity’s efforts of self-definition by “pseudo-speciation” clearly demonstrate “religion” (monotheism) is an inherently divisive and destructive theory/concept. It also inadvertently provides this study with a time stamp that indicates when the Self/Other bifurcation became socially real and relevant in antiquity. By exposing Christianity (along with its co-monotheist faiths, Judaism, and Islam) as the only “religion,” and its doctrine as genocidally intolerant of other’s beliefs and the beliefs of “Others,” this study identifies the birth of Christianity and its orthodoxy as marking the exact timeframe within which the Self/Other dichotomy was invented. It also identifies its use for the precise purposes of re-conceptualizing and re-configuring ancient social relations according to Christian theo-political ideology.

This study thus finds the Self/Other theory/praxis emerges directly from Western Christianity through construction of the Christian *Self* in direct opposition to the beliefs of non-Christians, which it pejoratively designated as Paganism (Assmann, 1996a; Fletcher, 1997; Fox, 1987; Levitin, 2012). Hence, the *believer/non-believer* asymmetrical binary as conceived by Christians represents the first definitive and socially consequential “difference” of social identity in the ancient history. It not only divides the entirety of humankind based on belief in an exclusive cult, but it also becomes even more destructive of human relations and societies when the *white/black* binary becomes synonymous with *believer/non-believer* in Western European thought.

“Non-believer” and “Pagan” commonly function as cognates in the monotheist worldview and vocabulary. Consequently, Paganism remains a constant target of

Christians and Muslims despite the fact it predates them by millennia and furnished the spiritual/symbolic traditions out of which belief in “one-godism” emerged (Assmann, 1996a, 1997; Fox, 1987; Jackson, 1985; Johnston, 2008; MacDonald, 2000; O’Donnell, 2015; Römer, 2015b, 2018; Thompson, 2009). Care must be taken therefore to rescue the concept from the massive Christian propaganda campaign that systematically excoriates and demonizes Paganism to falsely claim the world languished in spiritual darkness until the revelation of the Christian gospels. Instead, this study contends the world entered a dark age of cult(ural) violence with the advent of Christian orthodoxy because it obliterated the tradition of *cultural translation*. It views and treats Paganism as synonymous with the *translatability of culture*. Accordingly, it redefines it to denote the fact that it comprises and supplies a set of concepts, tools, and values designed to negotiate perceived biocultural differences in ancient societies. Pagans accomplished this phenomenal feat using a mutually intelligible cosmic vocabulary and syntax to foster communications and socioeconomic relationships (Assmann, 1996b, 1997, 2011). *Cultural translation* in antiquity therefore should be viewed as perhaps the most significant and definitive achievements in human history.

The German Egyptologist, Jan Assmann, geographically locates this Pagan tradition thusly: “This common world extended from Egypt to the Near and Middle East and westward to the shores of the Atlantic” (1996b, p. 28). Assmann also deconstructs and delineates its structure and expression as follows:

We can distinguish three types of cultural translation: “syncretistic translation” or translation into a third language/culture; “assimilatory translation” or translation into a dominant language/culture; and “mutual translation” within a network of (economic/cultural) exchanges (1996b, p. 34).

Assmann locates the tradition within the geographical region this study identifies as the cradle of antiblackness. He also distinguishes “three types of cultural translation:” *syncretistic*, *assimilatory*, and *mutual*. According to Assmann, *syncretistic translation* “presupposes a fundamental unity beyond all cultural diversities” that defines the nature of universe and life within it according to the assumed singularity of its cosmic identity and existential reality (1996b, p. 34). In this specific instance different “divinities” from different cultures are not translated into each other. Instead, they form a third entity in which their diverse backgrounds and origins remain visible, but that presupposes their unity based on the commonly-shared belief in the oneness of the cosmos.

Assimilatory translation recognizes the power differentials that occur among various societies. Consequently, Assmann also refers to it as *competitive translation* to denote how some societies used the idea of “primacy” to claim to be the originating cult(ural) source or locus for the dissemination of translatable cosmic beliefs and values. Assmann cites interactions between the ancient Egyptians and Greeks to illustrate this process of transmitting ideas from a more advanced to a purportedly less advanced society. Assmann’s third category—*mutual translation*—“is based on and develops within networks of international law and commerce” (1996b, p. 35). He traces its origins to Babylon, and further explains “The history of these networks leads us back to the very roots both of translation and of mutuality and reciprocity, namely, to the exchange of gifts as the primal form of intergroup communications” (1996b, p. 35). Hence, in each of the three instances, Assmann furnishes evidence that shows ancient societies based their initial contacts and diplomatic relationships on an underlying belief in the natural unity of

humankind—the recognition and realization of which clearly made cultural translatability an imperative.

Assmann’s “three types of cultural translation” correlate with the first stage of self-distantiation identified by Brons—“the encounter with the other and the bare recognition of that other as not-self (that is, without or before stressing otherness)” (2015, p. 77). Primary sources that validate Assmann and Brons include Homer’s epic poems, which date from the eighth century BCE, and Herodotus’s *Histories* written in the fifth century BCE. One of the most remarkable descriptions of *cultural translatability*, however, comes from Plutarch (c. 46 CE–119 CE), the renowned Greek scholar and Platonic philosopher. His invaluable treatise, *de Iside et Osiride*, an illuminating text about the Egyptian *neteru* (divinities) Isis and Osiris, both explains and documents the existence, purpose, and use of *cultural translation* in his day.

De Iside et Osiride was written in the second century CE, near the end of Plutarch’s life. In it, he makes his discursive and didactic intentions abundantly clear. His principal aim is to assert the superiority of Greek philosophy and hermeneutics as a framework for correctly interpreting Pagan beliefs and rituals. His middle-Platonic philosophical views thus come into play in his claim the Greeks possessed a more elevated understanding of the divine than the Egyptians (Richter, 2001). Plutarch is writing nearly five centuries after the Greeks colonized Egypt—followed by its colonization by Romans in the century before his birth. Hence his efforts to raise the status of Greek philosophy above that of ancient Egypt exemplifies the kind of cultural chauvinism associated with conquest and colonization. In elevating Greek thought, however, he deliberately acknowledges and documents the existence, purpose, and use of *cultural translation* in his day:

Nor do we regard the gods as different among different peoples nor as barbarian and Greek and as southern and northern. But just as the sun, moon, heaven, earth and sea are common to all, though they are given various names by the varying peoples, so it is with the one reason (*logos*) which orders these things and the one providence which has charge of them, and the assistant powers which are assigned to everything: they are given different honours and modes of address among different peoples according to custom (cited in Assmann, 1997, p. 49).

As Assmann states unequivocally: “The conviction that these foreign people worshipped the same gods is far from trivial and self-evident. On the contrary, this insight must be reckoned among the major cultural achievements of the ancient world” (1996b, p. 26). Even so, *cultural translatability* remains undertheorized and undervalued in western scholarship. As argued here, it is largely unknown and unaddressed primarily because it challenges and contradicts the eurocentric conception of antiquity.

Even though Plutarch purposefully identifies elements of the Pagan ecumene he deems to be of “barbarian” origin to label and criticize them as superstitious, he acknowledges them nevertheless as central to the shared tradition of ancient cosmological/metaphysical beliefs (Richter, 2001). His treatise thus explains why the Greeks recognized and regarded Ethiopians as part of a vast Pagan ecumene despite geographical distance and limited contact. It also evidences why Homer’s narrative takes for granted the existence of a universal belief system in the ancient world. Plutarch thus confirms Paganism transcended cultural/linguistic divisions, bridged the Barbarian/Greek dichotomy, and differed only in how local societies expressed and performed specific myths and practices. Most important from this study’s perspective, Plutarch’s text also furnishes an invaluable time stamp that marks *translatability* as the standard philosophical principal and operating mode of ancient societies as late as the second century CE. Plutarch thus proves the socialization of the Self/Other theory/praxis came later. This study finds it

to be a contemporaneous product of Christian identity formation based on the establishment of Christian orthodoxy.

Still, an important caveat must be mentioned here that pertains to evidence of possible political limitations of the practice. Despite the fact cult(ural) translatability enabled diverse ancient populations to share a general cosmic conception, conflicts could and did occur among competing imperial powers within the Pagan ecumene. Pagan societies frequently waged brutal wars against each other. Consequently, cults could be banished through conquest and colonization, although the incorporation of “local” cults into imperial ones (*assimilatory translation*) occurred too (Fox, 1987). In ancient Rome, for example, imperial decisions to ban a cult generally stemmed from political motivations rather than cult(ural) ones, although those two ideas often are difficult to separate. The main point to take away here—problem sects primarily were perceived as threats to civil authority and order rather than spiritual beliefs and practices. Obstructing or posing a danger to imperial rule guaranteed repression and banishment would follow. However, the previously unknown idea of banning cults according to notions of being “true” or “false” did not occur in the ancient world until Christians declared Paganism illegal in 372 BCE (Fox, 1987; Hillgarth, 1986; O'Donnell, 1979).

Inarguably, belief in European biocultural superiority is founded on the social construction of the European “Self” in opposition to the non-European “Other.” Hence the establishment of the Self/Other bifurcation constitutes a critical cognitive step in the social construction of whiteness/antiblackness and the racial hierarchy it convenes and reifies. This study, as stated, completely rejects the notion this process is innate in human consciousness. Instead, it traces the origins of the Self/Other theory/praxis to early

Christianity based on Christian use of the *believer/non-believer* dichotomy to define the cult's ideology and dogma. That dichotomy originates with the invention of Hebrew-Israelite-Judean monotheism, where it had previously formed and informed a host of related and supportive asymmetrical binaries—good/evil, black/white, true/false—to instantiate and socialize its form of one-godism.” Christianity, which began as a Jewish sect, thus took the same discursive steps in efforts to supplant the Jewish faith and establish itself as the only “true faith.” Unlike the Jews, however, who never commanded the political power to impose their belief beyond their homeland and their fellow Canaanites, Christians used their power as the heirs of imperial Rome to destroy non-believers and their traditions (Fletcher, 1997; Fox, 1987; Hillgarth, 1986; O'Donnell, 1979).

This study thus finds the basis of Self/Other is the *believer/non-believer* asymmetrical binary. It identifies this monotheistic construct as the first *distinction with a difference* in the conception of social identities in the West. Accordingly, *white/black* is secondary, and accretive, in the sense of adding an additional layer of meaning with the same implications to the pre-existing template. These differences therefore become essentialized when the social constructs white = European (Self) and black = African (Other) are overlaid on the existing template. The dehumanization of the “Other” in the West, however, ultimately depended on the imposition (instantiating) of these ideas by embodying and performing them through the social actions of conquest and colonialism.

The chapters that follow will link early Christian self-fashioning to stages two and three of “Othering” as delineated by Brons. Stage two involves “Othering” in the sense of converting biocultural distinctions into normative biocultural “differences” generally defined and “naturalized” as fixed elements of social identity. Stage three involves the

acquisition and accrual of social benefits for the “Self” from the extreme (denigrating) application of stage two to the purported “Other.” This study shows how early Christian self-invention constitutes the enactment of steps two and three. It also shows how steps two and three constitute the principal formative procedures for the development of early Christian identity (“Self”) based on the construction of the “Other” as “black,” ungodly, and evil.

By unframing and unreading the all-too-familiar Self/Other trope this study reveals western self-conception to be an ideology-driven process rooted in the invention and socialization of Judeo-Christian monotheism. It thus identifies one-god-ism as the singular source of the eurocentric belief that posits Europeans as possessing the only “Self” (social identity) that matters in the world. This study thus identifies the imaginary of “white” European superiority as a product of European Christians defining themselves as the “chosen people” of the only “true god”—a belief evidenced historically by their relentless efforts to denigrate and dehumanize non-European “Others” as bio-cultural inferiors.

Although politically and socially powerless during its first two centuries, the cult’s situation changed dramatically with its internal takeover of imperial Rome in the fourth century CE. Empowered by imperial authority and aiming its newly-enacted orthodoxy as a blunt weapon against Christian heretics and Pagans alike, “Othering” then became the key determiner of social relations as it defined a new social reality that fixed and reified the status quo of *believer/non-believer*. Once the Christian cult thus empowered itself it launched its first holocaust against non-believers in Europe to secure its dominance on the sub-continent. Centuries later the Self/Other trope entered a new and critical phase when the Latin Church sanctioned the chattelization of West Africans by the Portuguese in the

mid-1440s. (Marcocci, 2016; Russell-Wood, 1978; Sweet, 2003). At that point *Christian identity* determined the identities of the colonizers and juxtaposed them against that of the colonized. As show in the following chapters, colonialism has always been central to the cult, its formation, and its theo-politics.

CHAPTER TWO

THE COLONIAL MATRIX OF CHRISTIANITY

After two centuries of modern biblical scholarship, the origins of early Christian religion still remain unclear. Anyone studying first-century Christianity has to realize both the diversity and complexity of the phenomenon. Already the earliest documents reflect the existence of surprisingly different and often rival groups of the new religion. The variety of views and practices found in the earliest writings is so great that it is almost impossible to find a minimal definition of Christianity.... Indeed, the very notion of a single origin of Christian religion seems to be an exclusive one (Czachesz, 2007, p. 66).

Introduction

This study identifies Alexandria, Egypt as the most important center of Christian education in the formative years of the cult's history. It also identifies it as the geo-cultural cradle of antiblack discourses in antiquity. Consequently, in the sections that follow, this study analyzes this complex multi-cultural cradle of the Christian faith to illustrate how Christian doctrine and its antiblack dogma developed simultaneously in a Roman-colonized Egypt at war with its African neighbors. Hence the critical need here to examine the sociohistorical contexts in which it emerged in the first century CE to determine and document how they effected the faith's conceptual and social development.

Historians identify Alexandria as the center of scholarship and intellectualism in the Mediterranean world in the first century CE. In this city which surpassed even Rome in terms of its cultural and educational institutions Christian theologians integrated Pagan ideas with their own, whether acquired indirectly from "Judaism" or directly from Pagan

sources. However, instead of syncretizing them, as had been the tradition for millennia in the ancient world, they instead claimed them as original to their faith. For example, the notion of divine “sonship” or “virgin birth” predated Christianity by millennia in Paganism, but became a definitive tenet of Christian faith nevertheless by ignoring or erasing its historical antecedents (Fox, 1987; Jackson, 1985). In a further irony, Paganism’s ubiquity compelled early Christians to impose the most extreme form of “Othering”—the *believer/non-believer* dichotomy—to self-distance themselves and their doctrine from it in every respect. Christians resorted to extreme self-distantiation to make their faith appear *sui generis*, transhistorical, and universal. They thus labeled and contested as evil every existent non-Jewish tradition in antiquity, which they collectively classified as Pagan for that purpose (Fox, 1987). They also did not spare Jews and the Jewish faith from their animus. Instead, they attempted to supersede and supplant ancient Jewish monotheism with the new gospel of Jesus Christ to evangelize Christianity as the “one-true-faith” and only path to “salvation.”

Although Romans controlled Judea and Egypt in the first century CE when the Christian cult emerged, this chapter begins with a discussion of Egyptian culture and civilization. Given this study’s claim of Egypt as a cradle of Christianity, Egyptian culture constitutes the logical starting place to determine if it supplied any elements of the faith’s distinctive antiblack ideology despite its colonization by Romans at that time. An analysis of Christianity’s deep roots in Greek language and culture (Hellenism) follows the discussion of Egypt. It situates and examines Christianity’s origins within Hellenism, an ancient Greek cultural modality so dominant in the Mediterranean world it profoundly influenced Roman literature, arts, and education (Gruen, 1986; Morgan, 1998). Hence it

shows how Christianity was both Jewish and Hellenist at birth, and therefore took a circuitous path to emerge as the “Roman” Catholic Church in the fourth century CE.

Black/Blackness in Egypt Before Christianity

Given this study’s claim antiblack discourses originated in the Christian community in Roman-colonized Egypt in the late first century CE, it is important to determine if existent Egyptian concepts of the color “black” in any way contributed to their content and development. In other words, did native Egyptian symbols, ideas, and beliefs influence Christian perceptions of skin color in Christianity’s formative period. The symbolic uses, and meanings of the color “black” (*kem*) in Egypt—a nation with deep roots in prehistory—span a wide interpretive spectrum. Within that spectrum, however, this study does not find any definitive instances where “black” denotes “evil” or is associated with the “counter-divine” personified in the form of a demonic power comparable to Satan in Christian mythology. Instead, the term perhaps most notably appears among the several geographic appellations native Egyptians used for their nation: (𓂏𓂗𓏏) *km.t* (*Kemet*). In this rendering *Kemet* means the “Black Land.” Egyptologists commonly interpret it as referring to the rich soil deposited annually by the Nile and not the land’s ancient inhabitants. This view prevails in Egyptology even though the identical hieroglyph for “black” is used with the added determinatives of a man and a woman to signify “people”—thereby denoting the ancient Egyptians as the “Black” People. Moreover, this expression also is rendered in the genitive form *rmT.w nj km.t* (*Remtju ni Kemet*) or People of the “Black Land,” an expression that survived into Christian times and has been reserved in the Coptic language

of Egyptian Christians as *rm-n-kēme* (Allen, 2000; Dosoo, 2019; Loprieno & Müller, 2012).

The term *km.t* (Kemet) became increasingly popular during the Middle and New Kingdom eras of Egypt's history. Therefore, its use not only remained consistent it grew over the centuries. Consequently, it can be viewed as the popular if not "official" denomination of Egypt. Africana scholars frequently cite this fact in arguing the people of Kemet, the inhabitants of the "Black Land," referred to themselves as "Black" (Diop, 1974; Van Sertima, 1989). While this evidence may appear conclusive, it raises the question as to why an African people would choose to identify themselves in such a fashion? As St. Clair Drake informs us:

Within the Egyptian population, classifications on the basis of skin color do not seem to be the custom. The only foreigners who were so classified seem to have been some of the inhabitants of the African area west of Egypt, who were referred to by a term that meant "Yellow" and who were usually called "Libyans" by the Greek historians (1987, p. 141).

How then should the term *kem* be interpreted in view of the time and place in which it originated, which in Egypt's case predates foreign invasions and conquests? A major factor that confounds any interpretation of its use as "realistic" (as opposed to "idealistic") is evident in the artistic convention used to depict Egyptian men and women in pictorial art and statuary. Men frequently are portrayed in a dark reddish hue and the women as lighter by comparison. The Africana scholar James Brunson suggests the Egyptians' choice of the color red (*deshet*) may preserve a widespread custom that originated in prehistory of peoples adorning their bodies with red ochre (the same pigment used to make red paint in Egypt) (1991). Examples of the ubiquity of this custom is evident in cave and rock paintings and prehistoric human burials across vast areas of Africa and Europe. Recent

research has established the efficacy of ochre in inhibiting the adverse effects of ultraviolet radiation due to its high sun protection factor (SPF) (Rifkin et al., 2015). Its benefits for human health thus extend beyond its cosmetic use. Hence its value in Egypt's harsh desert environment goes without question and thus may explain its routine use in depicting Egyptian men.

However, this study still rejects the notion Egypt's "red" skin color aesthetic is grounded in realism because its ancient color scheme was a product of and thus represented an exceedingly complex set of metaphysical and philosophical principles and conventions. Other ideas also had to be at work in the Egyptian psyche because red (*desh*) is also the color of the hostile desert regions of Egypt. Additionally, and even more noteworthy, red frequently is used for the coloration of the divinity (*netjer*) named Set, who some scholars view as the inspiration for the Jewish-Christian idea of Satan. Unlike Satan, however, Set's treatment in ancient Egypt vacillates between official adoration and opprobrium depending on the Pharaoh in power. To further complicate any exegesis:

"Making red" was synonymous with killing someone. Salvation from the evil is the subject of an ancient Egyptian charm: "*Oh, Isis, deliver me from the hands of all bad, evil, red things!*" Red was a powerful color, symbolizing two extremes: life and victory, as well as anger and fire. Red also represented blood, and in the Chapter 156 from the Book of the Dead, protection is sought through the blood power of Isis: "*You have your blood, O Isis; you have your power, O Isis; you have your magic, O Isis*" [author's emphasis] (Singer, 2016, p. 7).

Egyptian scribes also wrote the hieroglyph for "evil" in red, along with the names of hostile monsters including Apophis (the cosmic serpent who embodies the notion of chaos), and any other words they regarded as profane or dangerous (Wilkinson, 1994). Given the confounding circumstances pertaining to *desh*, it appears best not to view *kem* as conveying any notion of "blackness" that can be related to its current conception and use

in the West as a form of social or self-identification. As for the lighter coloration commonly used in depictions of Egyptian women, the Egyptologist Joyce Tyldesley explains it thusly:

The “fairer sex,” who conventionally worked indoors away from the burning Egyptian sun, were invariably painted with lighter skins than their ochre-coloured menfolk. This convention completely ignored the fact that society was racially well-mixed at all levels; as has already been noted, the Egyptians did not require their art to be an accurate representation of life. Some Egyptian women were depicted with a black skin, but this did not necessarily imply a Negroid origin. Black, the colour of the fertile Egyptian soil, symbolized regeneration and therefore was used to those awaiting rebirth in the afterlife. Following this logic, a lady with depicted green skin was understood to be dead, green in this instance being the colour of life (i.e. the expectation of resurrection rather than putrefaction (1995, pp. 23-24).

This explanation about women working indoors has appeared often and may have some merit in terms of women in the upper classes who also were more likely to be depicted in various works of art. The Egyptologist Gay Robbins offers this explanation for consideration before moving on: “The use of the two contrasting colours in relation to gender is obviously a convention, and while it may in part be based on reality, the situation with regards to skin color in life is likely to have been far more complex” (Robbins, 1993, p. 181).

The Egyptologist John Baines informs us the color terms used by the Egyptians—*deshet* (red), *kem* (black), *irtiu* and *khesbedj* (blue) etc.—“are attested from the mid-3rd millennium B.C. to the Middle Ages, and do not appear to have changed greatly during that immense period” (1985, p. 285). Their consistency however is belied by historic changes in the color palette itself:

Painted colors changed significantly between the Old Kingdom (ca. 2600 B.C.) and the later New Kingdom (ca. 1540-1070 B.C.), and evolved further by the Greco-Roman period (332 B.C.-ca. A.D. 250). The sparse Greco-Roman evidence shows that color use in that period was different from, and more heavily symbolic than, that of earlier times (Baines, 1985, p. 286).

While the standard use of these colors can be said to comprise an artistic convention, it can never be considered a consistently fixed or bounded one, in the conventional sense, due to countless examples that defy general categorizations, at least from a modern vantage point. Hence, the famous underworld figure Osiris (Ausar) often is depicted with green skin indicating death and resurrection, or black skin which also signifies resurrection and symbolizes his role as presiding over the Egyptian underworld. Even though Egyptian underworld is associated with black, the heavens too can be represented as black or blue, further indicating a kind of ambivalence or flexibility in meaning (Baines, 1985).

What modern scholars find confusing, and even contradictory, may be explained again by the fact the palette and its artistic conventions appear grounded in a kind of “realism” that is primarily symbolic rather than naturalistic. From a non-Egyptian perspective, this aesthetic may seem incoherent and thus incomprehensible. The art clearly offers layers of possible interpretive meanings in keeping with the profoundly rich and complex spiritual philosophy of the Egyptians (Wilkinson, 1994). Nonetheless, like other cult(ural) changes in the Nile Valley, variations in representing standardized ancient Egyptian images and figures, such as divinities (*neteru*), reflect the nation’s historically unprecedented social evolution and development over more than four millennia. Still, the main takeaway from available evidence shown here is “black” serves as an honorific in Egyptian culture when applied to certain *neteru* (divinities) and is never used to designate or defame them as evil or “counter-divine.” Even though *kem* also figures prominently in the Egyptian underworld and is the color of night and death (sometimes indicated by a black hole), it also signifies resurrection from death, and fertility—which is emblematic of life itself (Wilkinson, 1994). Based on these findings this study rules out ancient Egyptian

culture as the source of antiblack concepts and imagery. Nevertheless, as Africana scholars and others have shown, centuries of Western bias and eurocentrism overwrite and obscure these basic sociohistorical facts and thereby complicate efforts to excavate and explicate them (Bernal, 1987; Diop, 1974; James, 1976).

In terms of Egypt's impact on the invention of Christianity, this study takes the opposite position. Like the Jewish faith that preceded it, this study contends Christianity was directly and deeply informed by ancient African belief systems and traditions (Jackson, 1985; Jackson, 2013; Michello, 2020). For example, the Egyptian divinities (*neteru*) Isis, Horus, and Osiris (a prototypic divine family), appear to be the inspiration and models for the mythology and iconography of Jesus and his family. The diffusion of the Isis cult throughout the Mediterranean and Europe during the Greco-Roman era, explains in part why Christianity's origins in Egypt led to the widespread worship of the Black Madonna and Child in Europe (Michello, 2020; Redd, 1988). Although Isis worship initially spread through *cultural translation* in antiquity, the most significant diffusion of its iconography occurred in conjunction with Greco-Roman conquests and colonialism (Hegedus, 1998; Witt, 1997). Given the priority and preeminence of the Greeks as mediators of *cultural translation* in the Mediterranean world before the Romans, this discussion now pivots to examine how the diffusion of Greek culture in a modality western scholars label and define as *Hellenism* contributed directly to the formulation of Christianity and its ideology.

Christianity and Hellenism

The term/concept Hellenism, it must be noted, first appears in academia in nineteenth century Germany. The notion proved essential to the construction of the “Aryan Model” of ancient civilization—the term Martin Bernal devised to identify the eurocentric and white supremacist historiography that discursively colonizes the past (Bernal, 1987). Still, like other eurocentric terms associated with antiquity, this study uses it with the appropriate caveats. Here, it serves mostly as a referent for the massive contributions of Greek philosophy and language to Christianity in the centuries before Rome became the faith’s headquarters in the West and the Church was Latinized. Christianity began as a small Jewish sect in a Mediterranean world permeated and dominated by Hellenism. Hellenism developed and emerged in the fourth century BCE as a consequence and outcome of Greek imperialist wars under the military leadership of Alexander the Great (Brunschwig & Lloyd, 2000). However, even though Greek cult(ure) pervaded and influenced the ancient world through conquest, Assmann suggests Greek socio-political hegemony did not disrupt *cultural translation* but instead furnished a kind of surrogate medium for its continuation:

Hellenism, seen not as a message but as a medium, not as a homogenizing cover but as a flexible and eloquent language giving understandable voice to vastly different messages, preserving difference while providing transparency, might serve as a model. Hellenistic culture became a medium equally removed from classical Greek culture as from all other oriental and African cultures that adopted it as a form of cultural self-expression. In the same way, a transcultural meaning that will not amount to westernization or Americanization could provide visibility and transparency in a world of preserved traditions and cultural otherness (1996b, p. 36).

This study agrees in principle with Assmann’s remarks and finds them highly useful in setting the stage for forthcoming discussions. Still, the fact Hellenism initially spread

through warfare rather than commerce means scholars must be attentive to the role and impact of cultural chauvinism in its dissemination. This need becomes particularly acute when considering the social consequences of planting settlers and settlements in conquered lands to rule them from within. The stated motives for Hellenism's promotion by the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt also indicate its use to express and convey imperial power and propaganda (Erskine, 1995; Green, 1985). Here, however, the focus is on its role as the primary cultural matrix in which Christian ideology and doctrine evolved and cohered. To that end, Christoph Marksches, a scholar of early Christianity, offers this helpful definition: "The Hellenization of Christianity is a specific transformation of the Alexandrinic educational institutions and of the academic culture that was developed in these institutions in the theological reflection of ancient Christianity" (2012, p. 34). The forthcoming discussions unpack Marksches definition to document Christian expression of Hellenist ideas and values and how and where they appear in Christian dogma.

Although Christianity indisputably began as a Jewish sect in the first century CE, the Jewish traditions that inspired it, including the Hebrew Bible, had been themselves profoundly impacted by Hellenism for centuries (Meyers, 1992). Jewish Hellenization is perhaps best evidenced by the translation of the Hebrew Bible into its Greek *Septuagint* version (Greenspoon, 2003; Tov, 1988). Greek had become something of a *lingua franca* among Jews because knowledge of Hebrew had declined significantly in widespread Jewish communities (Greenspoon, 2003; Lanckau, 2011; Stroumsa, 2012; Tov, 1988). Hence, Jewish education in Egypt, which is well documented in Alexandria, was deeply influenced by Greek "Alexandrinic educational institutions" and "academic culture" as Marksches (2012) indicates above. In turn, Jewish education and scholarship in

Alexandria directly influenced early Christian education, as discussed below (Decock, 2015; Jaeger, 1985; Runia, 1993, 1995; Sanders, 1999; Tov, 1988).

Hellenism remained a formidable cultural force in the Mediterranean long after the Romans conquered Greece in 146 BCE. When Christianity was born in the first century CE, in the Roman province of Judea, its founders faced a world in which they had to navigate Roman rule and law within a Hellenistic cultural milieu. Despite Rome's military successes, Greek thought retained its prominence as evidenced by the Roman educated elite's common knowledge and use of Greek language and embrace of Hellenic philosophy (Wallace-Hadrill, 1998). Educated Jews and Christians in Egypt and Judea thus received their training and instruction within this complex admixture of Roman civics and Greek literature and literary culture. Consequently, Christian intellectuals routinely utilized theories and methods derived from the vast Hellenic corpus, including the works of Plato and Aristotle, to formulate and express Christian thought at the same time they excoriated Pagan intellectual traditions and education (Allen, 1987; Fox, 1987; Jaeger, 1985; Ramelli, 2009; Stead, 1994).

Incontrovertible evidence of the massive influence of Pagan literature on Christian theology can be seen in the fact Christian writers tapped into the mythopoetic literary style and structure of the Homeric epics in crafting the Christian gospels (Fox, 1987; Grant, 1979; MacDonald, 2000). Evidence of this Greek literary tradition's direct influences on the rhetorical, stylistic, and structural elements of Christian texts would be much more evident if not for centuries of Christian obscuration and erasure of the facts (Fox, 1987; Rohmann, 2016). As part of their mission to eradicate Paganism, Christians launched a relentless assault on its literary culture and heritage through a well-organized and zealous

campaign of book burning and censorship (Rohmann, 2016). Yet in their efforts to reduce the Pagan canon to ashes and Paganism along with it, Christians still could not erase countless instances in which the Old and New Testaments convey the ideas they anathematized and sought to destroy when encountered in their original Pagan form. This task was made more difficult if not impossible given the fact Christian gospels were composed in Greek rather than Aramaic, the principal language of Jesus and the peoples of Judea in the first century CE.

Greek thought (as represented by Greek language, idioms, semantics, and grammar) therefore determined and informed the way Christian intellectuals formulated and expressed their Christian beliefs and ideas. Greek also remained the official language of the Church in Rome until the third century, and thus contributed directly to Christianity's intellectual growth during the cult's formative years (Fox, 1987; MacDonald, 2000; Wilson, 1998). Although it remains the primary liturgical language of the Eastern Orthodox Church, the eventual displacement of Greek in Roman Catholicism occurred as local Christian communities began translating biblical scriptures into Latin in the mid-second century CE. A complete Latin translation of the bible, however, did not appear until the late fourth century CE (Metzger, 1993). The theologian Jerome (347–420 CE) famously used the Latin fragments (known as the *Old Latin* texts), the Hebrew Bible, and its Greek translation known as the *Septuagint*, as the source documents for constructing what is known as the Latin Vulgate Bible (Metzger, 1993). Upon completion it became the standard Latin Bible for the Latin speaking Church in the West, and was eclipsed only by a modern vernacular version translated from Hebrew in the late twentieth century and sanctioned by the Second Vatican Council (1962-64) (Wcela, 2009).

The Latinization of Christianity thus required nearly three centuries to take effect after the faith had been initially informed by Greek language and thought. The writings of Saul of Tarsus (aka Saint Paul or Paul the Apostle) evidence and exemplify this historical fact. The title “apostle” generally refers to the twelve chief disciples of Jesus, but also is applied to Paul who, according to tradition, did not convert to Christianity until after Jesus’s death (Wilson, 1998). Paul is the primary author of the New Testament. Of its 27 books, 13 or 14 are conventionally attributed to him, although not without considerable debate about the authorship of nearly half of them (Wilson, 1998). Whether or not written by Paul, all the epistles proved critical to the invention of Christianity. They also irrefutably demonstrate a “vigorous and very distinctive Greek prose style:”

Paul thought in Greek. He wrote in Greek. Together with Philo of Alexandria, he is the great conduit through which Jewish concepts and stories and patterns of thought came into the Gentile world. As these ideas came through the channel, they passed into a new intellectual world; the attempt to translate Hebrew ideas into a Gentile setting, above all a Greek setting, meant using words with new senses or with great boldness (Wilson, 1998, p. 28).

A.N. Wilson, a biographer of Paul, describes him as “one of the most important and influential figures who ever lived” (1998, p. 13). His role as a co-inventor of the Christian faith is unquestionable; yet according to Christian tradition Paul never met Jesus, the messianic savior he helped to invent and glorify:

But he did know—and had complicated relationships with—some of the men in the original circle around him: Peter (whom he calls “Cephas”), John (the son of Zebedee?), James the brother of Jesus, and perhaps as well some of those whom Paul eventually distained as “false brothers” (Fredriksen, 2018, p. 2).

Paul’s ideas and zealous leadership proved instrumental in distinguishing and ultimately separating the Christian cult from the other Jewish cults existent in the first century CE. Even though Jewish traditions were never uniform, belief in the Hebrew/Israelite/Judean

concept of one-god-ism unified millions of Jews. The term/concept *Judaism*, however, did not exist in Paul's time and did not appear in Europe until the thirteen century CE (Boyarin, 2004; Fox, 1987; Wilson, 1998). Still, Paul's explication of core beliefs now labeled "Christian" helped to define Jewish traditions even as it broke with them. While his efforts did not appear initially to be aimed at founding a new faith, after Jews in Jerusalem rejected his claims about Jesus's messianic identity his efforts to synthesize Jewish and Greek ideas fostered the establishment of the cult's ideology. His writings also facilitated the growth of Christian communities across the Mediterranean world by attracting non-Jews, so-called *Gentiles*, to join the sect (Fox, 1987; Fredriksen, 2018; Wilson, 1998).

Paul, a Jewish convert to Christianity, thus received his education within the Hellenic tradition as did so many of his contemporaries and fellow Christians. Notably, he conducted his missionary work primarily in Jerusalem and Antioch, two early centers of Christianity's development, and not in Alexandria (Wilson, 1998). However, this study contends many of the most active and influential Christian theologians and thinkers who used Paul's writings to establish Christian orthodoxy during the three centuries that followed came from North Africa (Oden, 2007). It bases this finding on this study's genealogical reconstruction of the origins of antiblackness in early Christian discourses, its identification of the Christian community in Alexandria as their conceptual source, and the centrality of those discourses in early Christian catechism. As explained below, the hypothesis antiblackness originated in the Christian community in Egypt, in a city built by Greeks and ruled by Romans, is based on specific circumstances and events associated with Greco-Roman colonialism and warfare in Africa.

Hellenic Egypt and Christian Antiblackness

The social conditions in Egypt that made African discursive denigration possible, occurred in part due to the nation's history of invasions and occupations by foreign enemies. A recent study, however, found Egypt's purported first foreigner conquerors, the Hyksos, a term that means "foreign rulers," apparently were not invaders but long-time settlers in the north who rebelled and seized control of the nation circa 1638-1530 BCE (Stantis et al., 2020). Although now labeled an internal coup, the victory of the Hyksos can be seen nonetheless as the forerunner of a series of conquests by Libyans, Nubians, Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans. What became a relentless pattern of invasion and occupation repeatedly stratified Egyptian society by subjugating and consigning the Egyptian masses to a subordinate class within their own land (Drake, 1987).

In reconstructing the origins of antiblack discourses, however, this study views the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great and the nearly three centuries of Greek rule by the Ptolemies that followed as setting the cognitive stage for their ideation and construction. Accordingly, this study finds antiblack tropes did not originate with Greek or Roman Pagans in Egypt, but with Greek and Roman Christians in the Roman-ruled colony in the late first century CE. Roman rule began in 30 BCE, nearly a century before the first textual evidence of Christianity appears. As shown below, resistance to Roman colonialism in North Africa negatively impacted Rome's views of Africans based on the threats they posed as economic competitors, and as impeding further conquests in the region. Roman cultural attitudes and values thus contributed to early Christian beliefs, even though Christians broadly rejected most of them as contradicting the basic tenets of their faith.

In addition to the massive sociopolitical consequences of repeated invasions (a tragic pattern that persisted into the early modern era), the Egyptian population, particularly in the northern region, experienced significant demographic change. St. Clair Drake describes the impact on Egyptian society as follows: “as Persian, Greek, and Roman rulers entrenched themselves in the cities, the somatic norm of the upper strata came to differ markedly from that of Nectanebo and the earlier pharaonic dynasties” (1987, p. 260). The Nectanebo referred to by Drake is Nectanebo II, who from 360-342 BCE ruled as the last “indigenous” Pharaoh of Egypt (Clayton, 1994).

In the early modern era, art and artifacts associated with Egypt’s alien rulers and inhabitants became part of the “evidence” western scholars used to deny the nation’s African origins. Historian and linguist Marin Bernal aptly labeled this brand of eurocentric historiography the “Aryan Model” of ancient civilization (Bernal, 1987). This western “racial” fantasy also received additional support from the bio-cultural-geographic concept of “sub-Saharan Africa”—a pseudoscientific idea used propagandistically to distinguish and separate North African populations from the rest of the continent. The term deliberately misrepresents the region’s demographic history based on the false notion that desertification in Africa’s prehistoric past physically divided African populations into two fixed and immutable groups popularly represented as “White” North Africans and “Black” Sub-Saharan Africans (Keita, 1993). Africana scholars have contested this white mythology for centuries, as exemplified by Frederick Douglass’s comments in a speech given at Western Reserve College in 1854 to rebut the scientific racism of his day:

But Egypt is in Africa. Pity that it had not been in Europe or in Asia or, better still, in America! Another unhappy circumstance is that the ancient Egyptians were not white people but were, undoubtedly, just about as dark in complexion as many in this country who are considered genuine negroes; and that is not all, their hair was

far from being of that graceful lankness which adorns the fair Anglo Saxon head (Douglass, 1854, p. 17).

Egypt is in Africa. So is North Africa. And so is the ancient city of Alexandria, the specific locale in Egypt where the invention of antiblack Christian rhetoric and dogma occurred. Conceived and planned by Alexander the Great in 331 BCE as Αλεξάνδρεια (Alexandria), the city was strategically constructed on Egypt's Mediterranean coast twenty miles to the west of the Nile River on the site of an existing settlement named Rhacotis (Vrettos, 2010). It replaced Memphis as the capital of Egypt under the rule of Ptolemy I Soter (the "Savior"), the originator of the dynasty of Greek kings of Egypt known as the Ptolemies. The late English Professor John Rodenbeck offers this useful summary of the city's political, cultural, and economic influence in the region:

Alexandria was the political and cultural capital of realms that under the first four Ptolemies included not only Egypt, but also Cyrenaica, Cyprus, Kos, Sanios and other Aegean islands, portions of the Asian mainland itself, and parts of Syria and Palestine. While acting as a magnet for artists and intellectuals living in its own Egyptian hinterland or in other parts of this maritime empire, it also drew men and women from everywhere else in the Mediterranean. Some came merely as tourists. Thousands of others had been recruited by the Ptolemies, however, or had been independently attracted by the new city's commercial prospects and came to settle down as permanent residents (2001, p. 537).

The Ptolemies ruled as self-styled Pharaohs after Alexander's death in Mesopotamia in 323 BCE until 30 BCE when the Roman armies of Octavian (later called Augustus) invaded after defeating the forces of Marc Anthony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium (Vrettos, 2010). During the three centuries of Greek rule that followed, Alexandria became the unrivalled intellectual center of the ancient Mediterranean world:

Within a century after Alexandria was built, it was larger than Carthage and growing so swiftly that it acknowledged no superior, even Rome. It had already become the center not only of Hellenism, but also of Judaism. Its Mouseion was the leading university of its time—the finest teachers, philosophers, and scientists flourishing within its walls. Here ancient scholars produced the Septuagint (Greek

translation of the Hebrew Old Testament), and on these streets Julius Caesar would stroll with Cleopatra to the wild cheers of the populace. For the thousand years after its foundation, Alexandria served as the cultural, political, and religious center of Egypt (Vrettos, 2010, p. location 134).

World-class scholars from across the Greek world and beyond were drawn to Alexandria and contributed to its renown. Its intellectual and cultural life revolved around a Hellenistic learning complex known as the Mouseion (the origins of the English word: museum) and a world-renowned Library. Their founding date is unknown, but evidence shows the Mouseion and the Library were well established by 285 BCE (Rodenbeck, 2001). The Mouseion began life as a temple dedicated to serving the Muses—inspirational forces posited by the Greeks as both the spiritual embodiments and sponsors of the arts and sciences including geography, mathematics, philosophy, drama, and poetry. While today many would regard this ancient university as a “religious” institution, it offered its students instruction in all forms of knowledge:

It should be emphasized that the basis of all research at the Mouseion was the written word. Therefore there was no distinction made between those intellectual pursuits that we persist in separating into distinct and exclusive categories naively designated by terms like "scientific or technological" and "literary or humanistic" (Rodanbeck, 2001, p. 529).

It also should be noted the Mouseion resembled the organization and function of Egyptian temples, which may have served as its model. The Egyptian tradition of housing libraries within the temples of various cults began perhaps more than two thousand years before the Mycenaean Greek culture appeared on the historical stage in 1900 BCE (Haikal, 2008; Verner, 2013; Zulu, 1993). The extent to which the Ptolemies borrowed from existing Egyptian institutions in building their own remains a subject of debate. In any case, the establishment of the Mouseion and Library made Alexandria a cultural and intellectual powerhouse in the Mediterranean world. The city soon surpassed Athens in prominence as

it became the center of Hellenic education and intellectual and cultural production. A summary of its history until the Arab invasion of Egypt in the seventh century is offered as follows:

The history of the library and its university center falls into five stages. The first, from its founding in 306 B.C.E. to about 150 B.C.E., was the period of Aristotelian science, during which the scientific method was the dominant feature of scholarly investigation. The second, from 150 B.C.E. to 30 B.C.E., was marked by a decided shift away from Aristotelian empiricism to a Platonic preoccupation with metaphysics and religion. This period coincided with the consolidation of Roman influence in the Mediterranean basin. The third was the age of Philo Judaeus's influence, from 30 B.C.E. to 150 C.E. The fourth was the era of the Catechetical School, 150 to 350 C.E., and the fifth was the period of the philosophical movement known as the Alexandrian School, 350 to 642 C.E. Together, these five stages cover a thousand years. No other institution of this kind has proved to be so long-lived or so intellectually dominant of its world and subsequent history as Alexandria's library (Ellens, 1997, p. 22).

The focus here mainly is on the third and fourth eras of its history as identified above (30 BCE – 350 CE). Nevertheless, from its first stage onward, the Ptolemaic Greek knowledge factory in Alexandria clearly influenced scholarship throughout the Mediterranean in ways that profoundly shaped the evolution of western science and philosophy as well as the development of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The world owes the survival of countless ancient texts today to their collection and preservation in Alexandria's Great Library, and to the purported stated mission of the Ptolemies to acquire a copy of every single scroll ever written (Erskine, 1995). In addition to the massive contributions made by its scholars to the foundations of Western scientific theory—which some scholars trace from Aristotle to Francis Bacon—the collection and standardization of Homeric texts and other literature from the Greek corpus, and the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek and its canonization, constitute two of the think tank's greatest literary achievements. Evidence suggests this grand vision of a centralized system and repository of Greek knowledge is

precisely what Ptolemy Soter had in mind in making Alexandria a global learning center. Evidence also suggests he arrived at this decision in part to establish the basis for a common identity and culture to unify the Greek immigrants arriving from the Greek mainland and the Greek Diaspora:

Given Alexandria's position as a center of world trade and polyglot nature, it was vital for the Ptolemaic dynasty to unify their city and people so that Alexandria was not merely a place where many different people lived and through which trade passed. Alexandria and Alexandrians needed to have an identity and a uniqueness of their own. As the Greek culture encountered and was changed by others, it became not just Hellenic, but Pan-Hellenic. This new Pan-Hellenism played a vital role in accomplishing a kind of unification. The Ptolemaic dynasty set about making Alexandria the center of learning and culture in the Pan-Hellenic world – containing the intellectual works of all the newly Hellenized nations. In this way, Alexandrians would not only find unity in a common Pan-Hellenic culture but they would, in a very specific sense, be at the very core of that culture. The creation of the Great Library and its attendant institutions were indispensable contributions toward making Alexandria into this intellectual and cultural center (Phillips, 2010, p. 4).

As foreign rulers, the Ptolemaic Greeks were compelled to protect and project Greek heritage and culture as a matter of survival, and as a mechanism to exercise and retain power. As the historian Andrew Erskine states: “the presence in Alexandria of two institutions devoted to the preservation and study of Greek culture acts as a powerful symbol of Egyptian exclusion and subjection. Texts from other cultures could be kept in the library, but only once they had been translated, that is to say Hellenized” (1995, p. 43). This practice explains in part how the Hebrew Bible came to be translated into Greek and why it took place in Alexandria (Tov, 1988).

The Mouseion and Library thus served the dynasty's broader mission of establishing and disseminating a standardized Greek system of knowledge and culture throughout the Mediterranean world. Erskine (1995) describes this practice as evidencing an imperialist monopoly at work in the Library's collection and translation policies

designed and purposed to give the Ptolemies total control in fashioning Greek society. By reproducing texts in definitive and standard editions, the Ptolemies aimed to provide far flung Greek populations with a common Hellenic culture and social identity defined and determined by them. Royal funding of knowledge production, collection, and management in Alexandria, and lifelong patronage for prominent scholars, also facilitated this process. It ultimately proved to be immensely successful. Greek knowledge and literary culture, so-called Hellenism, took root throughout the Mediterranean (Manning, 2012; Phillips, 2010; Vrettos, 2010). By the time Christians took control of the Roman Empire in the fourth century CE, the Romans also had famously spread Greek language and philosophy throughout its conquered territories. This Roman embrace of Greek culture was not new. Hellenism had been a major and formative component of Roman culture since Rome's founding in 753 BCE:

Greek culture leaves its mark on Roman at every moment we can document, and more we learn about archaic Rome, the more we are inclined to accept, even if different sense, the argument of the Augustan historian, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, that Rome was from the first a Greek city (Wallace-Hadrill, 1998, p. 79).

Given the Roman empire's immense geographic reach, and its longevity which lasted fourteen centuries, the Romans proved far more instrumental than the Greeks in disseminating and institutionalizing Alexandrian intellectual methods and materials. With Rome securely in Christian hands after 323 CE, Christianity then became the primary conduit whereby Alexandria's intellectual achievements continued to influence the intellectual, artistic, social, and scientific development of the West:

Just as there is a debt to Alexandria wherever a pipe-organ is played or an Archimedes screw is used, whenever a Western-style atlas or calendar is consulted, wherever medicine, astronomy, grammar or geography are taught, or whenever a problem in mechanics or geometry is solved, so there is also a debt wherever a

Western or Western-influenced novel, poem, play or opera is written, read, recited, performed, examined by a critic, catalogued by a librarian, investigated by a scholar, or even enjoyed by one reader or an audience. These debts began to accumulate some 25 years after the founding of the city by one of the sons of Philip II of Macedon, Alexander III, known to history as Alexander the Great (Rodenbeck, 2001, p. 524).

The fact Egypt is in Africa, however, raises another important question: *how much of this debt is owed to the genius of Egyptian scholars?* Egyptian civilization began millennia prior to the Greek presence in Egypt. It includes within its remarkable record of accomplishments major discoveries and innovations involving writing, geometry, architecture, literature, philosophy, medicine, and astronomy (Diop, 1974; Rice, 2004; Römer, 2018; Verner, 2013). Those achievements often are attributed to “Greek” Alexandria, as evidenced by the quote cited above. Consequently, Egypt’s profound legacy in the West, including its contributions to the inventions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, remain a major subject debate among Africana scholars and others (Asante, 2004; Bernal, 1987; Diop, 1974; James, 1976; Keita, 2000). Eurocentric scholars generally deny ancient Egyptians possessed deep thought (philosophy) in any sophisticated or systematic form (James, 1976; Onyewuenyi, 1993; Park, 2013). Hence, they either dismiss Africana thought outright or attribute most Africana ideas and knowledge to outside influences. The debate over the “sources” of “Greek” philosophical ideas or scientific inventions exists in part, however, because the Greeks viewed colonized Egyptians as a threat to their rule and thus engaged in various forms of cultural appropriation and suppression as both defensive and offensive countermeasures (Anakwue, 2017; Asante, 2000; Onyewuenyi, 1993; Orrells et al., 2011). Erskine provides this salient example of Greek anxiety and fear:

A reading of Alexandrian poetry might easily give the impression Egyptians did not exist at all; indeed Egypt itself is hardly mentioned except for the Nile and the Nile flood, both of which had been well known among Greeks since at least the

time of Herodotus. This omission of Egypt and Egyptians from poetry masks a fundamental insecurity. It is no coincidence that one of the few poetic references to Egyptians presents them as muggers (1995, p. 43).

The cultural insecurity of the Greeks, which Erskine describes as “fundamental,” may be explained in part by a frequently recounted conversation that purportedly occurred between an Egyptian priest and Solon (c. 630–560 BCE), a visiting Athenian lawmaker and reformer. The following passage comes from Plato and is related in the *Timaeus*. Plato reports that after Solon related the most ancient knowledge the Greeks possessed to a gathering of Egyptian priests, one of the elder priests responded as follows:

‘Solon, Solon, you Greeks are always children; there are no old men in Greece!’
‘What are you trying to say?’ asked Solon.
‘You are young in spirit,’ replied the Egyptian priest, ‘for you possess no truly antique traditions, no notion gray with time’...it is said that here are preserved the oldest traditions . . . Thus there is nothing beautiful nor great nor remarkable done, be it in your country (Greece), or here, or in another country known to us, *which has not long since been consigned to writing and preserved in our temples* [italics added] (cited in Sauneron, 1960, p. 114).

Even if Solon’s encounter is a Greek fabrication, it speaks volumes about their view of their civilization in relation to Egypt’s vast antiquity. It again raises the question: how much Egyptian knowledge did the Greeks collect, translate, and claim as their own after they conquered Egypt? How many ideas, theories, inventions did they appropriate without credit? The West’s intellectual debt to Africa, including the development of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, remains unknown in part because the erasure of its history began with invaders like the Greeks. However, the primary debt that concerns us here is that which Western Christianity owes to Alexandria as the cradle of antiblackness. Ironically, this history cannot be understood without viewing it within the context of coloniality and imperialism.

Greek Colonialism in Egypt

Under Greek rule, immigrants poured into Egypt from Greece and Greek colonies across the region with many choosing to reside in Alexandria. Under the Ptolemies, the city exceeded the notion of polis, according to the Greek definition, to become a cosmopolis that epitomized and asserted Hellenistic culture and civilization within a multiethnic milieu. Immigrants and travelers hardly exaggerated in claiming Alexandria possessed the best architecture, wine, spices, clothing, and theatres in the ancient world, as the Ptolemies spent lavishly on their capital (Erskine, 1995; Manning, 2012; Vrettos, 2010). The countryside, however, presents a sharp contrast to Greek and Egyptian urban life. The armies of the Ptolemies kept the Egyptian peasantry, the backbone of the nation's lucrative agricultural industry, in a perpetual state of oppression to generate the immense wealth from grain and papyri production for export throughout the Mediterranean world (Drake, 1990; Manning, 2012). Agriculture and gold mining made the Ptolemaic dynasts fabulously wealthy and helped them to maintain power. Nevertheless, encounters and interactions of Greek colonists with Egypt's ancient culture, and their rulers' embrace of the symbols of pharaonic tradition, changed them in ways they could neither anticipate nor prevent. St. Clair Drake describes the emergence of distinct Greco-Egyptian cultural traits as follows:

The Greeks living in Egypt became a very different group in speech and custom from the Greeks in Greece. They developed a *colon* mentality. The masses of the people were exploited Egyptian peasants. The ruling class evolved as a polyglot mixed group in which Egyptian Greeks predominated but which included some assimilated Egyptians [author's italics] (1990, p. 59).

Drake also notes the relief felt by Egyptians immediately after Alexander drove out their brutal Persian overlords. Tradition records the populace greeted him as a liberator

(Manning, 2012). Alexander's death less than two years later in 323 BCE, however, resulted in the ascension of the Ptolemies, followed by their campaign of Hellenization and economic exploitation. The Egyptian masses frequently rebelled during Ptolemaic rule. Each time, however, the armies of the Ptolemy dynasts suppressed the uprisings with Egyptian troops (Manning, 2012). The Hellenization efforts of the Ptolemies thus continued undeterred, and included with it a campaign to syncretize Egypt's sacred spiritual symbols with Greek "deities" (Drake, 1990). This acculturation/assimilation crusade, which further obscured and erased Egypt's past, provides a salient example of colonialist policies and practices in late antiquity. However, it is important to view these actions in the context of *assimilatory translation*, which Assmann defines as "translation to a dominating language/culture" (1996b, p. 34). Ironically, Greek colonization of Egypt appears to have reversed their relationship with Egyptians in terms of *assimilatory translation*. Assmann offers the following explanation:

Assimilatory or competitive translation is exemplified by the early instances of *interpretatio Graeca*, when Herodotus visited Egypt and formed the opinion that 'almost all the names of the gods came from Egypt to Greece.' This, he adds, is what the Egyptians say themselves. What Herodotus heard in conversing with Egyptian priests must have been the Greek names. They spoke to him in Greek using the hellenized names of the gods, speaking not of Re, Atum, Thoth, and Ptah, but of Helios, Zeus, Hermes, and Hephaestus. For them it did not matter whether these gods were called Re or Helios, Amun or Zeus, Thot or Hermes, as long as the same gods were recognized and addressed by these names. They claimed to be the first to recognize these gods, to find out their nature by establishing their mythology and theology, and to establish a permanent contact with them: *gnosis theon*, as this particular cultural activity is called. The *interpretatio Graeca* of the Egyptian gods turns out to be not a Greek but an Egyptian achievement. We have always assumed this translation to be a manifestation of the Greek spirit and its interpretative openness toward foreign civilizations. But it seems now much more probable that the translation of their national panthea into Greek suited in the first place the interest of the 'barbarians' (1996b, pp. 34-35).

Colonialism is never a benign process and so even with what Assmann describes as an “interpretative openness toward foreign civilizations,” violence remains the primary tool of foreign, occupation and settlement. Social divisions imposed by the Ptolemies to establish and maintain their rule created and fueled conflicts. Their definition of citizenship, for example, separated the free population into three broadly designated ethnic communities—Greeks, Jews, and Egyptians (Drake, 1987). While this arrangement generally permitted considerable personal freedom, the Ptolemies also sought to impose and maintain their version of an apartheid state by banning mixed marriages. The regulations proved unenforceable, were widely ignored, and thus did not prevent the city’s “admixed” population from steadily increasing. These Greek social divisions, however, raise the question of color prejudice in Egypt as possible social barriers. However, Drake informs us: “There is no evidence that skin-color assumed a status-conferral function in Egypt before the reign of the Ptolemies, but it seems likely that it took on such connotations during that period and in the period of Roman rule that followed” (1987, p. 302). This study contends that even if forms of colorism developed—and evidence shows some Greco-Egyptian and Roman writers described Africans in pejorative terms, skin color prejudices did not create skin color policies in Egypt during Greek or Roman rule (Drake, 1987).

Despite the apparent lack of overt skin color prejudice, this study still locates the cognitive seeds of antiblack discourses in Greco-Roman colonized Egypt for reasons further detailed below. The importance of this finding is it also enables scholars to recognize and analyze antiblackness as the product of two distinct forms of colonialism separated geographically by thousands of miles and temporally by more than fifteen centuries. The initial colonialism identified here occurred before the invention of

Christianity and was imposed by the Greeks and Romans. Those empires encompassed within their conquered territories the Levant (modern-day Syria, Turkey, Israel, Jordan, Palestine), and Egypt, the principal centers of early Christianity's growth and development (Crossan, 1999). Accordingly, given this study's aims, it is important to recognize the founding of the Christian cult by Jews in Judea in the first century CE took place within this distinct colonial matrix dominated by Greek culture and Roman law. Christianity thus constitutes the link between ancient Greco-Roman colonialism, with the early modern colonization of the Americas by Western Europeans, who conducted their campaigns of genocide and slavery in the name of the Christian god. The two also are connected by yet another irony: Western Christian imperialists (Spanish, Portuguese, English, Dutch, French), who colonized the Americas in the early modern era, claimed to be the heirs to the Roman Empire when in fact their ancestors had been conquered and colonized by the Romans (Williams, 2012).

Roman Colonialism in Egypt

The Romans entered Egypt three centuries after the Greeks invaded and conquered the ancient nation (Nimis & سيميد, 2004). With the Romans holding power over Judea and North Africa at the birth of Christianity, it is important to determine if or how their colonialist policies and practices impacted the development of antiblack discourses and rhetoric. More so than the Greeks, the Romans demonstrated a deep hostility to Africans. This animus escalated over time and geographic space because Africans comprised their main competitors in the early phases of their imperialist campaigns in the Mediterranean. Rome's greatest rival on its path to empire-building proved to be the maritime power of

Carthage. Founded in what is now modern Tunisia, by Phoenician colonists from the Levant in the late ninth century BCE, it soon became one of the wealthiest and most powerful states in the Mediterranean (Hoyos, 2015). As Carthaginian power and settlements grew throughout the region in the centuries that followed, conflicts over territory and trade with Rome caused a series of wars. The Punic Wars, as they have been dubbed by historians, lasted more than a century (264-146 BCE). Over the many campaigns fought on land and sea, Romans faced armies of African soldiers—including one led by Hannibal Barca (c. 287-181 BCE) that famously invaded Italy with war elephants among its forces. Rome's final victory in 146 BCE occurred with the sacking of Carthage—one of the most populous cities in antiquity—during which the Romans infamously massacred and enslaved its populace (Hoyos, 2015).

After Rome seized Egypt more than a century later, they ignited another war with Africans in Nubia. It resulted in their defeat by an African queen, Amanirenas, an event viewed here as proving even more decisive in determining Roman attitudes against Africans (Schwarz-Bart & Schwarz-Bart, 2001). Most significantly, it raises the question: what impact if any did centuries of conflicts with Africans have on the Roman perception of the color black? As indicated below, evidence shows basic Roman perceptions of the color black already differed somewhat from their Mediterranean neighbors.

In imperial Rome, the color black thus seems to have lost the beneficial aspect (fertility, fecundity, divinity) that it possessed in the East and the Middle East, in Egypt, and even in archaic Greece. The two adjectives that designate it, *ater* and *niger*, are laden with many pejorative meanings: dirty, sad gloomy, malevolent, deceitful, cruel, harmful, deathly. In the past it had been possible to take only *ater* in a bad sense; henceforth that was equally true for *niger*. Many authors go so far as to relate *niger* to the large family of the verb *nocere*, to harm. Light night (*nox*), black (*niger*) is harmful (*noxius*): admirable proof provided by the words themselves, which the authors of the Christian Middle Ages would use again to

evoke sin and construct a negative symbolism for the color [author's italics] (Pastoureau, 2008, p. 35).

The same laundry list of negative connotations for *niger* can be observed today under the entry for “black” in any English dictionary. *Niger* also enjoyed a second career as a pejorative when it appeared centuries later as an ethnic slur in the form of *negro* (Spanish and Portuguese) and *nigger* (Anglo-American English) to justify the Western European trade in enslaved Africans. In the hands of African Americans in the latter decades of the twentieth century it acquired a third career as *nigga*—a stunningly self-denigrating linguistic distinction without a difference. Unfortunately, a large segment of the African American population perversely views its usage as an act of defiance against white supremacy when in fact it recapitulates and reifies antiblack racism in its earliest linguistic form.

Roman perceptions of the color black, however, were more nuanced than the words *niger* and *ater* denote or suggest. Even when Romans clearly mocked and disparaged Ethiopians/Africans in visual, dramatic, or literary arts, a balanced approach still is needed to interpret each instance in context. Lloyd Thompson warns about the consequences of generalizations:

According to a widely held Roman view, the somatic ‘defects’ of the *Aethiops* somatic type comprised colour, hair, facial shape, and over-large breasts in the female of the *genus*. But the blue eyes, blonde hair (in the male sex, at any rate), and pale whiteness regarded as ‘typical’ of the central and northern Europeans were also perceived with some disfavor; so too were redness of skin and hair, and dark brown or bronzed complexions of the ‘Caucasian’ type. For these reasons it is important to avoid emphasizing Roman disparagement of black somatic traits while glossing over similar disparagement of those other types like the ‘nordic,’ as some have done (1989, p. 35).

Like the Greeks, Romans viewed themselves as the exemplars of humanity without equals.

Yet their imperialist policies did not require individuals in Rome or its colonies to adopt a

“Roman” identity. All, however, were required to make the appropriate signs of obeisance to the cult of the Roman emperor. Augustus Caesar (63 BCE – 14 CE) founded the imperial cult by deifying his predecessor Julius Caesar to establish the Julian dynasty (Winter, 2015). After this nakedly political move, he proclaimed himself *Imperator Caesar divi filius*, Commander Caesar son of the deified one. Ironically, Augustus imposed his cult on Roman Judea before introducing it in Rome. Its presence immediately ignited conflicts with the province’s predominantly Jewish population, especially after Augustus’s successor, the Roman Emperor Caligula (12-41 CE), ignored the previous policy of toleration and ordered his statue to be erected in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem (Fox, 1987; Johnson, 2012). His assassination in Rome in 41 CE prevented the order from being carried out, but violence ensued in Jerusalem, nevertheless (Bilde, 1978; Fox, 1987). Roman rule also changed social conditions in Alexandria as noted:

This issue of the ethnicity of the city had become increasingly problematic following the Roman reorganization of Alexandria and Egypt. The Romans imposed complex status differentials which were loosely based on ethnicity and residence and reinforced by different rates of taxation, so that to be 'Greek' and urban was to be of the highest status while to be 'Egyptian' and rural was to be of the lowest. Roman rule, therefore, associated the city with Hellenism, implicitly questioning the place of the Jewish community (Alston, 1997, p. 166).

In asserting their power, the Romans made clear distinctions between classical and contemporary Greeks (in Egypt and elsewhere), and viewed the latter as having lost the wisdom, cultural prestige, and fame of their ancestors. This policy followed the same tactics the Greeks previously had used against the Egyptians in colonizing Egypt (Nimis & س. يمينا, 2004). Like their Greek predecessors, such attitudes did not preclude them from appropriating Egyptian knowledge or that of the Greeks. However, another factor—fear of attacks by “Ethiopians” in Egypt—deeply impacted Roman Egyptian society and attitudes

about Africans. These threats were constant but intensified and continued throughout the period when a combination of Jews, Egyptians, Greco-Egyptians, and Roman-Egyptians in Alexandria invented the Christian cult from the Jewish faith. The failing campaigns of Rome south of Egypt in Nubia thus generated fear throughout the colony of the military prowess and intentions of their African neighbors. This toxic combination of fear and hostility thereby contributed to the denigration and demonization of Ethiopians during the crucial time of Christianity's initial conceptualization (Byron, 2002).

According to the Roman historian Strabo (c. 63 BCE – c. 23 CE), the war began after a Nubian attack on the city of Syene (modern-day Aswan). After retaking this city which marked southernmost limits of Roman Egypt, the Romans made the strategic mistake of invading Nubia to extend their imperial reach deep into the African interior. After initial successes, including the sacking of the major Nubian city of Napata, a Nubian (Merotic) *Candace* or Queen named Amanirenas, responded with a vengeance with her army and drove out the Romans (Mokhtar, 1990; Schwarz-Bart & Schwarz-Bart, 2001). Roman writers generally stereotyped women warriors as “masculine-looking.” In Amanirenas' case, they also added “ugly” to the list of pejoratives because her appearance was marred by the loss of an eye in battle. This formidable African Queen nevertheless forced them to sign a treaty in Rome in which they conceded territory and halted the usual financial tribute the empire coerced from bordering states as extortion to keep the peace (Schwarz-Bart & Schwarz-Bart, 2001). Eurocentric scholars, however, following the lead of Roman authors like Strabo, barely recognize or acknowledge the import of this African queen's victory over the Roman psyche.

Ethnic animus in Egypt increased in the three centuries of Roman rule during which Christians converted the masses of Alexandria's residents to their faith as a major first step toward converting/colonizing the entire Roman empire. During that period, the Romans began to identify some peoples south of Egypt as *Blemmyes* and *Nobatae*, although the term *Aithiops* remained in wide usage. The persistent threat of those two groups on Egypt's southern border undoubtedly contributed to Africans becoming the exemplars of evil in the Christian imagination. The historian Gay Byron identifies those African groups, real and imagined, as inspiration for the homophobic/homoerotic texts written by Christian monks in the Egyptian desert beginning in the fourth century CE. The Egyptian Christian founders of monasteries and monastic life reported lurid, nightmarish visions or encounters with "black" demons with such frequency they came to comprise a distinct genre of early Christian literature. As Byron points out: "In this literature Ethiopians—both men and women—personified the most powerful forms of sexual temptations and vices that challenged the austere and ascetic life of the monks" (2002, p. 85). This stereotyping of purported "Black" hypersexuality was picked up and amplified as part of the discursive suite of justifications for Western European Christians to denigrate, demonize, and enslave Africans a millennia later (Piedra, 1993; Sweet, 1997).

With the above research findings, this study contends Egypt's colonization by the Greeks proved central to the development of Judaism and Christianity in the centuries that followed, even after the Romans came into power in the Mediterranean. Greek ingenuity made Alexandria the intellectual magnet and crossroads where Pagans, Jews, and Christians met, interacted, and debated in ways that defined their differences and their beliefs. Jews comprised a major part of the population in Alexandria. Some scholars

believe it contained the largest Jewish community in the Jewish diaspora during the first century CE when Christianity began:

The Jewish community was large, and may have accounted for over 30% of the population. Some consider that there may have been some 180,000 Jews living in the city, with a population density of perhaps 45,000 per square kilometre, but others, while accepting that Jews may have made up nearly a third of the population, would set the absolute number of Jews at more like 100,000. The Jewish community was concentrated mainly in two of the five wards of the city, but there were Jews living in each of the other three wards, and Jews were integrated into all aspects of the city's social and economic life (Atkinson, 2006, p. 40).

Given Christianity's origins as a Jewish sect, the Jewish diaspora comprised the likely source of many early converts to Christianity. The extent of Jewish conversions and whether they constituted the majority of early Christians, nevertheless remains a subject of debate (Sanders, 1999; Stark, 1996).

Alexander and his army seized the Jewish homeland from the Persians prior to invading Egypt. After his death it too became part of the Hellenistic kingdom ruled by the Ptolemies from Alexandria. Prior to the Greek conquest and settlement, Jews had arrived in Egypt in significant numbers with the invading Persian armies and settled throughout the country. The Ptolemies also recruited Jewish soldiers and their families, while still other Jews migrated to Egypt from Judea for economic reasons (Seltzer, 1980). Most resided in Alexandria where Jews were present in every social stratum as merchants, bankers, generals, artisans, shepherds, writers, intellectuals, and theologians. Their embrace of the Greek language (Hebrew had long fallen out of common usage in Jewish communities) and the fact the majority assumed Greek names, indicates their assimilation into Greek culture (Seltzer, 1980).

The Jewish presence and influence in the cradle of antiblackness (as this study deems Alexandria) is addressed in the next chapter. It has two main objectives. The first is

to show how the monotheism of the Hebrew/Israelite/Judeans, as represented in the Hebrew Bible, supplied the framework for the construction of the “Other” in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in its originating form of the *believer/nonbeliever* dichotomy. The second is to determine if Western Christianity acquired any key components of its noted antiblack rhetoric and discourses directly from the Hebrew Bible aka *Old Testament*. To this end, it examines how the Hebrew Bible and Jewish beliefs informed the development of early Christian doctrine as embodied and expressed in the New Testament.

CHAPTER THREE:
MONOTHEISM, OTHERING, AND CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

Introduction

The previous chapter examined ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome—the complex and overlapping cultural matrices in which Christianity evolved—to determine if any of those imperial powers debased and dehumanized African peoples according to perceptions of “Otherness” based on differences in ethnicity and skin color. While it found instances of skin color prejudices none proved indicative of systemic “race(ism)” or proto-race(ism). This chapter now examines the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish faith for the same purpose. It seeks to answer the critical questions: how did the Hebrew/Israelite/Judeans view Africans? And did Christians find precedents in Jewish beliefs to portray Africans as the exemplars of evil?

The Hebrew Bible furnished the critical template for the development of Christianity and the Christian texts written and selected to compile the *New Testament* (Crossan, 1999; Johnson, 2012). In addition to composing and canonizing their own scriptures, the second and third centuries also mark the period when Christian scholars reconceptualized and reconfigured the Hebrew Bible as the *Old Testament*. They did so to appropriate its texts and link them directly to Christian New Testament writings. The theological need to establish their savior-god Jesus and the Christian faith as originating with the Hebrew god’s creation story in Genesis compelled early Christians to reinterpret Jewish scripture to replace the Jews as the “chosen people” of god’s covenant (Longenecker, 2007;

Vlach, 2009). This practice known as “supersessionism” enabled Christians to assert the universality of their god and their faith:

Supersession describes a situation where one entity, by virtue of its supposed superiority, comes to occupy a position that previously belonged to another, the displaced group becoming outmoded or obsolete in the process. The term thus properly applies to a completed process of (perceived) replacement. For this reason, it is most immediately applicable in a situation where “Christianity” and “Judaism” are—or are perceived to be—more or less separate entities and the church is recognizably non-Jewish (Donaldson, 2016, p. 7).

Christians deliberately set out to make their faith the “religion” god “revealed” to Abraham and Moses in the Hebrew Bible. They did so by tracing and linking its origins to the creation story in Genesis. By this means they replaced the Jews as god’s “chosen people”—the sole beneficiaries of god’s covenant with humankind as related by Abraham and Moses. Supersessionism also validated the Christian claim god commanded them to take dominion over the world through either voluntary or forced conversions of non-believers or their extermination (Assmann, 2010; Kirsch, 2004; McGrath, 2012). This strategic appropriation and re-formulation of Jewish monotheism ultimately proved destructive of social relations in the ancient world.

This study shows Christians, not Jews, ruptured the pre-existent ancient system of *cultural translation*. They did so by using methods of self-identification and self-distancing that originated with Jewish monotheism, but that the Jews were powerless to impose on “Others.” The discussions that follow show precisely how Christians constructed the Christian “Self” which discursively demonized African as “Others” by pejoratively labeling them *Pagans, non-believers, infidels, devil-worshippers* (Assmann, 1996a; Kirsch, 2004; Schwartz, 1997). This dehumanizing rhetoric proved especially destructive as early Christians also added dark skin color as an overlay to the Hebrew monotheist

template of *believer/non-believer* to make non-believer an analogue of blackness, and indicia of sinfulness and idolatry. As the evidence shows, the catechistic discourses early Christian theologians devised to construct the cult's identity and ethos allegorized, symbolized, and stereotyped Africans as the embodied exemplars of godlessness, demonism, and evil. (Byron, 2002; Grimes, 2020; Hood, 1994). The discussions that follow will show how and why this toxic mixture of monotheism and antiblackness became formulaic in Christian pedagogy and didactics at the beginning of its history.

To document these findings, the discussions will illuminate critical distinctions between Christian monotheists and their Jewish predecessors to show how Christianity bears the primary responsibility for the destruction of *cultural translation* in the ancient world. Early Christians deliberately abandoned the ancient practice in pursuit of their mission to eliminate Paganism. The theo-political justifications for their actions could not be clearer: Christianity's "one-true-god" requires the faithful to submit a strict and uncompromising monotheism. The need to adhere to this divine commandment makes the notion of *cultural translation* and syncretism with Pagan "divinities" impossible. Hence this chapter begins with an analysis of monotheism. It does so to show how Jewish conceptualization of the *believer/nonbeliever* asymmetrical binary is the precursor of the Christian theory/praxis of "Othering" previously examined. It concludes with an investigation of the Hebrew Bible's descriptions and depictions of Africans and their later use by Christian and Muslim exegetes to justify antiblack racism and lifetime and hereditary racial slavery.

One-God-ism, Believer/non-Believer, and Self/Other

“If one were to survey the religious ideas that have made the greatest impact on human history, among them would inevitably be included monotheism, the idea that there is only one true god” (McGrath, 2012, p. 1).

It is important, then, to identify in what ways the West is deeply Christian, in what ways Christianity is Western as if in its very purpose, and in what ways, through this Christian Westernity, an essential dimension of monotheism is put into play, quite intact. (Nancy, 2003, p. 40).

In contemporary usage the term/concept *monotheism*—or *one-god-ism* as this study also refers to it—denotes the doctrine and belief that there is only *one true god* and that all other beliefs are false, idolatrous, and irredeemably evil. It typically pertains to belief in the god of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, as purportedly revealed in the Hebrew Bible (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). However, neither the word *monotheism* nor its purported opposite *polytheism* existed in the English language until the seventeenth century (McGrath, 2012). The ancient peoples whose beliefs scholars anachronistically label as such would neither have recognized nor subscribed to them. In fact, even though the god of the Hebrew Bible could not be any more explicit in demanding “his” followers exclusive worship or declaring the consequences of their failures to comply: “what is meant by monotheism today is not necessarily what early Jews or Christians believed” (McGrath, 2012, p. 4). In addition, even a cursory review of ancient creation stories leads unbiased scholars to the inescapable conclusion the idea of a universal divine spirit did not originate with the ancient Hebrew/Israelite/Judeans nor was it exclusive to them despite the “modern” tendency to view the concept in such absolutes.

The discussion that follows relies extensively on studies by Theodore J. Lewis (2020), Frank Moore Cross (1997), Mark S. Smith (2001; 2010a, 2010b), Thomas

Thompson (1992, 1995, 1999), Israel Finklestein and Neal Asher Silberman (2001), Jan Assmann (1996a, 1996b, 1997, 2010, 2018), James F. McGrath (2012), Rodney Stark (2003), Thomas Römer (2015b, 2018), Karin Andriolo (1973), and Shlomo Sand (2009, 2012). Their work reveals a complex history of diverse cultural contexts in which monotheism emerged and spread among the ancient Hebrew/Israelites/Judaeans. Most of this information has yet to penetrate public education and consciousness. Nevertheless, these evidence-based reinterpretations of the Jewish past furnish a radical revisioning of monotheism that significantly changes how the bible, and its history should be viewed. In part, these recent studies reveal how a “tribal” god—the local tutelary deity of a small Near Eastern cultural group variously known as Hebrews/Israelites/Judaeans—became by *fiat* the creator-god of the universe and ruler over all creation according to the Hebrew Bible (Andriolo, 1973; Römer, 2015b).

Although the authors cited above do not describe their work as such, these recent studies provide a much-needed genealogy of the myth of monotheism. Here the term genealogy is used in the Foucauldian sense. It thus refers to wading through vast amounts of source materials with a calculated critical suspicion toward them as objects of knowledge and knowledge-production and the recognition the ideas they exemplify are not stable but subject to changing interpretations as are the terms used to convey and represent them (Foucault, 1977). Rather than an endless search for origins, *per se*, a genealogical method focuses on what is singular, distinct, and unusual about the material, and refuses to engage in absolutes in its interpretation (Foucault, 2001; Gutting, 1990). This study follows this prescription in that the forthcoming discussion does not find or assert an absolute

“truth” about monotheism but seeks only to interpret it within the contexts in which it is encountered.

Historicizing Monotheism

This investigation therefore analyzes monotheism’s historical impact and consequences as a “belief” that developed and changed over time. Hence it prioritizes its historicity over theological claims of its transcendent truth (i.e., the existence of a supreme being separate from the cosmos and yet solely responsible for its creation). It thus classifies the concept as a myth and the myth as a concept. Accordingly, it takes the view the authors of the Hebrew Bible composed a narrative in which their god revealed “himself” and “his” specific modality of monotheistic worship only to “his” chosen people, the ancient Hebrews/Israelites/Judeans, to serve a specific psychosocial function. That function, it is argued here, aimed to establish both the identity of the Jewish people as a nation and the boundaries of their “tribal” homeland or nation-state (Sand, 2009, 2012).

Accordingly, this conception of monotheism situates it within a typical pattern of ancient myths that posit the existence of tutelary deities—gods who guide and protect specific peoples and places (Römer, 2015b). This view of the discursive origins of the Jewish/Christian/Muslim god, the god of Abraham and Moses, finds further support from historical and archaeological studies that show Yahweh (Jehovah)—the god who purportedly revealed himself with that name—probably originated in southern Canaan. Evidence points to Teiman, Edom, or Midian, where “he” was known prior to the composition of the Hebrew Bible as the tribal god of one or more local nomadic groups, such as the *Sashu* and *Hapiru/apiru* as a storm god and god of war (Römer, 2015b). The

introduction of the Yahweh mythos occurs principally through two biblical narratives in which god speaks directly to Abraham (Genesis 17:2-14) and Moses (Exodus 3: 2-22) to reveal “himself” to them by name. With these instances and encounters “he” singles out the ancient Hebrews from all other peoples in the world to form a covenant.

The historical timing of these events leads some scholars to speculate the “chosen people” myth that proclaims and validates a purported unique relationship with god addressed deep-seated physical insecurities and sociopolitical anxieties of the Hebrew/Israelite/Judean people. The reality of their victimization for centuries from multiple invasions and conquests by powerful neighboring states may have created a profound psychological need for an all-powerful father-god figure who would in effect liberate and protect them from their many enemies in exchange for absolute loyalty and devotion (Assmann, 2018; Sand, 2009, 2012; Thompson, 1999). This analysis thus points to the integral relationship of the covenant myth with the identity of the Jewish people and their “promised” land—two ideas that became inseparable in Jewish theology and history. In the post-Holocaust twentieth century they proved determinative in the founding of “modern” Israel and the formulation of its vision of a Jewish homeland (Sand, 2009, 2012).

Unsurprisingly, the fact Jewish monotheism is a product of the vast multicultural literary matrices of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Greece remains controversial and little known in the public square. This lack of knowledge primarily is due to generations of monotheists engaging in the deliberate obscuration and erasure of inconvenient and contradictory facts to protect their theological beliefs and imperatives. Absolute submission to the Hebrew god compels the erasure of one-god-ism’s pre-biblical past because it contradicts reified claims of “his” exclusive revelation to “his” people.

Christians, however, could not claim this history as their own until they first usurped the role of god's chosen people from the Jews—the intended recipients and beneficiaries of the Abrahamic-Mosaic covenant with god as conveyed in biblical and extrabiblical Jewish texts. As noted, early Christians performed this historical sleight-of-hand through a process of supersessionism whereby they claimed the Hebrew Bible as their own holy book and then translated, canonized, and re-presented it as the *Old Testament* and the prophetic revelation of the coming of Jesus (Biddick, 2003; Donaldson, 2016). Muslims, on the other hand, achieved a similar objective by declaring their prophet Muhammad brought a new dispensation from god in the form of Islam, not as a supersessionism phenomenon as some Muslims insist, but as a continuation of the purported Jewish and Christian covenants with Abraham, Moses, and Jesus respectively—figures Muslims also regard as the prophets of god (Reinking, 2005). According to Islamic scholar Tariq Ramadan:

The teachings of Islam, as the last established monotheistic religion, make clear that the religious traditions that preceded it will continue to exist, and that the original unity of humankind, in its essence, is expressed even in the diversity of religions, civilizations, cultures, languages and nations. Diversity is the will of God, and it is incumbent upon humankind to transform it into a positive factor in its progression towards the good (2017, p. 60).

Ramadan's declaration about Islam hardly comports with well-established facts. The history of Muslim animus against so-called Pagans, like that of their Christian co-monotheists, is well documented. Moreover, the forced conversion to Islam of millions of Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Near East and North Africa, after invasions by Arab/Muslim jihadists in the seventh century, clearly contradicts the hyperbolic notion of Muslim respect for the "diversity of religions, civilizations, cultures, languages and nations" claimed by Ramadan (Bostom, 2005; Fregosi, 1998). In other words, like their Christian counterparts, Muslims interpreted the 'will of god' as a dictate to convert,

enslave, or destroy non-believers. They even oppressed their co-monotheists, Jews and Christians, in the societies in which they ruled (Fernández-Morera, 2016a). Thus, like Christians, they interpreted and applied their mutual god's threats of violence against transgressors to other monotheist cults despite their shared origins.

Refusal to obey god's laws is not an option available to monotheists. Either "believers" destroy the faithless and those who refuse to adhere to orthodox beliefs or face dire consequences from a vengeful god who proclaims "his" jealous nature along with a threat to murder "his" followers for any insubordination or resistance:

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me (Exodus 20:5).

This monstrous edict vows divine punishment for generations of innocent victims of "his" wrath. It is preceded by what is perhaps the most tyrannical declaration of its type in recorded history: "Thou shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). Support for this commandment also appears in Leviticus, Isaiah, and Psalms, where god's faithful are ordered to destroy what are referred to as graven images or idols as well as the people who worship them. In obeying this decree to obliterate the tell-tale evidence of the existence of other gods and the gods of "Others," monotheists also attempted, yet failed, to erase the inconvenient facts of its conceptual and genealogical roots in the very Pagan cultures they detested and despised. Before and after god published his strict commandments on stone tablets given to Moses (Deuteronomy 10:2-4), biblical scriptures explicitly depict the ancient Hebrews/Israelites/Judaeans engaging in the same so-called Pagan (polytheist) beliefs and practices as other peoples of their time (Smith, 2001).

Early Christians following in the theological-ideological footprints of their Jewish forebears also imagined and posited monotheism as a unique belief system unparalleled in human history. They informed their new cult with the idea its purported revelation by god made its conception absolutely pure and unquestionably true (McGrath, 2012). Hence as the authors of the Old Testament intended and the authors of the New Testament confirmed, its divine revelation made it *sui generis* and beyond the influence or contamination of humankind—especially the views and beliefs of any other cult(ure) prior to or contemporary with the Hebrew Bible. This reification of it as unique and exclusive lies at the heart of the claims from its believers about one-god-ism’s infallibility. It also animates and fuels their zealotry and fanaticism. This belief thus turned its adherents into crusaders, inquisitors, misogynists, enslavers, and genocidal mass murderers to enact god’s commands.

Accordingly, this study finds a violent obsession with purity and exclusivity distinguishes the later Jewish/Christian/Muslim versions of monotheism from the earlier Hebrew/Israelite/Judean concept from which it evolved (Römer, 2015b). That critical distinction also marks its separation from earlier and contemporaneous monotheistic beliefs evident within the massive corpus of creation stories from ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Greece. The recognition of distinct monotheist themes and frameworks in non-Jewish literary traditions provides a more accurate view of the Hebrew Bible as a repository of reworked and redacted creation stories, histories, hymns, and epic poems gleaned from multiple sources, some of which even predate the historical appearance of the ancient Hebrews (Römer, 2015a, 2018). For example, many so-called traditional African beliefs—the typical targets of abuse from monotheist fanatics throughout history,

and which in many instances significantly pre-date ancient Hebrew monotheism—commonly conceptualize a *supreme being* within their cosmologic traditions:

Some African cosmogonies envision the Supreme God as the highest and most powerful being, prior to everything else and of unknown origins or self-genesis. A remote or creator god is a common trope in African creation stories. Narratives from Nigeria to Zimbabwe depict an original deity who observes the creative process rather than participating in it directly, leaving the generation and continued maintenance of the world to lesser divinities. It is common to see such a god as being far removed from human affairs: for this reason, lesser deities are instead regularly petitioned for succor (Olupona, 2014, p. 21)

This description locates African cosmologies within the broad category of Paganism existent throughout the ancient world. Their prior and contemporaneous existence with the advent of the Abrahamic monotheisms, justified their systematic excoriation and condemnation by Christians and Muslims, who deliberately referenced them in their enslaving campaigns to capture African people for global commodification. (Azumah, 2001; Chidester, 2013, 2014; García-Arenal & Glazer-Eytan, 2019; Segal, 2001). Wielding the blunt instrument of one-god-ism, they engaged in a ruthless competition to enslave or convert Africans and others in their efforts to dominate the world. This monotheist juggernaut deracinated and eradicated Pagan beliefs despite the fact the monotheist cults borrowed much of their content and literary style from Paganism (MacDonald, 2000; Römer, 2015b, 2018; Thompson, 1999, 2009). Pagans not only conceived the basic idea of “one god” prior to the authors of the Hebrew Bible, they also typically subjected monotheism to various analyses and critiques as they did with all myths and philosophical concepts they devised or encountered. Pagan perspicacity in such matters, however, generally went unacknowledged by their Christian critics who found any Pagan thought abhorrent. They thus pretended to reject it while cannibalizing, assimilating, and

redeploying key elements of Paganism's immense corpus of philosophical, medical, scientific, literary, and spiritual texts and treatises (Fox, 1987; O'Donnell, 2015).

This study thus refutes the idea belief in a universal god originated with the ancient Hebrews, or that the bible itself is a singular creation independent of the vast literary traditions of antiquity. It finds both assertions to be postbiblical inventions of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars and characterizes them as evidence of hubris and wishful thinking. As the bible historian Thomas Thompson points out:

It is well known that the concept of a universal and transcendent divine spirit—certainly defining the soul of monotheism, if not characteristic of monotheism itself or of its more exclusive and polemical forms—is found in very early texts. It is the universalist and transcendental qualities that these widely variant traditions share in common. While the Hebrew and Greek traditions developed respectively in the directions of the forms of a more or less personal monotheism, the Assyrian/Aramaic and Babylonian traditions maintained inclusive hierarchical pyramids for their theological metaphor (1995, p. 62).

Thompson's reference to the "more exclusive and polemical forms" of monotheism identifies the key characteristics that distinguish the later Jewish/Christian/Muslim versions of it from earlier variants found in the ancient world. It must be noted, however, the process of disseminating and instantiating the Abrahamic monotheist code took centuries even within Jewish communities. The reasons are as complex as biblical monotheism itself. Perhaps the situation is explained best by the fact monotheistic statements appear rather infrequently in the bible. Similar to the narrative of Noah's Curse, they acquire a greater significance and prominence in postbiblical literature and thought (Smith, 2001). That is not to say the early Hebrews did not aim to establish a standard and common belief in one-god-ism, but that such beliefs need to be investigated within the contexts of their timing and explicit meaning, purpose, and instantiation in Hebrew culture (Smith, 2001; Smith, 2010b).

Like other peoples in antiquity Jews originally believed in many gods (polytheism, as the misleading term describes it). They also dwelled within a vast cultural milieu that undoubtedly contributed to their basic conception of divinity (Finklestein & Silberman, 2001; Smith, 2001; Smith, 2010b; Thompson, 1999). Numerous passages in the Hebrew Bible in fact show early Israelites/Judaeans did not immediately reject the existence of other gods. Even after making their exclusive covenant with Yahweh, other gods of older provenance continued to be recognized and revered as evidenced in the scriptures (Smith, 2001; Smith, 2010b). In fact, biblical scholar Mark Smith shows even during the development and subsequent expression of the Hebrew Bible's doctrine of "one-god-ism," *cultural translatability* remained the central mode and mechanism of cross-cultural engagement in ancient societies including that of the Jews:

(1) in keeping with its scale and relatively local relations with other polities, Israel deployed a form of local translatability during the period of the monarchies, if not earlier; (2) this translatability took the form of a worldview that could recognize other national gods as valid for Israel's neighbors just as Yahweh was for Israel; (3) Israel's loss of translatability represented an internal development that corresponds with its experience of the initial stage of the international age emerging under the Assyrians and Babylonians; (4) the conceptual shift in this period involved a sophisticated hermeneutic that retained older formulations of translatability within expressions of non-translatability and monotheism; (5) the hermeneutic of theism within ancient Israel and Yehud was an ongoing intellectual project involving various forms of textual harmonization (2010b, p. 10).

Smith's comment furnishes a vital baseline for identifying and tracking the differences between early Hebrew monotheism and changes in its conception prior to the emergence of the Jewish-Christian sect in the first century CE. His analysis also underscores two points made earlier: (1) the Hebrew faith emerged within and was deeply informed by existent Pagan cosmologies; and (2) the limitations of Israel's power and autonomy in relation to its neighbors constrained its conception of monotheism and restricted its ability

to disseminate or impose its doctrine within its own borders let alone beyond them. Smith further states the notion of an uncompromising monotheism appears as a product of “the late-biblical and post-biblical reception of the Bible than generally the Bible itself (much less ancient Israel) when it comes into focus” (2010b, p. 10).

This finding places the emergence of a strict and uncompromising form of monotheism far closer in time to the origins of Christianity. Moreover, Smith’s conclusion also comports with this study’s position the Christian variant of monotheism, not its Hebrew source, is the origin of the Self/Other theory praxis. Smith’s research also exposes another irrefutable fact about monotheism—none of the major faiths that promulgate it adhere to it in its strictest sense. One-god-ism requires exclusive devotion to a single deity who demands “his” followers violently reject all others. Yet, as Rodney Stark, a scholar of comparative religions, explains:

although monotheism means belief in only one God, in none of the great monotheisms—Judaism, Christianity, or Islam—is there only *one* supernatural *entity*. In each, God is surrounded by a cloud of beings ... This necessarily limits monotheism since, in order for a divine being to be rational and benign, it is necessary for the religious system to postulate the existence of other, if far lesser, beings. That is, *evil* supernatural beings such as Satan are essential to the most rational conception of divinity. Thus Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are ***dualistic monotheisms***—each teaches that, in addition to a supreme divine being, *there also exists at least one evil, if less powerful, supernatural being*. As Jeffrey Burton Russell put it, “Dualism posits two opposite powers of good and evil, attributing evil to the will of a malign spirit.” The principle of dualism reflects the necessity either to conceive of a single divine essence that is above the question of good or evil by virtue of being remote from any exchanges with human (the Tao), or to admit the existence of more than one supernatural being (author’s emphasis) (2003, pp. 10-11).

Smith’s meaning is clear. Monotheists ostensibly must perform a kind of theological hocus pocus to defend their god from bearing any responsibility for the existence of evil in the world. The belief “he” is not accountable for the ills that beset “his” human creations—

whether attributable to their own actions or otherwise—has engendered a host of questions such as: What kind of god presides over so much human suffering and death that appears unnecessary and unwarranted? What kind of god allows innocent children to die from horrific diseases, child abuse, or wanton slaughter from war? What kind of god allows the slaughter of countless millions in “his” name in endless “holy wars” that plague humanity? These questions and others along similar lines have confounded the one-true god’s most zealous adherents for centuries. The explanations they offer typically identify Satan, a purported fallen angel of god, as the prime culprit and source of evil in the world. According to his rabbinic, priestly, and Islamic interlocutors, Satan bears the ultimate and absolute responsibility for sin and wickedness because he seduces humanity into disobeying god’s laws (Baker, 2008; Stokes et al., 2016).

The attribution of evil, sin, idolatry, and godlessness to Satan and his realm makes him the most infamous scapegoat for all that is wrong in the world. To emphasize his ungodly, bestial, and hedonistic nature, Christians frequently depicted him with goat-like features derived from the Pagan figure known as Pan. However, early in the Christian era, Satan and his minions also are “Ethiopianized” (blackened) (Brakke, 2001; Brotóns Merino, 2018; Rothschild, 2019). As biblical scholar María José Brotóns Merino puts it: “In Early Christian Literature, particularly in the Epistle of Barnabas (4:10 and 20:1), the Devil is named *ὁ Μέλας*, an appellative translated as “the Black” (2018, p. 1). This eponymous blackening of Satan as personified evil inspired Origen of Alexandria and other early church fathers to disseminate and popularize the analogic form of blackening evil as a standard Christian catechistic practice, as shown in forthcoming discussions (Byron, 2002; Hood, 1994; Washington, 1984).

When flipping the script, however, for the purpose of exposing the Hebrew god's demonstrated misanthropy as recorded in "his" words in sacred biblical texts, what explanations ensue that can possibly justify or dismiss "his" own *Satanic* behavior? What happens, for example, if we ask why this god allowed the enslavement of millions of Africans and the genocidal extermination of millions of Amerindians in "his" name? Western Christians initiated these atrocities with the blessings of Catholic and Protestant church leaders. To defend the holocaust of Christian unholy wars conducted across the globe under the rubric of western conquest and colonization Europeans cite their authority directly from the Hebrew Bible (Prior, 1999). Any questioning of the Hebrew god's demands for the conversion or total eradication of non-believers thus typically elicits answers that fall back on the useful trope of *god's will*. Although the expression frequently explains or excuses violence in the world, it also remains inscrutable to humanity according to theologians. Hence in one sense god's existence is inextricably linked to "his" teleological determination of the affairs of humankind and their historic destiny, while in another "he" appears aloof, unconcerned, and perhaps even impotent in the face of absolute evil in the world (Romer, 2013).

The problem of evil also is rendered moot by completely separating the one god from "his" creation. "His" omnipotence and omniscience therefore are rendered by monotheists as disembodied and disconnected from the universe unlike that of the cosmogenic belief systems existent before and after the formulation of Hebrew monotheism (Assmann, 1996a, 1996b). Pagan cosmologies conceive the forces or entities of creation as *indwelling*, i.e., embodying and animating the cosmos. The Pagan belief that so-called deities gave birth to the universe and the life in it from their own *being* evidences

a fundamental difference with the monotheist creation account (Assmann, 1996a). Atum, an ancient Egyptian god (*neter*), provides a salient case in point. Considered the first of the gods (whose “maleness” nevertheless marks him as a later creator-figure in the Egyptian myth-cycle), Atum makes his earliest appearance in the *Pyramid Texts*. Viewed as the oldest “scriptures” in history, the Pyramid Texts date from approximately 2400 BCE and thus pre-date the composition of *Genesis* in the Hebrew Bible by nearly two thousand years. (Hornung, 1996; Johnston, 2008; Verner, 2013). According to the myth, Atum first created himself out of chaos by uttering his own name, and then out of loneliness he created the living world and the other Egyptian gods (*neteru*) by masturbating (or in some variants of the myth by spitting them out of his mouth) (Assmann, 2001; Hornung, 1996).

The Hebrew god’s creation story in *Genesis* is the basis for the construction of the monotheist concept that informs Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. As noted, its composition in approximately the early sixth century BCE exhibits numerous influences from earlier literary sources (Graves & Patai, 1983; Hoffmeier, 1983; Johnston, 2008; Smith, 2001; Walton, 2008). Moreover, despite the *sui generis* claims of his adherents, the Jewish-Christian-Muslim god did not conceive and reveal himself *ex nihilo* like Atum. Instead “his” identity is derivative. Biblical authors conceptualized and constructed it within the framework of the widely known set of pre-existent and culturally translatable spiritual exemplars that permeated the ancient world. This traditional matrix of creation stories that demonstrably influenced ancient Hebrew writers may also have included traces of the theology of Akhenaten, a ruler of Egypt’s Eighteenth Dynasty, circa 1351-1334 BCE, whom some scholars credit with being the inventor of the earliest recorded form of strict monotheism (Assmann, 1997; Hoffmeier, 2015).

Monotheism as Holocaust

Whatever the mix of cosmologic traditions contributed to its conception, the strict form of one-god-ism that evolved within Christianity and later inspired Islam is viewed here as inherently violent and dehumanizing. This finding is based on monotheism's categorization of all other belief systems and their believers as false, wicked, idolatrous, and thus punishable. The evidence of centuries of holy wars, inquisitions, pogroms, forced conversions, and internecine conflicts from the enactment of this doctrine is irrefutable (Kirsch, 2004; Schwartz, 1997). This ongoing history of seemingly endless violence and mass murder in the name of the one god begins with the ancient Hebrews as related in the story of their purported escape from Egypt. In the *Exodus* story—for which no archaeological evidence exists—the Hebrew god calls for his chosen people to exterminate the masses of Canaanites for their purported sin of being idol-worshippers and to clear the way for the Israelites to seize and occupy the Land of Canaan:

¹⁶ But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth:

¹⁷ But thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee: (Deuteronomy 20:16-17)

This biblical authorization of genocide against non-believers inextricably links belief in one-god-ism to land, and land to ethnic identity. Centuries after the rise of Western Christianity it led to the propagandistic and self-serving depiction of invader-settler-colonialists as holy crusaders carrying out god's commandment to Christianize the world (see Matthew 28:19-20 and Mark 16:15-18). By casting all other belief systems into the category of “false”—which then becomes a cognate for Pagan, heretical, blasphemous, idolatrous, demonic, atheistic and a host of other negative characteristics—one-true-god-

ism therefore instantly demonizes and thereby dehumanizes all non-believers (Assmann, 1996a, 2010).

This study contends the dehumanization of non-believers/infidels stems directly from the “chosen people” mythos the one-true-god purportedly established as the fundamental precept of “his” doctrine. It views the notion the one-true-god chose his people and not the other way around as integral to the conception and social construction of the “Other.” This act of being “chosen” by god thus defined and determined the identity of the Hebrew/Israelite/Judeans and their land based on a criterion of inclusion/exclusion that placed all non-believers (so-called *goyim*) outside god’s covenant. It did so by making heredity in the form of birth by a Jewish mother the essential requirement for membership in god’s faithful flock (Andriolo, 1973). This “genetic” lineage or bloodline used to determine the identity of the Jewish people rests entirely on an imagined genealogy derived from Adam and Eve, the purported first human beings. Viewed in the strict terms of inclusion/exclusion, this lineage ultimately distinguished the Jewish people from all other nations by means of a series of bifurcations including the valences true/false, good/evil, light/dark, white/black (Andriolo, 1973; Assmann, 1997). Known as sources of spiritual metaphors and symbolism, these asymmetrical binaries were mapped onto to the original template of *believer/non-believer* (Jew/Gentile) to produce an endless series of positive and negative attributes: *believer* = good, white, light, bright, beautiful, civilized, et cetera; *non-believer* = evil, black, dark, gloomy, ignorant, ugly, savage, et cetera.

As this study shows, the elemental formula of black = evil, although initially conceived without a human referent, invokes, and convenes a dehumanizing and deadly reality when later applied to African peoples by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. For

this reason, this study finds the most significant overlay of *difference* on the *believer/non-believer* template—one that profoundly affected the destiny of millions living under hegemonic one-god-ism regimes—is *skin color*. Hence the initial association of Africans with evil, as defined by one-god-ism, occurred through analogies and metaphorical tropes about the blackness of sin conveyed through biblical commentary and exegesis and other standard discursive practices in Christian hermeneutics and didacticism as shown later (Byron, 2002). The reception and re-construction of a strict and uncompromising monotheism in Christianity resulted in the manifestation of an extreme form of social distancing—the application of which once they came to power engendered and fueled a relentless crusade to convert, enslave, or exterminate all “infidels” depending on the circumstances.

Christian “Othering” thus facilitated the invention and imposition of a social structure of inclusion/exclusion in which non-believers were permanently consigned to a status and condition akin to social death. (Patterson, 1982). It therefore served to actualize, inculcate, and embody the category and identity of god’s chosen people, as *believers*, as totally distinct from the rest of humanity. Earlier and contemporary so-called polytheistic nations (Egypt, Babylon, Canaan,) organized and structured their societies based on caste (priest, soldier, farmer, scribe) rather than cult membership (De Blois et al., 2019; Starr, 1991). The emergence of a form of social stratification based exclusively on membership in a single cult (i.e., Christendom) required the imposition of one-god-ism in the form of the essentialized *believer/non-believer* dichotomy. Hence this study contends monotheism’s *believer/non-believer* paradigm constitutes the original template for the social construction of the Self/Other thesis/praxis—which now serves principally to divide

the West from the rest of the world. It argues Christian doctrine constitutes the source of the invention of essentialized categories of human differences, differences previously unimagined within the Pagan world's system of *cultural translatability*. Consequently, it finds the Self/Other social dichotomy is primarily a product of Western Christian thought and not the shared, natural heritage and inheritance of humankind.

Ontological distinctions between believers and non-believers and their social reification are viewed here as necessary conditions for the existence and survival of the rigid monotheism Christians devised and promulgated. Given how "Othering" serves to define "Self," and monotheism's efforts to define human identity based on its concept of divinity, this study argues belief in one-true-god-ism is where the search for the cognitive roots of white supremacy and antiblackness should commence. Accordingly, it centers the origins of antiblackness within the specific sociohistorical contexts of Christian monotheism, the evidence for which has been obscured and neglected for various reasons including the fact Christians and Muslims continue to compete in seeking to convert millions of peoples to their respective faiths.

Although this study views one-god-ism as inherently violent and dehumanizing, its main objective is to locate and explicate that violence in terms of how it structures and informs the social construction of antiblack racism and "white" Christian supremacy. The intent therefore is to show racial/ethnic violence is not incidental to Western Christian identity, but formative and structural in Christian self-invention. Beginning with the cult's inception in the first century of the common era, Christians introduced, disseminated, and reified, the most historically significant and socio-politically powerful conceptualization of antiblackness in the world. For centuries thereafter whiteness/antiblackness has

critically shaped and impacted the Western European imagination as they constructed their own sociohistorical identity, their place in world history, and most notably their views of non-European, non-Christian “Others.” With the critical and decisive role of monotheism in mind, this discussion now turns to the Hebrew Bible to determine when, where, why, and how its texts served to blacken African peoples for theo-political purposes. The following analysis thus sets the stage for identifying the Christian intellectuals and theologians who inspired and guided that effort.

The African Image in the Hebrew Bible

The compilation of the earliest Biblical texts date roughly from the same period as the epic poems of Homer (Finklestein & Silberman, 2001; Schniedewind, 2004). They also generally began their lives as ancient oral traditions prior to being compiled and written on stone, clay, leather, and wood—modes and materials that comport with the way early Greek literature, and literary culture in general evolved out of orality (Schniedewind, 2004; Thompson, 1999). Stories memorized and recited for centuries would be recorded first, that is transferred from mortal human brains—as they say in West Africa: “when a Griot dies a library burns to the ground”—into a seemingly permanent means of preservation and storage. Biblical literature unites Jews, Christians, and Muslims in what some scholars call the Abrahamic tradition (a rubric that remains a subject of debate) (Finkelstein & Römer, 2014; Hughes, 2012). The compilation and transfer of these oral traditions into written texts is roughly dated as follows: “the Bible—that is the collection of canonized books of the Bible as we have come to know them—was produced between the fifth century B.C.E. and the fourth century C.E.” (Schniedewind, 2004, p. 18). However, as noted, these

anthologized and canonized ancient oral traditions had been circulating in the Near East for centuries (Römer, 2015a, 2015b, 2018).

Christians view the Old Testament as foundational to the New Testament and the revelation of Christian theology. Its centrality to the construction and formation of the Christian canon and its theology therefore means it must be examined as a possible source document for early Christian ideas about the “blackness” of African peoples. The word Cushite (or Cushite) appears as the most commonly used term in the Hebrew Bible to describe African people (Sadler Jr, 2005). The Hebrew/Israelite/Judeans used it specifically to label and distinguish a specific African group—the same group Homer nicknamed “burnt-faced.” Consequently, the biblical terms “Cushite” (*Kushi*) and “Cush” (*Kush*) are thoroughly examined below. The following discussion thus examines the treatment of so-called “Blacks” in the Hebrew Bible. It relies primarily on the research of three biblical scholars for its analysis and findings: Abraham Melamed, Rodney S. Sadler, Jr., and David M. Goldenberg. Although taking different approaches to explicate this issue, each writer nevertheless concludes biblical authors did not conceptualize or construct a theological or ethnological view of Cushites (Africans) that in any way “othered” or denigrated them based on skin color. Abraham Melamed states his position thusly:

A principle finding in this research is that like so many other components of Jewish rabbinical culture, the image of the black as inferior other took shape in the writings of the Sages. As we will show later, *such an image is almost entirely absent from the Bible*. While undoubtedly there were late Hellenistic-Roman influences, the image was an authentic product of rabbinical culture and as such it had far-reaching influence, notably on the image of the black as inferior and other, and on the image of skin color in general in Jewish cultural history, down to our own day [italics added] (2003, p. 3).

Melamed’s remarks require considerable unpacking before moving on. First, like Sadler, Melamed concludes the Hebrew Bible contains no references to Cushites (the typological

African in the Israelite/Judean imagination) that denigrate them as “Other” based on pigmentation or other physical characteristics. Melamed is unequivocal, however, in finding the *Sages*—the Jewish authors of postbiblical wisdom literature and commentaries who subsequently dictated Jewish interpretations and understandings of biblical texts—deliberately identified and labeled Africans as an inherently inferior population. The *Sages* Melamed identifies as the Jewish authorities of the bible, notably came to be referred to as *Rabbi* (meaning: “my teacher” or “my master”) by the first century CE. Consequently, the texts they composed appropriately can be termed “rabbinic literature” from that time forward (Melamed, 2003).

Early generations of Hebrew/Israelite/Judaeans would not have recognized the occupation of *Rabbi*, which did not exist in the Hebrew Bible. However, after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE caused the decline of the Jewish dual institutions of prophets and priests, spiritual leadership shifted to the assembly of Sages (*Rabbis*), also known as the *Sanhedrin* (Melamed, 2003). This assembly of Jewish scholars served as a tribunal or court responsible for expounding, interpreting, and policing Jewish oral law and traditions (Gerhardsson & Sharpe, 1998; Melamed, 2003). Melamed locates and identifies the specific sources of antiblack ideas in Jewish thought within the vast body of postbiblical and extrabiblical texts the Sages/Rabbis composed based on their readings of the Hebrew Bible. This study, however, finds some of Melamed’s conclusions rest on shaky analytical ground, as will be detailed below.

The wisdom tradition of the Sages or Rabbinate dates from roughly 250 BCE to circa 625 CE. Each of the two institutions in turn constituted the central authority for interpreting and commenting on the meaning of the *Torah*. The word *Torah* most

commonly refers to the *Pentateuch*, a term that identifies the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, which Jewish tradition accords to the authorship of Moses. Torah also refers to the body of law embedded in Jewish scripture and its associated oral tradition (The Jewish Encyclopedia, 2011). The literature of the Sages/Rabbis, much of which took the form of *Midrashic* teachings—legal, exegetical, or homiletical commentaries on the Bible—maintains its authoritative status to this day. In similar fashion, the Jewish oral tradition remains a vital part of Judaism. Known as the *Mishna* (“study by repetition”), these oral commentaries were emended and compiled over the course of the first and second centuries CE to teach biblical law and its hermeneutics. As Jewish scholars came to view their oral tradition as threatened by both their persecution and the passage of time, the Mishna was collated and published circa the late second or early third century CE. Prior to that time Jews forbade the writing down of their oral traditions (The Jewish Encyclopedia, 2011).

Analysis of and commentaries on the Mishna known as *Gemara* also were redacted and compiled in Israel and in Babylon. Babylon became a major center of Jewish life and scholarship after an unknown number of Jews were captured in Judea by the armies of King Nebuchadnezzar and forced into exile in 597 BCE. Compiled and canonized together the Mishna and its associated Gemara were used to produce two Talmud: the *Jerusalem Talmud* (circa fourth century CE) and the *Babylonian Talmud* (third to sixth centuries CE). These Mishna and their associated Gemara constitute the source of what several scholars claim is direct evidence that antiblackness originated as a prominent discourse of Rabbinic Judaism in ancient Jewish society. Goldenberg traces the modern version of this idea to three authors and two texts: Thomas Gossett (1963), and Robert Graves and Raphael Patai (1983). However, he credits the historian Winthrop Jordan (1968), who acquired the idea

from Gossett, with reviving and giving it a new life in his influential, award-winning monograph *White over Black: American attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812*.

Of particular concern to this study and its grounding in the Africana Intellectual Tradition is the problem of Africana scholars selectively drawing on rabbinic commentaries to advocate and advance the argument that rabbinic literature gave birth to the idea of blackness as a divine curse. That academic cohort includes Edith Sanders (1969), Joseph Washington, Jr. (1984), St. Clair Drake (1987), Charles B. Copher (1988), Cain Felder (1990), and Tony Martin (1993). Each one analyzed and discussed the commentaries from an Africana perspective. However, their uncritical reliance on inaccurate and flawed translations and interpretations of the texts by European and Euro-American scholars led them and others to misread the literature and reach false conclusions about its facticity and reliability. As noted, translations of ancient texts in the West often serve the specific ideological purposes of colonizing the past to control the present and future. Consequently, Africana scholars who heedlessly dove straight into rabbinical textual waters unfortunately wound up drowning in mistranslations that convey the anachronistic perspectives of western translators and not that of the authors of the ancient texts. Perhaps the most egregious error awaiting the unsuspecting Africana scholar is blindly accepting the translation of the biblical name “Ham” to mean “Black.” As a result, Africana scholars have devoted considerable efforts to refute his excoriation in Genesis to vindicate and claim him as evidence of the “Black” presence in the Hebrew Bible (Barton, 2011; Davis, 2008; Felder, 1990, 2021; Johnson, 2004; McCray, 1992).

The Blackening of Ham

The idea of Ham's blackness and his positioning in the *Table of Nations* in Genesis 10:2-32 as the eponymous forebear of African peoples (*Hamites*) influenced generations of Africana scholars to construct vindicationist revisions of the ancient African past using biblical texts (Adamo, 2015; Copher, 1988; Sanders, 1969). The *Table* lists Ham as the father of *Canaan*, *Cush*, *Mizraim* (Egypt) and *Phut*. In addition, it catalogs and records the descendants of Japheth and Shem, Noah's other two sons, and delineates their migrations and subsequent locations to account for the repopulation of the world after the genocidal destruction of humankind by an angry and vindictive Hebrew god:

Generally, it is thought that Shem includes both the Israelites and ironically their rivals (in later eras), the Arameans and the Assyrians. The sons of Ham include African peoples and the Egyptians as well as the Canaanites. Japheth will provide ancestry for an extremely wide geographic domain, including much of Asia Minor and Europe. As such, the geo-political connotations of division were different for the writers of the originally discrete narratives. It is extremely important to note that *racial characteristics, physical types, or the color of skin play absolutely no role in their identification of groups*. Nahum Sarna points out that despite the Bible's claims to the contrary (Gen. 10:20,31), even language fails to serve as a consistent grouping device; the Canaanites were recognized as speaking the same tongue as the Israelites (Isaiah 19:18) but were nonetheless attributed to a different patriarch. Clearly the socio-political concerns outweighed any other logic in the division of peoples [author's italics] (Aaron, 1995, p. 731)

After an exhaustive analysis of the purported etymology of Ham in several ancient languages in the region, Goldenberg concludes the word's origins and original meaning cannot be determined from existing evidence:

One thing is, however, absolutely clear. The name Ham is not related to the Hebrew or to any Semitic word meaning "dark," "black," or "heat," or to the Egyptian word meaning "Egypt." To the early Hebrews, then, Ham did not represent the father of hot, black Africa and there is no indication from the biblical story that God intended to condemn black-skinned people to eternal slavery (Goldenberg, 2003, p. 149).

Ham apparently does not mean “black” by any stretch of the etymological imagination. Consequently, generations of western and Africana scholars have perpetuated a fallacy of massive proportions by uncritically accepting false translations. They identified Ham as ancestral to Africana populations in Africa and the Near East based solely on his purported skin color (a fact that admittedly does not preclude the possibility of genetic ancestral relationships). The persistently uncritical acceptance of this false etymology within the Africana Intellectual Tradition—especially in its sub-genres of Afrocentrism and “Black” Christian hermeneutics—severely distorts and damages efforts to understand the ancient African past. In dismantling the medieval schemas that posit Japheth, Shem, and Ham as the purported ancestors of Europeans, Asians, and Africans, respectively, as part of efforts in Europe to explain human biocultural diversity from a biblical perspective, Goldenberg’s linguistic finding casts into the dustbin of history the efforts of Africana scholars who seek to establish African genealogy on a foundation of biblical mythology (Adamo, 1993, 2001; Felder, 2021; McCray, 1992; Sanders, 1969). If the ancient Jews did not perceive Ham as the purported “Black” ancestor of ancient African and Near Eastern populations, this attribution by translators has thoroughly misled Africana scholars and thus irreparably compromised their sincere efforts to recover the presence and role of Africans in the Hebrew Bible.

The consequences of leaping to conclusions are made even more explicit when scholars fail to examine exegeses associated with Noah’s Curse without considering where such commentaries fit within the vast body of rabbinic literature. According to Goldenberg the false charge antiblack discourses originated in rabbinic texts rests entirely on a total of five statements:

Two of these occur in the earlier talmudic- midrashic corpus -- the others are in later medieval sources -- and view dark skin as a curse of God. The first (Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 108b) records the following folktale told by a third-century CE rabbi: God prohibited Noah and all the creatures in the ark from engaging in sex during the flood (“I have decided to destroy my world and you would create life!”). Three creatures transgressed -- the dog, the raven, and Ham, son of Noah -- and were punished. Ham’s punishment was that he became black, a procreative (i.e., genetic) punishment for a procreative (i.e., sexual) sin. The second story (Midrash, *Genesis Rabbah* 36.7), in an elaboration of the biblical narrative in Genesis 9 (“And Ham saw [Noah’s] nakedness”), assumes that Ham castrated his father Noah. In retaliation Noah said to Ham: “You prevented me from doing that which is done in the dark [the sexual act], therefore may your progeny be black and ugly (1997, p. 27).

Cited below is the entire passage noted by Goldenberg above as it appears in *Sanhedrin* 108b, which is a tractate of the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmud (composed in Galilee rather than Jerusalem) (circa 500—600 CE):

Our Rabbis taught: Three copulated in the ark, and they were all punished — the dog, the raven, and Ham. The dog was doomed to be tied, the raven expectorates [his seed into his mate's mouth]. and Ham was smitten in his skin (Epstein, 1936, p. 79).

A footnote to this treatise offers a rather oblique explanation that vaguely links the notion of being “smitten in his skin” with Ham’s purported descendants: “from him descended Cush (the negro) who is black-skinned” (Epstein, 1936, p. 80). This “interpretation” and depiction of Cush as the eponymous “negro” clearly is a product of “modern” translations of the text. Still, the passage can be viewed as furnishing what Goldenberg describes as an etiology (causative explanation) on the origins of black skin. He states: “In biblically-centered societies it would not be surprising to find skin-color etiologies constructed around characters or events found in the Bible” (2017, p. 33). Goldenberg argues that etiologies of this type exist in societies worldwide, and points to the environmental and climate theories of skin color offered by the ancient Greeks as a primary example of their utility and ubiquity in antiquity. As shown below, this etiology of skin color is linked

directly to the etiology of slavery in medieval interpretations of Noah's Curse. This linkage and its exegesis in effect establishes the "modern" tropology of Black = Slave (Goldenberg, 2017).

The "biblically-centered" societies to which Goldenberg refers above denotes the Jews, Christians, and Muslims of the medieval era who interpreted biblical texts according to the prevailing beliefs of their day, and not the Hebrew/Israelite/Judeans of antiquity who composed them. Viewed within this timeframe it becomes evident later scholars consciously and consistently added an antiblack gloss to biblical hermeneutics the ancient authors of those texts did not conceive or construct (Goldenberg, 1997, 2003). In doing so they grouped Ham with other "beasts" in the Ark in his inability to control his sexual urges. Hence Ham is rendered hypersexual in accordance with stereotypes of African peoples that circulated widely throughout Western Europe and the Mediterranean world. Those stereotypes increased in mendacity and vitriol with the advent of the massive Islamic African slave trade that began with the Muslim invasion of North Africa in the seventh century CE (Goldenberg, 2017; Lewis, 1985; Segal, 2001; Sweet, 1997).

As numerous biblical scholars have pointed out over the centuries, the myth of Noah's Curse in Genesis 9:20-27 never mentions skin color as a factor in Ham's execration. The Curse of Ham therefore is clearly misnamed, as it does not apply to Ham in the bible:

But just as there is no Curse of Ham in biblical literature, so too there is no Curse of Ham -- that is, a curse of slavery on Blacks -- in the rabbinic texts. The biblical story is an etiology accounting for Canaanite slavery. The rabbinic stories, on the other hand, speak of blackness, not of slavery. They are, as we saw, etiologies accounting for the existence of dark-skinned people (Goldenberg, 1997, p. 44).

Goldenberg repeatedly highlights the importance of viewing the Ham story within the individual contexts of its two separate traditions: biblical and extrabiblical. The biblical

text in Genesis 9:20-27 provides an explicit etiology for slavery through its inexplicable condemnation of Ham's son Canaan to servitude. The narrative thus authorizes an apparently monstrous overkill of a curse in response to Ham's revelation of Noah's drunken and naked condition to his brothers. The exact passages as translated in the King James Bible appear as follows:

²⁰ And Noah began to be a husbandman, and he planted a vineyard:

²¹ And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.

²² And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without.

²³ And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness.

²⁴ And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him.

²⁵ And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.

²⁶ And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

²⁷ God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

As evident from any reading of the text no mention of Ham's blackness or blackening occurs. Moreover, these few lines furnish the only account of this incident in the Hebrew Bible. Their utter lack of any reference to Ham's color perhaps explains why some later commentators insisted his name means "black"—as that "translation" clearly supports their specific discursive agenda (Goldenberg, 1997, 2003). However, some exegetes did not halt with simply blackening one of Noah's sons. A few extrabiblical commentators went much further. The following exegesis found in the *Tanhuma*, a Midrash from the eighth century CE, shows how medieval biblical exegetes amplified the effects of the Curse to construct and present an exaggerated and dehumanizing description of the purportedly "Black" type and phenotype:

As for Ham, because he saw with his eyes the nakedness of his father, his eyes became red; and because he spoke with his mouth, his lips became crooked and because he turned his face the hair of his head and his beard became singed and because he did not cover his father's nakedness, he went naked and his prepuce became stretched, [all this] because all of God's retributions are commensurate to a transgression (cited in Sweet, 1997, p. 148).

The story of Noah's curse takes place soon after the Hebrew god has destroyed humankind in a global flood (sparing only Noah and his family) as punishment for their purported wickedness. Given this context in which their god's misanthropy and genocidal wrath had been well established, perhaps we should not be surprised that biblical commentators did not question the divine authorization and enactment of a penalty that seems totally disproportionate for a crime hardly discernable from the passages provided in Genesis. However, given the redactions of the texts over centuries, it is doubtful the entire story of Noah survived (Graves & Patai, 1983). Consequently, the fragments of the tale that became canonized appear to have influenced generations of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim biblical exegetes to fill its obvious gaps with theories that involved Ham castrating his father Noah or having incest with him or his mother as the probable causes of such divine malediction (Goldenberg, 2003). More importantly, as the above commentaries illustrate, the medieval interpreters of the text used it as a template to furnish a catalog of purportedly "black" features that constituted a taxonomy and lexicon of inferiority in the western imagination. Yet despite the infrequent and often late appearance of these ideas in rabbinic literature, Melamed concludes:

In rabbinic literature the black appears for the first time in Jewish cultural history as not only other and different, but as a consequence, inferior too, and in this light Bible texts about the blacks were expounded. For generations, these commentaries determined the image of the black in Jewish thought. The rabbinic viewpoint did not originate in Scripture, which, as we have shown, was generally neutral, sometimes amazed and in extreme cases ambiguous and enigmatic, but never totally negative (2003, p. 60).

Melamed thus views these negative images of “the black as inferior and other” as an organic and authentic product of rabbinical culture (2003, p. 3). Yet at the same time he attempts to refute the claim rabbinic literature constitutes the birthplace of antiblack discourses. He contextualizes and diminishes the significance of these ideas in ancient Jewish culture by asserting, without proof, all ancient societies held “racist” beliefs. He advances that argument to claim ancient Greeks and Romans influenced the thinking of ancient Jewish scholars about so-called “Blacks.” He then goes on to argue medieval Jewish intellectuals like Benjamin of Tudela (1130-1173) and Moses ben Maimon (commonly known as Maimonides) (1138-1204)—scholars who resided within the Islamic Caliphate in Spain and North Africa, and who contributed their own infamous antiblack glosses to Noah’s Curse—were directly impacted by Christian and Muslim exegetes and hermeneutics in their day—a problematic argument but not entirely without merit as indicated below (Melamed, 2003).

Melamed also contends the commentaries have had an enduring impact on Jewish thought: “images of the black as absolute other, as they have developed in Jewish cultural history from the literature of the Sages, will profoundly influence the way blacks appear in modern Jewish culture” (2003, p. 8). Even if he is correct about the endurance of antiblackness in Jewish thought, in the Middle Ages, when most of the commentaries in question were composed, their prevalence and socialization in Jewish communities throughout the Diaspora remains uncertain. Researchers also should question how much they mattered to Jews in Christendom or in the Islamic Caliphate. In those societies Jews endured relentlessly hostile and genocidal regimes that execrated them for their beliefs, treated them as inferior “Others,” and subjected them to extreme forms of violence and

exploitation (Cohen, 2013; Fernández-Morera, 2016a). Within this environment, scholars need to determine what social use, if any, did Jewish antiblackness serve?

Rather than performing a decisive role in Jewish culture, as Melamed and others suggest, the history of antiblack rhetoric and discourses indicates these ideas and beliefs proved instrumental in informing Christian and Islamic views of Africans. They served specifically to promote notions of Christian and Muslim bio-cultural superiority in relation to infidels. Moreover, the evidence also shows Muslim commentators in some key instances ventured beyond earlier and contemporaneous Jewish and Christian interpretations of Noah's Curse in their discursive condemnations and excoriations of "Blacks." The infamous passage from Genesis 9:20-27 leaves no doubt that Noah condemned the Canaanites to servitude. The text therefore conveys a definitive etiology or causative explanation for slavery (Goldenberg, 2017). Medieval Muslim exegetes, however, used the myth to construct the genocidal notion of a *dual curse* in which blackness and slavery were inextricably joined to justify hereditary enslavement of Africans. It even resulted in some cases in the enslavement of Africans who had converted to Islam despite the explicit ban against enslaving Muslims in the Qur'an (Goldenberg, 2003).

The Dual Curse of Blackness and Perpetual Slavery

Beginning in the early seventh century, and continuing into the "modern" era, Muslim commentators promulgated the notion Noah cursed Ham with blackness as punishment for gazing upon his naked body. Goldenberg tracks the earliest known version of this idea to a commentary attributed to "Ibn Mas'ūd (d. 653), a companion of

Muḥammad, the prophet of Islam, as quoted by Ibn Ḥakim (d. 1014/15).” He provides the text as follows: “Noah was bathing and saw his son [Ham] looking at him and said to him, ‘Are you watching me bathe? May God change your color!’ And he is the ancestor of the *sūdān* [i.e., blacks]” (2017, p. 68). The Muslim ban on alcohol consumption did not allow Islamic writers to depict the prophet Noah as a drunk, so they resulted to various subterfuges:

[A] gust of wind uncovered Noah’s genitals; Ham laughed.... When Noah awoke he asked, “What was the laughter?... Do you laugh at your father’s genitals?... “May God change your complexion and may your face turn black!” And that very instant his face did turn black.... “May He make bondswomen and slaves of Ham’s progeny until the Day of Resurrection!” (2017, p. 90)

The earliest identified discursive method of linking blackness and slavery appears in the unknown writer al-Kisā’ī’s version of the *Tales of the Prophets* and is of uncertain date, although most likely composed in the seventh century (Goldenberg, 2017). Despite its brevity, the text illustrates the nature and content of Muslim discourses on the dual curse. These commentaries appear most commonly in Islamic narratives about the Old Testament but also can be found in Muslim histories, travelogues, and various other literary genres despite the fact the Qur’an makes no mention of it in its succinct treatment of Noah’s story (see Suras 49:13, 30:22).

Goldenberg believes Muslim scholars acquired the ark story “from Jewish sources, most probably as oral elaborations of biblical narratives current in the Muslim world” (2017, p. 50). However, he notes these exegetical ideas did not emerge in a vacuum. He contends they developed and spread in conjunction with the Muslim invasion of North Africa in 639 CE (following the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632) to justify the massive expansion of the Islamic trade in enslaved Africans that ensued. Islamic law

forbade enslaving Muslims and justified the enslavement of so-called Pagans. With Africa viewed as an endless source of human beings to feed the insatiable Muslim desire for “slaves,” particularly African women (Segal, 2001), it should come as no surprise that Noah’s Curse morphed into a dual curse of blackness and enslavement to target Ham’s purported African descendants. This dual curse made its way into Western Christian thought in the medieval era and from Western Europe into English colonial America in the early modern era where it became a pillar of white supremacist ideology and culture (Davis, 2008; Goldenberg, 2003, 2017; Haynes, 2002; Whitford, 2009).

In summarizing his main argument—an argument essential to this study’s efforts to track the evolution of antiblackness—Goldenberg states unequivocally:

Slavery and dark skin are two independent etiological myths. Nowhere in early Jewish literature -- either rabbinic or, for that matter, nonrabbinic -- is that distinction violated. Dark skin devolving on Ham comprises one set of traditions; slavery as Noah’s curse on a non-Black Canaan comprises a second. The two traditions are never joined (Goldenberg, 1997, pp. 45-46).

Not only are they never joined in rabbinic commentaries, but Goldenberg also identifies works from several Jewish scholars who flatly reject the dual curse outright. He notes as an example the twelfth century scholar Abraham ibn Ezra’s blunt criticism of other Jewish commentators who held such opinions: “Some say the Kushites are slaves because of Noah’s curse on Ham. But they have forgotten that the first postdeluvian king was a Kushite [i.e. Nimrod, Genesis 10: 8-10]” (2017, p. 110). Ibn Ezra’s commonsensical argument contends the history of Ham’s descendants, with the sole exception of the Canaanites, did not comport with the notion that ancient Hebrews/Israelite/Judeans regarded any of them as “slaves.” Goldenberg addresses this same issue and adds the following summary:

Moreover, in the rabbinic world-view, the association of slavery with Canaan, and not Ham, is implicit in the very linguistic classification used in the Talmud for the two categories of slaves: “Hebrew” and “Canaanite.” “Early rabbinic teachings distinguished the innocent black descendants of Kush from the accursed descendants of his brother Canaan.” The Curse of Ham is, indeed, an idea which spawned devastating consequences in history. It is not, however, an idea found in Judaism (1997, p. 47).

As Goldenberg and others document, the extrabiblical Curse of Ham emerges as a key theme in Islamic and Christian antiblack discourses in the medieval era. By the early “modern” era Western Christians, especially English invader-settlers in North America, used it to formulate and impose a system of racial capitalism that commodified Africans and subjected them to perpetual bondage (Washington, 1984). Noah’s Curse thus gave the West the moral authority (through the endorsements of the Catholic and Protestant Churches) to denigrate, dehumanize, and exploit Africans with impunity in the conduct of their genocidal campaign to seize Amerindian lands and build plantation-based colonial economies in the Americas (Davis, 2008; Haynes, 2002; Johnson, 2004; Whitford, 2009).

It also is important to note the existence of slavery within ancient Jewish culture. Jewish biblical law explicitly sanctions various forms of domestic slavery as payment for debts, for certain crimes, and in other enumerated circumstances (Phillips, 1984). Hence the enslavement of Jews by Jews commonly occurred in the Jewish homeland and diaspora and existed alongside well documented instances of Jewish enslavement of non-Jews (Goldenberg, 2003; Patterson, 1982). However, it would be remiss to mention bondage in Israel, even in passing, without noting a profound irony associated with Jewish identity. While much of the rhetoric on Noah’s Curse in postbiblical commentaries centers on justifying the enslavement of the Canaanites, recent studies have shown the Canaanites were in fact identical to the Hebrew/Israelite/Judeans in every respect except one: cult

membership. The Jews were Canaanites who could only be distinguished from others in their community by their conversion to the Abrahamic-Mosaic faith. The Canaanites subjected to enslavement or extermination were not the converts or adherents to the tribal cult of Hebrew one-god-ism. Those who did convert became Jews. Non-believers who practiced and continued to express beliefs that predated Israel's covenant with the Hebrew god thus remained "Canaanites" (Finklestein & Silberman, 2001; Sand, 2009, 2012; Thompson, 1992, 1999).

In addition to the Canaanites, enslavement in the Jewish homeland also involved other non-Jewish peoples including perhaps some Africans (Sadler Jr, 2005). Thus like their neighboring societies in antiquity—all of whom enslaved peoples captured in war as a common practice of conquest—the Hebrew Bible also authorized Jews to be equal opportunity enslavers: "The enslavement of people from nations surrounding Israel was sanctioned in Leviticus 25: 45-46 and this was generally stretched to include all non-Jews" (Schorsch, 2004, p. 63). The fact Jews remained the powerless victims of conquests, invasion, and rule by their Mediterranean and Near East neighbors throughout most of their history clearly does not mean they refrained from victimizing "others" within their own community or foreign "Others" they held power over.

African enslavement in medieval Jewish diasporan communities across Western Europe and the Near East appears to be limited mainly to domestic work until the discovery of the Americas in the fifteenth century and subsequent Jewish migration to plantation colonies in the New World (Schorsch, 2004). Africans, especially African women, comprised a targeted group for Jewish domestic enslavement because the repressive and dehumanizing laws that governed Jews in Christian and Muslim lands banned them from

enslaving Christians and Muslims (Schorsch, 2004). Jewish slavery, nevertheless, became a contested institution within Jewish communities. A vigorous debate arose among medieval Jewish scholars residing in Western Europe—primarily in Iberia under Spanish and Portuguese rule—regarding the legality of “modern” slavery in Jewish society (Schorsch, 2004). Opponents argued the biblical sanction for the practice had expired in antiquity. Defenders, on the other hand, claimed the authority of the original laws in the Hebrew Bible and their associated practices remained in effect and therefore legitimate despite the dispersal of masses of Jews from their homeland (Schorsch, 2004).

This internal Jewish debate about slavery reveals the complex nature of the challenges researchers face in studying antiblackness. This situation is particularly problematic when studying Iberia, where Jews, Muslims, and Christians interacted regularly for centuries with each other and with Africans of various ethnicities. Multicultural Iberia, in fact, constituted a major conceptual center for the construction of antiblack discourses, policies, and practices in the early modern era (Phillips, 2014; Sweet, 1997, 2003; Vaughan, 1995). It also proved a center for the construction of anti-Semitism, which can be said in some respects to be identical to antiblack discourses in the early modern era in its denigrating mode of “Othering” (Fernández-Morera, 2016a; Heng, 2018; Kaplan, 2013; Kaplan, 2019; Thomas, 2010)

The well documented history of Jews as a racialized and execrated group residing within hostile Christian and Muslim societies has resulted in regular comparisons of their oppression with that of Africans (Melamed, 2003; Philipson, 2000; Sasson-Levy, 2013). Like Africans, the psychosocial impact of such relentless hatred and economic exploitation perhaps damaged and disfigured their self-image and psyche in ways yet to be fully

recognized, comprehended, or remediated. Melamed argues the lived experience of Jews as “Others” in the West for two millennia led them to overcompensate for their marked biosocial inferiority by denigrating Africans (the other “Others”) to distance themselves socially from them. Accordingly, as antiblack discourses grew in prominence and animus some Jews sought to conform to the somatic norm in Western Europe and later in the United States to become socially “white.” Melamed explains it thusly: “because Jewish and Muslim scholars had complexions somewhere between light and dark, not truly white, they found it more necessary to distinguish themselves from the blacks, defining them as totally other and excluding them entirely” (2003, p. 4). As the sociologist Orna Sasson-Levy succinctly notes, this desire for social distancing was amplified by anti-Semitic discourses in Western Christianity that also used emerging scientific disciplines to *blacken* Jews:

As amply demonstrated by the social history of America and Europe, Jews were not always thought of as white. In traditional European science, Ashkenazi Jews were identified as “blacks” or “white negroes,” subject to persecution and pogroms (2013, p. 29).

Melamed interprets this situation as igniting a desire among some Jews in the early modern era to self-identify as “white.” Accordingly, those capable of “racial passing” assumed the obvious way to escape the Jewish association with blackness in the West simply required them to embrace the ideology of whiteness and white supremacy. Melamed thus views the relentless Western attacks on Jewish identity as creating the social consciousness and conditions wherein oppressed Jews sought to identify with their European and Euro-American Christian oppressors to escape the label of blackness or “Black” Otherness:

This longing to resemble the white European designator at least externally, as closely as possible, demanded the complete rejection of everything that identified the old black Jewish image. As we noted, precisely this identification of the Jew as

inferior other by the majority culture — be it pagan, Muslim or Christian — increased the psychological need to define and confine the other's other, which, for the varied reasons we have discussed, was so frequently with people with darker skin. And since the white designator, from medieval Christianity to present-day anti-Semitism, tended to stress the common features of Jews and black, both in appearance and in their so-called 'animal' behavior, defining both as inferior other, the Jew would stress his otherness vis-à-vis the black, and attempt to show how similar he was to the white European designator, if not his superiority over him (2003, p. 224).

To further his case about sought-after external resemblances, Melamed points to the tendency of some Jews in the West to alter their appearance by bleaching their skin, dyeing their hair, and surgically altering their noses to conform with what they perceive as the preferred "white" somatic norm. Sasson-Levy sheds additional light on this issue from a slightly different perspective:

Today, Jews in the United States are considered part of the privileged white group; however, Jewish "whiteness" as a whole is an unstable category, owing to internal ethnic diversity, the Jewish history of racialization and persecution in Europe, and the personal and cultural cost of the assimilation of the Jews into American whiteness.... Among the Jewish population in Israel, however, the social category of "Ashkenaziness" can be deemed white, as it has many features in common with whiteness in the United States: both categories are associated with European ancestry; both are identified with power structures; and, with important exceptions, neither U.S. whites nor Israeli Ashkenazim self-identify as white. These similarities between whites and Ashkenazim suggest that the study of Ashkenazim offers a valuable opportunity to examine the construction of whiteness in an Israeli context (2013, p. 29).

While examples of "modern" Jews self-identifying as "white" illustrate the historical impact and continuity of antiblack concepts and practices, the main goal here is to examine how ancient and medieval Jews viewed Africans to determine if or how Jewish thought influenced Western Christian beliefs. As shown above, Muslim scholars, not Jews, invented the dual curse tropology that inextricably joined black skin and slavery and supplied a purportedly divine authorization for the chattelization of so-called "Blacks." Western Christian intellectuals embraced the concept of the dual curse because it

conformed with their belief that Noah's Curse decreed African enslavement by Europeans, as the purported descendants of Ham's brother Japheth, and who, like the Arab/Muslim descendants of Shem, claimed to be the beneficiaries of Canaan's servitude. After it took root in Euro-American culture, the dual curse tropology retained its prominence and authority until the abolition of slavery in the Americas in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. The basic premise of blackness as a curse, however, survives and thrives in the US. It does so through the agency of White Christian fundamentalists who, in their unwavering theo-political commitment to oppose equal rights and equal justice for African Americans, constitute the architects as well as the bulwark of white supremacy in the nation (Jones, 2020; Joshi, 2020).

Unfortunately, Africana intellectuals working from a "Black" Christian perspective often repeat the false assertions about the primacy of rabbinic texts as sources of antiblackness. Ironically, they do so while uncritically accepting the biblical myth of Jewish liberation by Moses from enslavement in Africa by Egyptians (the descendants of Cush) recounted in those same sources. Evidence shows Jewish biblical commentators did contribute to the discourses of African dehumanization, as Jews contributed to every aspect of the intellectual and economic life of the hostile communities in which they resided. Nevertheless, they generally remained powerless within those societies as a result of brutally enforced policies of social segregation and economic exploitation used to regulate the most minute details of their lives (Fernández-Morera, 2016b). Moreover, to support the supersessionist claims their faiths preceded or superseded that of the ancient Jews, Christians and Muslims repurposed the Jewish corpus of postbiblical and extrabiblical texts to advance their own theo-political interests. The dissemination and subsequent

prominence of these commentaries thus led later scholars to mischaracterize as a Jewish “literary tradition” a paltry collection of five original texts of highly questionable meaning and value:

If we summarize the results of our investigation thus far, we find that the five Jewish texts reputed to show anti-Black racism actually present an entirely different picture. One text (*Zohar*) does not speak of Blacks at all; another (*Tan'uma*) may not. Two others (Eldad and Benjamin) are late medieval compositions not part of the rabbinic canon, reflecting only the views of the individual authors, which are shared by -- and much more prominent in -- pagan, Christian, and Muslim writers. The remaining texts (Talmud and Midrash) show a preference for the somatic norm on the part of two authors of antiquity. Yet, despite these meagre findings, the racist theorists claim that anti-Black sentiment permeates rabbinic literature (Goldenberg, 1997, p. 40).

With Goldenberg’s stinging criticisms still resonating, this study now pivots to examine exactly what the Hebrew Bible says about African peoples. For that purpose, it turns to an exhaustive study of this topic conducted by Rodney Sadler. Sadler investigates and analyzes the uses of the terms *Cush/Cushites* in the Hebrew Bible to determine how the ancient Jews depicted and regarded African peoples. He presents his conclusions as follows:

The Cushites were known to have been a tall, smooth (Isa 18), dark-skinned (Num 12; Jer 13:23) people from the farthest extent of the known world. They were born in a riparian land of mythic renown (Isa 18), rich and arable, full of luxuriant commodities (Job 28). Their economy, which likely depended on trade with Egypt and the people to the north, was facilitated by papyrus-sailing vessels that traversed the Nile (Isa 18). In the land of Cush they grew powerful, and from this land they came as warriors. The biblical authors knew the Cushites principally as soldiers participating in the Judean army (2 Sam 18), in their own Cushite-led forces (2 Kings; Isa 37), or in larger Egyptian military coalitions (e.g. 2 Chronicles; Isa 20; 43; 45). Because they appear in Egyptian expeditionary forces in every biblical period, it is no wonder that whenever Judeans thought of Egypt’s armies, they thought of Cushites (2005, p. 146).

Sadler’s examination of the discursive uses of *Cush/Cushite* in the Hebrew Bible represents the most comprehensive study performed to-date on the topic. Like Melamed, he points

out the word Cush/Cushite identifies the same geographic location and population as Homer's Ethiopia/Ethiopians. However, one critical difference pertains to their usage: unlike Homer's term "burnt face" (Ethiopian) which describes and depicts Africans *phenotypically* as "Blacks from the Land of Blacks," the term Cush/Cushite did not bear such a meaning in ancient Jewish culture. The authors of the Hebrew Bible—in recording and reflecting the attitudes and views of Israelites over the centuries it took to compile and redact it—did not deem the skin color of the Cushites as a defining feature and characteristic. Instead, they simply viewed Cush as a place and Cushites as its inhabitants:

Whenever Cushite phenotypes are mentioned, they are represented in a neutral to a noble manner. Likewise, the few references to Cushite phenotypes describe superficial differences in somatic type and never address other differences such as the appearance of faces, hair, body-types. While one could plausibly argue that the authors of the Hebrew Bible had a racial taxonomy, one that is not fully represented in biblical literature, I would suggest that there was no taxonomy because there was no burgeoning concept of race among the ancient Hebrews. By "no concept of race," I mean that prejudices based on the appearance of Cushites did not foster notions of inherent Cushite inferiority, negative behavioral traits, ontological differences, or a legitimating ideology to support their subjugation. Whatever the differences in phenotype and culture may have been, they did not inspire a racialist type of othering in biblical thought (2005, p. 150).

Based on the analysis of the works of Melamed, Sadler, Goldenberg, and others outlined above, this study finds that neither the ancient Hebrews/Israelites/Judeans who identified certain Africana peoples as Cushites, nor the Sages/Rabbis who wrote various commentaries on biblical texts in late antiquity, invented antiblack discourses. In the specific case of Genesis 9:20-27, and the notorious exegeses associated with it, evidence shows the Curse of Canaan was deliberately re-constructed and re-presented as the Curse of Ham in postbiblical and extrabiblical commentaries. Therefore, this study finds the tropology *Black = Slave* did not originate in early Jewish thought but entered Western Christian theo-politics centuries later and became a standard antiblack discourse because

of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian mistranslations and intentional misinterpretations of biblical scripture and extrabiblical commentaries.

As noted, this study finds Homer's eponym "Ethiopian" did not pejoratively label or target Africans to justify discriminating against them as a group. It concludes in fact neither the ancient Hebrew/Israelite/Judeans nor the Greeks or Romans (who ruled the Mediterranean world for centuries) developed the denigrating concepts and content for the antiblack discourses early Christian writers composed and popularized beginning in the second century CE. Consequently, it now pivots specifically to examine Christianity's birth as a Jewish-Christian sect to show how it redeployed Jewish beliefs to define and develop Christian identity and its antiblack ideology.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE HEBREW BIBLE AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Introduction

Jews, Christians, and Muslims define and categorize their faiths as “revealed religions” to distinguish them from those they identify and label as “natural religions” (Armstrong, 2011; Hughes, 2012; Smith, 1998). Western intellectuals devised both ideas in re-inventing the concept “religion” during the European Enlightenment, (Smith, 1998), a subject examined in-depth in Chapter Eight. The concept of “revealed religion” originates with the Hebrew Bible, which physically manifests and concretizes it in the form of holy writings or “scripture.” The distinction “natural religion,” on the other hand, applies to beliefs that posit and hold *Nature* to be the creator and source of all life. Western scholars also use the term *Pantheism* in such instances. Collectively, Pantheism, Paganism, and Natural Religion denote spiritual beliefs that originate and exist independent of divine revelation and thus are not dependent on divine prophets and sacred texts (Smith, 1998; Taylor, 2013). In terms of the concept’s general history: “The most active discussions of natural theology in the West occurred during the high medieval period (roughly 1100–1400 C.E.) and the early modern period (1600–1800 C.E.)” (Chignell & Pereboom, 2020, para 4).

Unsurprisingly, the notion of “revealed religions versus natural religions” privileges the monotheisms over other traditions and contributes to the propaganda

Western Christians use to demean the faiths of “Others.” Monotheists believe they know precisely how to worship and obey god because “he” reveals “his” word directly to believers through the mediumship of prophets (Römer, 2015b; Schniedewind, 2004). Humans, they assert, acquire direct knowledge of god’s name and commandments (codes of behavior) solely through “alleged instances of divine speaking or special divine acts in history.” (Wahlberg, 2020, para 1). God’s words then are rendered into holy books by god-inspired scribes whereby they become fixed (canonized) in perpetuity. Believers in one-god-ism thus reflexively point to their “sacred scriptures” as proof of their faith’s authenticity, truth, and divine authorization. They claim their holy books furnish the precise rules of worship and moral conduct for human beings to secure an eternal afterlife with god. Hence monotheists assert their beliefs derive solely from the prophetic “revelation” of god’s holy words in god’s holy books.

Jews view the biblical patriarchs, Abraham, and Moses, as their faith’s preeminent spiritual interlocutors. For Christians, revelation and faith are inseparably joined in the “revelation” of Jesus Christ as the son of god and the New Testament gospels that convey the “good news.” Muslims, on the other hand, regard the Prophet Muhammad as the last and in fact final prophet of the broadly-defined monotheist ideology that unites Judaism-Christianity-Islam under the rubric of “Abrahamic faiths” (Reinking, 2005). According to the Qur’an, Islam’s holy book, the angel Gabriel verbally revealed god’s holy word to Muhammad over a period of approximately 23 years before his death (Ramadan, 2017; Reinking, 2005). All three cults recognize and accept the communications between god and Abraham and Moses in the Hebrew Bible as the founding revelations of god and “his” word (Armstrong, 2011). However, while Christians accept the historicity and authority of

the two biblical prophets, they distinguish their monotheist faith from Judaism and Islam by claiming Jesus Christ to be the actual “Word of God” made flesh. In Christian theology, his so-called miraculous birth, ministry, and death evidences and exemplifies the embodiment and revelation of god’s *logos* or *word* in the world “he” created (Armstrong, 2011; Ehrman, 2014).

This study does not treat the “revelations” of “revealed religions” as representing objective facts. Instead, it historicizes and analyzes so-called “scriptures” using the same methods it applies to all mythological beliefs. It thus investigates them as the products of “localized” spiritual traditions and customs, subjectively collected, mediated, and recounted by their “authors.” Hence the description of Christianity as “invented” indicates a choice of terminology that correlates with the structural-analytical approach used here to investigate Christian doctrine. The following comment from Thomas Römer, a professor of biblical studies, demonstrates why such methods are apropos:

When we speak, then, of the “invention of God,” we should not imagine either that a group of Bedouins met one day and huddled around an oasis to create a god for themselves, or that some scribes, much later, invented Yahweh out of whole cloth, so to speak, as their tutelary god. Rather this “invention” should be understood as a progressive construction arising out of a particular tradition. Think of this tradition as a series of sedimentary strata gradually laid down over the course of time, which is then somehow disrupted by historical events that disturb the orderly sequence of layers, allowing something new and unexpected to emerge. If we try, then, to understand how the discourse about this god developed and how he eventually became the “one God,” we can observe a kind of “collective invention,” a process in which the conception was eventually revised in light of particular, changing social and historical contexts (2015b, p. 4).

Christianity’s “progressive construction” or “revelation” spanned several centuries before its founders codified its orthodoxy (the Nicene Creed) and canonized its scriptures (the New Testament) (Thompson, 2009). The main objective here, however, is to determine how Jewish scriptures contributed to the construction of antiblackness in Christianity. This

investigation begins by locating it among the several distinct Jewish denominations existent in the first century CE to illustrate the confrontational and divisive way its founders distinguished it from all other contemporary cults, Jewish and Pagan.

Jewish Sects and the Jewish-Christian Distinction

Numerous sources indicate the Jewish diaspora in the first century CE was fragmented by competing and antagonistic sects (Essenes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots) whose contentious ideological disputes reveal Jewish beliefs were neither homogeneous nor monolithic (Crossan, 1999; Fox, 1987; Johnson, 2012). Evidence of their doctrinal differences can be seen in the Qumran texts or so-called Dead Sea Scrolls. Their surviving fragments shed new light on the nature of sectarian debates in Jewish communities in the three centuries prior to the birth of Christianity (Davies, 2003). Most of the texts are written in Hebrew. A few were composed in Aramaic and Greek. They date variously from the last three centuries BCE and the first century CE, which means they are coincident with the advent of Christianity (Davies, 2003). Although most are non-biblical, they are of immense importance to scholars because they were composed at the same time some books of the Hebrew Bible were written or redacted for their eventual canonization—a process occurring during the first century CE. Prior to their discovery between 1946 and 1956, the oldest previously known Hebrew-language biblical manuscripts dated only from the tenth century CE. The dating of the Qumran texts thus helps to establish the provenance, prevalence, and continuance of key biblical concepts and themes that appear in early Christianity (Davies, 2003).

The co-invention of the Christian faith by Paul and other disciples of Jesus, thus gave birth to yet another schism. It did so by claiming the same kind of exclusivity/inclusivity as Jewish one-true-godism, while expanding the notion of god's "chosen people" beyond traditional Jewish identity to invite non-Jews—generically referred to as Gentiles—to join the Christian flock. While a strict and intolerant one-true-godism emerged over time as the primary distinction separating Jewish beliefs from all other belief systems in the ancient world, the Christian cult entered the sectarian fray in the first century CE and immediately distinguished itself from the other Jewish sects as well by subverting the Jews' strict monotheist code (Assmann, 1996a; Ehrman, 2014).

Christian claims that Jesus was not a typical Jewish preacher, but a divine "savior" born of a virgin mother, and whose body resurrected from death after crucifixion by the Romans, broke decisively with the normative traditions of Jewish beliefs. Yet perhaps the most controversial and divisive idea to emerge in early Christianity—one not evident in the earliest conception of the faith—is the cult's conception of a triune god (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost). This notion made Jesus both the son of god and god made flesh (Ehrman, 2014). The introduction of a triune godhead violated a core Jewish belief in god's "oneness" and proved decisive in separating the Christian church from the Jewish synagogue as the belief took root among Jesus's Jewish followers and drew large numbers of non-Jews to the cult. However, many early Christians (most notably members of the Arian sect) refused to accept this notion. This meant its conception also caused deep schisms within the Christian community, which ultimately erupted in the fourth century in internecine battles over orthodoxy (Ehrman, 2014).

The purportedly “historical” Jesus conceived as a “son of god” (a preexistent idea in the Pagan world with many variants in circulation) directly violated the existent framework of Jewish prophecy and belief (Fox, 1987; Jackson, 1985). Old Testament prophecies predicted an “anointed one” or “messiah” of royal lineage would appear at an unspecified time to unify the Jewish people and initiate a new age of global peace. Jews therefore expected the messiah to be a future king with the requisite ancient traceable through Kings David and Solomon to Adam and Eve (Fredriksen, 2018). Christians, on the other hand, used the idea of the messiah as a basis for reinterpreting and revising the Old Testament prophecy to identify Jesus as god made flesh and thereby claim he came to deliver a new covenant and gospel to the world via Christianity (Ehrman, 2014). Paradoxically, this new covenant embodied notions of Jesus’s birth, performance of miracles, and resurrection from the dead that proved identical to the ways Pagans characterized many Pagan “saviors” throughout antiquity (Fox, 1987; Jackson, 1985).

This study thus agrees with bible scholar Thomas Thompson who finds the canonical gospels to be a product of the compilation of Pagan myths and their embodiment in the person and purported biography of Jesus Christ (Thompson, 2009). This assimilation and rendering of Pagan myths as Christian mythic-history appears in the books and epistles collected and canonized in the fourth century CE to create the Christian sect’s New Testament (Elsom, 1987; Lieuwen, 1995). The late compilation of these texts and their acceptance as canonical shows Christians operated for centuries without a fixed scripture and common set of orthodox principles to guide them. It also underscores the importance of historicizing and structurally analyzing Christianity to reveal its cognitive construction within its ancient Mediterranean cradle rather than uncritically accepting the miraculous

tales Christians devised to establish and propagate their faith as a fully formed revelation by god through his “son.”

Early Christianity and the Septuagint

Early Christians founded their beliefs on ancient Hebrew-Israelite-Judaeen scripture and doctrine while rejecting or violating key tenets of the Hebrew faith. Although well-versed in biblical stories and idioms, Jews, and Jewish-Christians of the first century CE, like Paul, encountered and learned the bible mainly through its Greek version known as the *Septuagint*. This name given to the first translation of the bible means *seventy* in Latin. It derives from a legendary tale that claims it was produced by 70 or 72 Jewish scholars who represented the fictional twelve tribes of Israel and who worked independently to craft identical translations of the scriptures. Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-247 BCE), a Pharaoh of Ptolemaic Egypt purportedly commissioned the translation of the text. Its completion and compilation therefore took place two centuries before the purported birth of Jesus and Christianity (Tov, 1988). It enjoyed wide usage among Jews because few could read Hebrew at the time. It also attracted non-Jewish readers curious about beliefs most outsiders generally knew nothing about. When the Greek New Testament began to be composed in the latter decades of the first century CE, Paul and its other authors relied on the Septuagint far more than the original Hebrew Bible (Tov, 1988; Wilson, 1998).

This study’s findings agree with this statement: “The Septuagint represents the most impressive monument of Jewish Hellenism, the acme of what one might be tempted to call the cultural symbiosis between Jews and Greeks in Ptolemaic Alexandria” (Stroumsa, 2012, p. 257). Evidence shows the translated biblical texts facilitated a complex

intertextual dialogue and intellectual exchange between Jewish beliefs and Greek philosophy that later found its way into Christianity through the Alexandria-based, Christian theologians Clement and Origen (Greenspoon, 2003; Römer, 2015a). It also shows the absence of any convention or tradition of execrating African people or demonizing their physical appearance in the Hebrew Bible. Instead, it consistently uses the toponym-derived designation Cushite (Kushite)—which conveyed no reference to skin color or physical appearance—to refer to the same people the Greeks called “sunburnt.” To refer to a *Cushite* in ancient Jewish parlance thus served to identify a person from a specific place, like calling a person from Athens an *Athenian*. Based on this analysis and other findings previously outlined this study rules out the Hebrew Bible as the direct source of Christian antiblack rhetoric.

The Greek word μέλας (black/blue) also appears extensively in the Septuagint, but not as an ethnic slur or pejorative. However, this fact did not preclude Christian writers from imposing their own interpretations on the scriptures for doctrinal and theo-political purposes. As shown below, their post-biblical interpretations of the lightness/darkness themes in Genesis and throughout the bible, and their hermeneutic glosses on Noah’s purported curse of Ham, provided the discursive framework for their allegoric and rhetorical condemnations of blackness. Evidence shows these exegetical practices were prominent in Alexandria among Greeks and Jews alike, and thereby entered and became standard in early Christian catechetical discourses through their formal educational institutions (van den Hoek, 1997). The main question here, however, is how did the completed translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek in Alexandria in the third century

BCE provide early Christians with literary precedents and sources for blackening African peoples?

Several prominent biblical passages that undoubtedly furnished the basic conceptual building blocks early Christian used to formulate their version of black = evil can be easily identified in both the original Hebrew and its Greek translation. Specifically, the white/black dichotomy—which constitutes perhaps the most common means to symbolize and represent good and evil in the West—may stem directly from the thematic usage of the asymmetrical binary *light/darkness* and its derivative metaphors and allegories. The light/darkness theme appears frequently in the bible. It in fact begins with a widely-known and celebrated dramatic narrative that recounts the creation of the world by a god who initiates the process by separating light from the darkness:

³And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

⁴God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness.

⁵God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day (Genesis 1:3-5).

The opening lines of Genesis explicitly convey the belief that in god's mind: "light was good." Many variations of this theme exist in the bible, but the following two illustrative passages directly link darkness with evil:

The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble (Proverbs 4:19).

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! (Isaiah 5:20).

The authors of the Christian gospels in the first century CE continued this theme in composing the books that eventually became canonized as the New Testament in the fourth century. Early Christians more than embraced the light/dark = good/evil analogy; they too reified it. Evidence of its value and profound meaning for the cult's followers appears in

the “earliest surviving piece of Christian literature, 1 Thessalonians,” where “Paul explicitly informs his followers, ‘You are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness’ (1 Thess. 5:5)” (Brakke, 2001, p. 507). Paul—the most prolific early Christian theologian—speaks with an apostolic authority. However, the following declaration exceeds Paul’s as the absolute “gospel” for Christian believers: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). This famous passage attributed to Jesus perhaps constitutes the most definitive and consequential articulation of the lightness/darkness theme in Christianity.

From a cognitive-linguistic standpoint the transposition of meaning from lightness/darkness = good/evil to whiteness/blackness = good/evil does not require traversing a vast ideational distance. The terms light/white and dark/black often function semantically as cognates within many languages (Pastoureau, 2008). Here, the main concern pertains to how these concepts are being mapped in Christian thought onto human identity, character, and physical appearance. The following discussions identify the Christian theologians responsible for metaphorically blackening human skin color. It also identifies and analyzes the apologues (allegorical morality tales) they invented to illustrate and convey the concepts of human morality and its evil twin, immorality. Exposing the authorship and context in which these ideas originated illuminates the processes and timing of their socialization and embodiment in Christian cult(ure) as referents and determiners of social status and value. Still, before naming names and analyzing the mechanisms and functions of antiblack metaphors and analogies, the first step in this process requires an investigation of the meanings of “sin” and “evil” within their originating Jewish contexts

in the Septuagint. This discussion sets the stage for showing how those concepts became central to Christian doctrine where they subsequently informed the cognitive construction and socialization of white supremacy in the West.

Sin and Evil in the Hebrew Bible

Biblical scholars generally define and comprehend sin and evil by auditing and analyzing the theological uses, thematic histories, and etymologies of the terms. The complexities of the concepts, however, pose many challenges: “The Biblical Hebrew lexicon contains no shortage of terms pertaining to immoral human behavior; by one count, there are over fifty words for ‘sin’ in biblical Hebrew” (Lam, 2016, p. 2). The basic concepts of immorality in the bible were solely the inventions of the one-true-god *Yahweh* (“I Am Who I Am”)— the name “he” used to identify himself (Exodus 3:14) when directing Moses to convey the Ten Commandments to the Hebrew/Israelite/Judeans (Exodus 20: 2-28). However, the actual term/concepts for sin and evil used by biblical authors far exceed the taboos enumerated in the Ten Commandments. They therefore resist easy categorization.

To be clear, no unified conception of sin exists that can be derived from Hebrew Bible without considerable simplification, distortion, or minimizing of significant portions of material.... the biblical texts are understood as encapsulating a diversity of views that existed in ancient Israel on matters related to human wrong-doing and its consequences (Lam, 2016, p. 4).

Accordingly, the words sin and evil function as hypernyms, meaning in this case they encompass a wide semantic range from *wrong*, *corrupt*, *deficient*, and *harmful*, to *immoral*, *depraved*, *vile*, *malicious*, and *wicked*. Early and contemporary biblical translators, however, have significantly reduced or consolidated the terms to comport with contemporary perspectives and idiomatic uses of *sin* and *evil* often without acknowledging

the meanings and nuances that got lost in translation (Lam, 2018). It also is important to note the initial portrait of Yahweh—the Hebrew god who defined the concepts of sin and evil—somewhat resembles that of so-called Pagan deities. Ancient Hebrew writers envisioned and conceptualized their one-true-god within the complex multicultural milieu of the all-encompassing Pagan world in which they lived. Pagans (even those who embraced monotheist beliefs) typically viewed creative forces (deities) as inclusive of both positive and negative attributes. They also believed supernatural powers or so-called gods and demigods possessed human-like characteristics (or were the ultimate sources thereof). Therefore, in addition to wielding absolute power over human existence, Pagans viewed supernatural beings as embodying and expressing every aspect of human thought, emotion, and behavior, good and bad (Fox, 1987; O’Donnell, 2015).

Given the Jewish god’s cognitive origins within the ancient literary tradition of the vast Pagan ecumene, “his” image changes significantly as the Jewish doctrine of one-true-god-ism develops and matures over centuries. (Andriolo, 1973; Römer, 2015b). Despite critical changes, however, it still retained key features that complicate and compromise attempts to isolate and separate god from “divine” actions that unquestionably are deemed “evil” when performed by humans. For example, when Yahweh commands “his” followers to reject other gods as false and worship “him” alone, “he” does so with a marked element of fanaticism. “His” words convey a hyperbolic level of envy and wrath that seems utterly evil in its paranoia: “for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me” (Exodus 20:5). This raw articulation of jealousy and rage is reminiscent of Greek myths associated with the goddess Hera, who serves as another well-known exemplar of divine

jealousy and vengeance in antiquity (Konstan, 2019). However, unlike Hera's frequent displays of "romantic" jealousy, Yahweh's jealousy in Judeo-Christian scriptures stems exclusively from the need of one-god-ism to reject all other beliefs as false to project and protect its purported universality.

Like the ancient Hebrews, the Jewish-Christian cultists who founded Christianity, distinguished their one-true-god from "his" Pagan predecessors and contemporaries by completely absolving "him" from any responsibility for sin and evil in the world. Hence the jealous god becomes a loving god in the New Testament despite the fact "he" exterminated all humankind except for the family of Noah according to the flood story in Genesis. Early Christian cultists led by Paul dogmatically embraced this Hebrew Bible doctrine in the late first century CE. Christians to this day maintain and promulgate the belief sin arises only from the existential decisions and actions of human beings. Early Christians, however, went beyond simply viewing the transgressions of god's laws as evidence of humanity's free will within god's creation. They declared human sin and depravity to be integral to and inseparable from human identity (Augustine, 2009; Couenhoven, 2005). Early Christian theologians decided, in fact, all humans were born "sinners" and therefore required salvation to enter god's kingdom in heaven upon death and receive the blessing of eternal life. Hence salvation requires conversion to the Christian faith and adherence to its orthodoxy. This belief became official church doctrine through the efforts of Augustine of Hippo, perhaps the most influential theologian in Christian history (Augustine, 2009). Basing his reasoning on his readings of Paul, Augustine conceived the idea humans are born in a state of sin due to the purported fall from god's grace of Adam and Eve (the original human ancestors) and their resultant exile from

paradise. He then coined the expression “original sin” to define and explain its origination (Augustine, 2009). Through his efforts, belief in humanity’s “original sin” became the official doctrine of the Latin Church by the early fifth century CE.

Pope John Paul II reaffirmed this dehumanizing belief as a central tenet of Roman Catholicism in 1992. The Church subsequently published and distributed it as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to guide the instruction of Christian doctrine to the faithful and to new converts. It states:

By his sin Adam, as the first man, lost the original holiness and justice he had received from God, not only for himself but for all humans. Adam and Eve transmitted to their descendants human nature wounded by their own first sin and hence deprived of original holiness and justice; this deprivation is called "original sin". As a result of original sin, human nature is weakened in its powers, subject to ignorance, suffering and the domination of death, and inclined to sin (this inclination is called "concupiscence") (Pope John Paul II, 1993).

The Catechism also identifies Satan as the architect and perpetrator of sin and evil in the world, and explains his role in a manner that absolves god from responsibility for the actions of “his” fallen angel:

Although Satan may act in the world out of hatred for God and his kingdom in Christ Jesus, and although his action may cause grave injuries - of a spiritual nature and, indirectly, even of a physical nature - to each man and to society, the action is permitted by divine providence which with strength and gentleness guides human and cosmic history. It is a great mystery that providence should permit diabolical activity, but "we know that in everything God works for good with those who love him (Pope John Paul II, 1993).

As the personification of evil, Satan exonerates god from any personal responsibility for the failings of “his” creation. He arguably serves as the greatest scapegoat in human history, and thus tends to receive as much attention and publicity as Jesus in many contemporary evangelical Christian discourses. Christians thus define and depict Satan’s existence and actions as “permitted by divine providence” to explain away god’s tolerance

of human suffering and failure to intervene (Farrar, 2015). When analyzing this doctrine within the context of the ancient Hebrew faith's origins in the Pagan ecumene, the need for Satan as antagonist and arch villain becomes apparent. This seeming circumscription of the one-true-god's omnipotence by one of his creations, a "fallen angel," not only distinguishes "him" from a host of "his" peers in antiquity it also absolves the divine inventor of sin from any direct responsibility for it. As noted, a doctrine that holds humans responsible from birth for their actions thus establishes human existence as the defining condition of sin. Accordingly, sin constitutes both a set of actions and a state of being that persists as a permanent condition and fact of human life and being human until salvation (Bray, 1994).

The 20 different words translated as denoting "sin" in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible appear to fall into two general semantic categories: moral and physical (Faro, 2021). *Moral evil* refers specifically to beliefs and acts of wrong done to others such as dishonoring one's parents, committing murder, stealing, committing adultery, lying, and other transgressions listed in the one-true-god's Ten Commandments. *Physical evil*, also known as *natural evil*, applies to natural calamities that befall humanity such as floods, epidemic diseases, physical deformities, et cetera. (Faro, 2021). Because physical evil concerns nature and the natural world, natural disasters thus are perceived to stem directly from human misconduct. Accordingly, human immorality causes nature to afflict humanity even when instigated by the one-true-god. Lastly, in the Christian imagination, sin causes death followed by everlasting torture and punishment, as expressed and embodied in the belief of eternal damnation and consignment of the condemned to an afterlife in hell (Bray, 1994).

The sordid details of humanity’s propensity for sinfulness and self-destruction, including murder, appear in the story of the first human family: Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel. This mythic tale is conveyed in Genesis, the authorship of which—along with the other four books that comprise the Pentateuch (first five books of the Old Testament)—traditionally is credited to the biblical patriarch Moses. Estimates of its actual dating by biblical scholars, however, indicate its composition occurred circa the sixth century BCE (Schniedewind, 2004; Thompson, 1999). It thus appeared centuries after the completion of Exodus, Judges, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus, and Job—books that follow it in order of presentation due to how the Hebrew Bible was canonized (Schniedewind, 2004). In addition to explicating the origins of sin and evil, Genesis also is important here because it contains the utterly bizarre episode misnamed the Curse of Ham. Both mythic tales contribute to Western Christianity’s antiblack discourses and dogma. The authors of Genesis in fact assert the existence of an ongoing conflict between good and evil that animates and defines existential reality on earth. Biblical texts portray it as an eternal Manichaean war between the forces of darkness and light:

Good and evil play a role in developing the plot conflict woven throughout the literary structure of Genesis in interlinking textual connections. Through collocations, exegetical, and literary analysis, evil contrasts with the broad use of good, which encompasses the domains of pleasant, delicious, abundant, flourishing, harmonious, blessed, peaceable, and righteous. The foundation is established for the Deuteronomic triads of good-blessed-life versus evil-cursed-death, embodied through human choice between following God or not. Evil is also most closely collocated with words pertaining to sight, which carries a canonical weight of significance in how God and humanity perceive good and evil (Faro, 2021, p. 5).

The association of sight and evil and its “canonical weight,” as Faro labels it above, is of vital importance here because Blackness is literally *seen* as the hallmark and trademark of evil in the West. Blackness becomes indelibly linked to sin by metaphorical expressions

like “the inky dye of wickedness” and by *Ethiopianizing* Satan in Christian art and iconography. Hypothetically, given the variety of meanings associated with the terms sin and evil, the use of metaphorical blackness offers a practical solution for simplifying and reducing the concept of evil to a single attribute and meme: Blackness. Conceptual metaphors thus “literalized” and “materialized” the abstract notions of sin and evil in the concrete form of African bodies “blackened” explicitly for that purpose (Byron, 2002).

Despite the claims of Christianity being a “revealed religion,” its emergence as a distinct cult in the late first century CE evinces the fact early Christian theologians deliberately and strategically formulated their faith. Evidence shows the cult’s founders invented it out of Jewish beliefs within a Jewish diaspora deeply influenced by Greek culture (Hellenism) and dominated by Roman law and governance (Crossan, 1999; Fox, 1987; Fredriksen, 2018). Moreover, to devise their most consequential allegory—which also directly informed their unique concept of the Self/Other dichotomy—they selected the term *Aιθιοψ* from the Greek language rather than the term Cushite from the Hebrew which identified the same Africana group without reference to skin color. Hence the need here to accomplish two main objectives: (1) to determine how and why Christians gave the Greek nickname “sunburnt” a decisively negative and pejorative meaning and purpose; and (2) to identify the precise mechanisms they used to conflate sin and evil with dark skin.

The discussion that follows examines the cognitive roots of the allegoric methods early Christians devised to interpret the Hebrew Bible and thereby establish the foundations and parameters of Christian belief. It shows the line of transmission of what scholars identify as Jewish-Hellenic biblical hermeneutics went directly from Philo of Alexandria to the most influential theologians in the Christian community in Alexandria who

disseminated his methods throughout the Christian diaspora. Philo, a devout Jew, developed the innovative theories and methods for interpreting biblical scripture (hermeneutics) which proved essential to the development of Christian theology and its exegetical practices (Borgen, 2003; Decock, 2015; Runia, 1995). Although his voluminous writings exhibit his singular dedication to the intellectual and spiritual advancement of his Jewish faith, Philo of Alexandria unknowingly proved instrumental in the invention of Christianity.

Philo of Alexandria and the Transmission of Jewish Allegory

Philo lived in Alexandria when the city dominated the cultural and intellectual life of the Mediterranean world:

Most probably his lifetime spanned the period between 20–15 B.C.E. to 45–50 C.E., although we have no solid indicators to be more exact... What we do know indicates that he is to be considered a contemporary of both Jesus of Nazareth and the apostle Paul. There is little reason, however, to presume that they knew each other or that there was any mutual knowledge of the writings now being associated with Paul or Philo. Paul does not mention Philo, nor does any serious scholar today suggest that Philo mentions the Christians in any of his writings (Seland, 2014, p. 12)

Although born into a prominent Jewish family, like most Alexandrian Jews of his day, he was untrained in Hebrew and therefore acquired his knowledge of the Jewish faith from the Septuagint (Greek) version of the Hebrew Bible and classes taught in Greek in Alexandria's Jewish schools. Some scholars regard him as the first Jewish theologian and the greatest figure in Alexandrian Jewish literature (Seland, 2014). However, this Jewish exegete with a Greek name used Greek philosophy, particularly that of Plato, to interpret and explain the Torah. His deep knowledge of Greek literature inspired him to explore and

explicate commonalities between Hellenic thought and Jewish theology. However, rather than viewing him and his work as violating the integrity of either tradition, Brazilian theologian Cesar Motta Rios reminds us that neither existed in a state of pure abstraction: “It is impossible for any culture to remain completely isolated. This is undoubtedly the case of first century Alexandrian Jewish experience, and also Jewish communities in other times and places” (Rios, 2015, p. 3). Moreover, the point needs to be restated that the Hebrew Bible and its Pentateuchal traditions, which originated in the literary milieu and traditions of the Near East, chronologically corresponds with the creation of the Homeric epics and thus exhibits numerous parallels from Greek literature that researchers have only recently examined in-depth (MacDonald, 2000; Römer, 2015a).

Jewish scholars in Alexandria like Philo no doubt encountered and recognized themes, stories, and other literary elements in the Greek corpus that also appeared in the Hebrew Bible. Their colonized situation too may have influenced them to engage in intercultural intellectual dialogues and debates as diverse Pagan nationalities often did in the quest to find common ground or new knowledge to expand their cult(ural) vocabularies and repositories (Assmann, 1996b). The practices of Jewish scholars like Philo operated within limits that did not violate the basic tenets of one-god-ism and the spiritual parameters of Jewish faith. Philo’s work exhibits this reality in that as much as he employs Platonic philosophy in his exegetical writings, he never ceases to assert the superiority of the Hebrew faith and its one-true-god doctrine over and above all Pagan beliefs. Even so, he constantly brings the two traditions together in intertextual dialogues devised to serve his Jewish exegetical ideals and purposes:

Philo was convinced that a great deal of continuity existed between the wisdom of the Greek sages and the wisdom of the Jewish Scriptures. According to Philo, true

philosophy was presented by God to Israel through Moses when the Law was given on Mount Sinai. This true philosophy was also given, through different means, to other peoples. It was given to the Greeks in their ancient philosophical heritage, elements of which Philo argues are derived from the teachings of Moses. In fact, Moses is seen by Philo as a teacher rather similar to the ancient Greek philosophers. Thus, Philo works extensively in his exegetical analysis to develop in detail the commonality between Greek philosophy and the teachings of Moses (Hauser & Watson, 2003b, p. 16).

The setting for Philo's work is Greco-Roman colonized Egypt, and his productive life and career spans the transition of power between the two colonizers. The army of Julius Caesar entered Egypt in 48 BCE to end the Roman civil war with his rival Pompey who had fled there only to be murdered by the Egyptians. The Romans, however, did not officially annex the colony until the defeat of Cleopatra and her husband and ally Mark Anthony in 30 BCE by the forces of Octavian (later named Augustus). Philo thus grew up under Roman rule in a violent transitional period that brought dramatic changes to the colony. The Roman colonizers barred Egyptians from attending Greek schools and receiving Paideia education—the Greek system of learning that included grammar, geometry, math, gymnastics, music, and rhetoric (Atkinson, 2006). This ban extended to the Mouseion in Alexandria. The Romans also excluded native Egyptians from holding top government posts. Additionally, under the direction of Augustus Caesar, they revived and enforced the Ptolemaic laws against intermarriage. Their ruthless campaign of divide-and-rule and targeted disenfranchisement aimed to erect insurmountable social barriers for native Egyptians. Their policies also increased inter-ethnic violence, particularly attacks against Alexandria's Jewish community (Atkinson, 2006). Roman colonial governance, however, focused primarily on oppressing and controlling native Egyptians:

All Egyptians were classified as *dedicti*, which made them legally no more than serfs ... the property of the emperor. The Greeks were classified as *foederati* ("confederates"). The reasoning behind this classification had nothing to do with

beliefs about racial or color superiority, but the objective result was to create a status division that roughly coincided with a difference in physical type. The same was true throughout northern Africa, where brown-skinned Berbers were 'second-class citizens' under Roman rule (Drake, 1990, p. 60).

As the Roman empire expanded during the first century CE, a golden age of literature and the arts began in its capital. Fueled by what John Rodenbeck describes as “the most momentous cultural appropriation that has ever taken place anywhere in the world” (2001, p. 535), the florescence of Roman arts, unlike that of the Greeks centuries earlier in colonized Egypt, took place in Rome, the center of the empire. The massive transfer of knowledge from Alexandria resulted in the extensive use of materials and methods derived from colonized Africa in Roman education. As Rodenbeck describes it:

They conducted the wholesale transfer of the major elements of Hellenic religion, myth, legend, philosophy, literature, manners, customs, and plastic arts to Roman setting and their translation into a Roman idiom, through which they have come down to us. Every educated Roman knew Greek literature and, in consequence, the Greek language, often to the point of being virtually bilingual. Pompey Great, was murdered, for example, as he read Greek poetry, and Julius Caesar's last words as recorded in Shakespeare "Et tu, Brute?"—are only a Latin approximation of what ancient authorities report he really said, which was in Greek: "Kai su, teknon?" "You too, son?" The writers of ancient Rome's Golden Age wrote in Latin, of course, but saw their task as fundamentally involving naturalization of the Greek culture in which they had been educated (2001, pp. 535-536).

Philo became the leading Jewish theologian of his generation during the tumultuous era when Roman colonialism transformed Alexandrian (Egyptian) society while Roman colonizers assimilated and disseminated Greek-Egyptian knowledge throughout the empire. The theological treatises and methods of exegesis Philo devised proved so influential among the first generation of Christian intellectuals in Alexandria, Eusebius and other church leaders believed he had converted to the faith, and Jerome (the translator of the bible into Latin) listed him as one of the Church Fathers (Laporte, 1988; Ramelli, 2012; Rios, 2015; Seland, 2014; van den Hoek, 1997). Frequent citations of his Jewish-Hellenic

texts by Clement, Origen, and other prominent Christian theologians explains why his work survived and is known today (Laporte, 1988; Ramelli, 2012; van den Hoek, 1988). The Israeli scholar of religion, Guy Stroumsa, contends: “As is well-known, the Septuagint and Philo were soon erased from Jewish memory, and it is only thanks to the Church Fathers that remnants of Jewish Hellenistic literature have reached us” (2012, p. 258). Philo’s “remnants” survive because they became foundational in the development of Christian theology and its hermeneutic methods (Runia, 1993).

While Philo’s allegoric methods especially stand out for their reception by early Christian theologians, allegoric practices in Jewish theology develop and appear centuries before Philo. Jewish exegeses on biblical texts—of which allegory was merely one commonly used hermeneutic tool—probably began with the transference of ancient oral traditions into writing beginning in the seventh century BCE to compose the texts later canonized as the Hebrew Bible (Finklestein & Silberman, 2001; Thompson, 1999). Although evidence shows Philo’s approach differed from Jewish practices outside of Egypt (specifically those associated with Antioch), he may have known of them nonetheless (Young, 2003). A key distinction between Antiochian and Alexandrian exegetical approaches can be observed in Philo’s practice of translating the meaning of a biblical text “into the language of Greek philosophy” rather than explicating it according to Jewish law and prophesy (Matusova, 2010, p. 7). In this instance Philo’s approach may have followed the Jewish Hellenic literary tradition established by Aristobulus, a Jewish philosopher who lived in Alexandria in the second century BCE (Matusova, 2010). Aristobulus famously argued in his *Commentaries on the Writings of Moses*, more than 150 years before Philo, that Greek Philosophy was derivative of Jewish thought (Dawson, 1992).

Aristobulus' claims notwithstanding, some scholars today trace the beginnings of allegory to the same Greek philosophers (among the earliest of note) whose works the Jewish scholar proclaimed to be derivative and imitative of the Jewish intellectual tradition. While the Greek origins of allegory cannot be substantiated, the practice was deeply entrenched in Greek literature and operated as follows according to the Egyptologist J. Gwyn Griffiths:

In its original Greek sense allegory implies that an author proclaims a meaning other than the one which is instantly apparent. The Greeks who explained Homer from this point of view were superimposing the second meaning upon a narrative which usually does not, in our opinion, bear any traces of such a meaning being deliberate.... Two kinds of allegory therefore occur in Greek literature, the one superimposed by critics and the other consciously intended by the author; for the former type the term 'allegoristic' is generally used today (Griffiths, 1967, p. 89).

Plato and Aristotle both criticized the practice of allegory, but Plato nonetheless crafted his famous *Allegory of the Cave* which appears in the *Republic* (c. 375 BCE). Numerous interpretations of it exist including the notion the "cave" represents the human body as the prison of the soul. Plato's text conforms with the "allegoristic" form cited by Griffiths above. The other type of allegory, the "one superimposed by critics," is believed by some scholars to have been invented to defend Homeric literature (the bible of the Greeks) from attacks by Greek philosophers who regarded its depictions of so-called gods and supernatural powers as immature and immoral:

In the sixth century B.C. some of the philosophers, notably, Xenophanes, Pythagoras, and Heraclitus attacked the Homeric and Hesiodic conception of the gods. The rise of allegorical interpretation was an attempt to salvage these revered works by suggesting that the offending episodes really bore hidden meanings which were at once acceptable and elevating (Griffiths, 1967).

The first Greek allegorists apparently responded to an urgent need to save the traditional *paideia* (Greek system of education)—founded on the works of the poets Homer and

Hesiod—from the devastating criticisms of some of their earliest philosophers. Before early Christians came to power in Rome and systematically suppressed Pagan literature, they deployed the same allegoric tactics to defend their beliefs from Pagan attacks (Fox, 1987).

Before taking a closer look at Philo's methods, it is important here to state once again: "But Egypt is in Africa." The presence and history of allegorical methods in ancient Egypt and their intercultural transmission generally receives short shrift from eurocentric scholars. Those who do accept both the evidence of their existence and the fact they pre-date that of the Greeks nevertheless summarily dismiss any possible African contributions to Greek thought. Griffiths, however, identifies the abundance of animal fables as indicative of a "rich allegorical tradition firmly entrenched" in Egypt (1967, p. 92). The presence in Greece of the *Aesopica* or Aesop's fables, the authorship of which traditionally is attributed to fifth century BCE Greek slave, indicates a parallel development of animal tales if not one due to direct transmission from Egypt (Konstantakos, 2011; Lobban, 2002).

Erudite examples of Egyptian allegory also can be seen in other literary genres. The arcane text, *Rebel in the Soul*, which may date as early as 2000 BCE, evidences a fully developed philosophical system in Egypt more than a millennium before the appearance of Homer and Plato (Reed, 1987). It uses an extended metaphor to depict and interrogate the spirit/body paradox—the struggle of the human intellect with physical existence and death. It presents its esoteric discourse in the form of a story that brilliantly centers on a man contemplating suicide and seeking guidance in resolving his inner turmoil through a dialogue with his soul. Hence it exhibits an early and dramatic use of the allegoric form to convey arcane and mystical knowledge about the inner teachings of the Egyptian cults in

what likely constitutes an initiatic text for Egyptian priests (Reed, 1987). Finally, the Egyptian writing system uses picture-signs—referred to in the Greek by the term *hieroglyph*, meaning “sacred writing”—which expressed and represented the entire spectrum of visual, conceptual, and literary metaphors:

It is, indeed, quite plausible that the Egyptians regarded diverse phenomenon in the world as reflecting (“symbolizing”) one another, their meaning(s) analogous or figurally interchangeable. Transformation, metaphors, anthropomorphisms, iconography in writing: all these point to a vividly constructionist understanding of “reality” (Hare, 1999, p. 240).

Regardless of the source of Philo’s inspiration, which many scholars identify as Platonic, he elevated allegory to a new level of prominence in Jewish theology during his lifetime. Surviving texts reveal he allegorized the creation story in Genesis, Cain’s murder of Abel, Noah’s flood, and elements of Mosaic Law (Runia, 1993). His basic methodology consists of first acknowledging and citing the literal interpretation of a bible verse and then offering his symbolic understanding and interpretation of it using allegory and metaphor (Borgen, 2003). The Jewish Hellenic hermeneutic framework he perfected clearly featured in the theological training Christians received in Alexandria. (Decock, 2015; van den Hoek, 1988). Numerous accounts illustrate how the Alexandrian Church Fathers Clement and Origen brought Philo’s three main methods of scriptural interpretation—*literal*, *allegorical*, and *moral*—directly into Christian pedagogy and didactics in the second century CE. Hence, the scholarly recognition of those two Alexandrian Christian theologians and educators as the most prominent proponents of Philo’s methodology (Decock, 2015; Ramelli, 2012; van den Hoek, 1988).

A fourth method, *anagogic* exegesis, based on the work of the Christian monk and theologian John Cassian (c. 360-435, entered the Christian hermeneutic toolkit in the fourth

century. The four methods subsequently became known collectively as the *Quadruga*. The name itself is metaphorical as it is synonymous with the Roman chariot drawn by four horses yoked abreast. The horses thus symbolize the four basic methods of scriptural interpretation that comprised the standard hermeneutic practices in the Latin Church by the middle ages (Klepper, 2016).

Literal interpretations of scripture in Christianity generally “explain” events from a historical perspective while often ignoring the actual timeframe in which the texts were composed. *Allegoric* interpretations, on the other hand, serve to “label” and “connect” purported historical events in the Hebrew Bible as prophecies that predict the ministry of Jesus as re-presented in New Testament gospels. *Moral* interpretations also are termed “tropological interpretations” to denote how early Christians used the Hebrew Bible to provide an ancient lineage and heritage for their “new” faith (Klepper, 2016). “Moral” or “tropological” methods also served to blunt Pagan criticisms of Christian scriptures that appeared fantastical—Jonah swallowed by a big fish, for example—by claiming such texts, like parables and proverbs, contained hidden spiritual truths. *Anagogic* interpretations, the last entry into the *Quadruga*, focused on future events including the last judgement, the resurrection, and prophecies pertaining to the second coming of Jesus (Klepper, 2016).

Despite these useful distinctions, allegories typically function in the basic manner of a “one-to-one narrative in which features of a primary narrative are selected (in the process rhetoric calls *amplificatio*) and correlated with features of a second one that then becomes the “meaning” of the first” (Jameson, 2020, p. 25). The English scholar Peter Crisp explains allegoric function thusly: “It is the role of reference in allegory that determines its most distinctive features. The fact that allegorical expressions refer to source

rather than target domain entities means that allegorical language is often as language perfectly literal” (2001, p. 10).

The literalization of the abstract ideas “sin” and “evil” particularly concerns this study because it explains how Africans were “literally” denigrated (blackened) and demonized. The literal allegoric method amplified and materialized those abstract ideas by mapping them onto skin color to identify and designate Ethiopians as their physical exemplars and embodiments. Accordingly, meaning was transferred from the primary narrative (sin) to the secondary one (Africans), which then replaced or superseded the original. Hence, sin is not just theoretically “Black” it is “Blackness” literally, which by inference means “Black” people become its physical manifestation as “Blackness” *personified*. The allegory’s metaphorical *mapping* (a technical term used in cognitive linguistics) therefore occurs by making fictional entities “literally” real (Crisp, 2001). Hence the idea of “Black” people is made *real*—as well as the belief Africans are “Black” people—through what originally was a metaphoric association of sin and Africans with “blackness.” As noted, Homer’s metaphoric neologism, burnt-faced (*Ethi-ops*), is where the idea of human blackness originates. Given the fact approximately eight centuries passed before the term became a pejorative in Christian rhetoric, this study contends this semantic change occurred to serve a specific function in Christian catechism.

At its most basic level of application literal allegorizing provides a framework for taking situations, events, or abstract ideas and describing them in terms of material objects, persons, or actions. This method typically involves reading a text using a deliberate interpretive structure to find meaning or meanings not explicitly set forth but that the reader believes to be embodied in the narrative (Crisp, 2001). The practice therefore is ideological

in nature and should be viewed as such within the contexts of its reception and practice by early Christian exegetes (Jameson, 2020). This means considering, as done here, the origins and development of Christian dogma within a Greco-Roman colonized society. By identifying and analyzing the socio-political circumstances and colonial matrix where the metaphorical and allegorical “blackness” of African people first appears, this study historicizes its manifestation and links its usage to a specific cognitive and ideological purpose—to construct the meaning and purpose of Christian salvation. This approach also sets the stage to explain how it applies centuries later as Western Christians consciously expanded the basic catechistic function of blackness/antiblackness to justify and rationalize white supremacy and African enslavement.

The Transmission of Jewish-Hellenic Allegory to Christianity

As noted, the Jewish world in the first century CE consisted of multiple sects that competed for prominence and followers within the diaspora. Early Christian communities comprised another diaspora widely dispersed across the Mediterranean world. Neither of the two faiths, however, can be described at any point in their histories as homogeneous in their practices and beliefs (Crossan, 1999). Moreover, given the emergence of Christianity as a Jewish sect, Christian conversions most likely began within Jewish communities in the Mediterranean population centers of Jewish life and learning. In tracking the faith’s early manifestations and development, Alexandria and Antioch, a major city in Syria, emerge as principal centers of Christianity before Rome became its umbilical in Europe. Hence despite the purported birth of Jesus and the Christian faith in Roman colonized Judea, Christianity owes much of its identity in its first three centuries to developments occurring

mainly in North Africa and in the eastern region of Rome's empire (Armstrong, 2011; Crossan, 1999; Oden, 2007).

Alexandria, the greatest city in the Mediterranean world in the first century CE, constituted the most significant venue where Pagans, Jews, and early Christians interacted socially and intellectually. However, relations under Greek and Roman colonizers were contentious at best and frequently bloody. In addition to the oppression of native Egyptians, historians also note the existence of a well-documented animus against Jews in Egypt. Some scholars claim the antagonism rose to the level of "antisemitism," which they also argue was deeply rooted in the region's history:

The traditional strong dislike between Jews and Egyptians is reflected in the anti-Jewish calumnies of the Egyptian priest Manetho, writing in the first half of the third century B.C.E. The tension and mutual aversion between Egyptians and Greeks was no less strong, but it was often compounded by anti-Jewish sentiment (Stroumsa, 2012, p. 260).

Egyptian animus toward Jews was real, but the notion Manetho's work represents an early example of antisemitism rests on faulty interpretation (Raspe, 1998). It seems more likely Egyptians associated Jews with foreign invaders and colonizers, particularly the reviled Persian rulers with whom many Jews entered Egypt in 525 BCE. Guilt-by-association thus appears a more likely explanation for native Egyptian attitudes than hostility to Jewish beliefs, the specifics of which did not become more widely known to non-Jews until the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek in the second century BCE (Raspe, 1998). The Jewish claim in the Hebrew Bible of enslavement in Egypt, and the fantastical stories of the Hebrew god visiting the Egyptians with ten deadly plagues and destroying a Pharaoh, and his army (for which no documentary or archeological evidence exists) no doubt contributed to Egyptian hostility once these ideas became commonly known.

Ethnic divisions sowed and exploited in Alexandria by Roman imperialist policies increased social tensions in the city in first century CE (Atkinson, 2006). Roman occupiers deliberately targeted Jews in Alexandria, as they did in Roman Judea, for refusing to show obeisance to the imperial cult of the Roman emperors (Alston, 1997; Atkinson, 2006; Fox, 1987). Relations soon devolved to a level of violence that resembled gladiatorial contests in the Roman Circus as various factions battled outright in the city's streets. In 38 CE, the Roman governor Flaccus declared Jews to be "foreigners" in the city. As a direct outcome of the violence that followed, Jews were "forcefully dislodged and concentrated, under squalid conditions, into one of the five quarters of the city, into what we should perhaps call the first ghetto in Jewish history" (Stroumsa, 2012).

Philo witnessed and wrote about the Alexandrian mob's rampage and destruction and traveled to Rome to the court of Emperor Caius Caligula to lodge a protest on behalf of his community (Alston, 1997). The fate of Alexandria's Jews in the centuries that followed, however, remains a matter of speculation. Few texts written by Jews in Greek in Alexandria subsequently appear. This absence led some scholars to suggest most Jews in the city converted to Christianity (Stroumsa, 2012). The question of Jewish mass conversion, however, remains a subject of significant debate. Despite the contentious intellectual environment in Alexandria, however, Greek philosophy and Jewish theology still met, merged, and contributed decisively to the birth of early Christian doctrine (Decock, 2015; Römer, 2015a, 2018; van den Hoek, 1997).

The next step in this investigation is to connect Philo and his Greek education and philosophy of Jewish Hellenism to the hermeneutic practices of the first generation of Church Fathers. The earliest texts the first Christian theologians composed are known

collectively as *patristic* writings or *patrology*. This period also is referred to as the “Apostolic Age” (Lake, 2020; Trigg, 2003). Patristic writing thus date from the end of the Apostolic Age, circa 100 CE, to approximately 451 CE. They thus culminate according to scholarly convention with the Council of Chalcedon, which settled pressing questions in 451 CE about the divine nature of Jesus and reaffirmed the Creed of Nicaea the bishopric had previously voted to make orthodox doctrine in 325 CE (Trigg, 2003). The Apostolic Age thus encompasses the critical timeframe when antiblack rhetoric appears in Christian discourses and rhetoric. During this formative period Philo’s writings circulated widely among Christian scholars and theologians, particularly in Alexandria. His death, circa 50 CE, occurred at approximately the time when scholars estimate the first Christian text, *Thessalonians 1* was written, and more than two centuries before the New Testament is canonized (Gamble, 2003; Wilson, 1998). Philo’s work thus supplied the key link in the chain of transmission of exegetical methods from Jewish Hellenism to Christian Hellenism during the most critical period in the development of Christian doctrine. Philo’s methods thus are fully evident in the texts of patristic writers like Clement, and Origen, who lived in the second century, and who established the framework for early Christian hermeneutic practice. Their writings also exhibit Philo’s massive influence on the general education the first generation of Christians received in Greco-Roman Alexandria (Runia, 1993, 1995; van den Hoek, 1997).

To delineate the transmission of the *Paideia* (tradition of Greek education) from Greco-Egyptians to Jews to Christians, this study draws a line from the Mouseion and Library of the Ptolemies, to the Jewish-Hellenic education Philo received in the Jewish

schools in Alexandria, and finally to the city's Christian catechetical school (*Didaskaleion*), which may have been the first Christian educational institution in world:

The scholarly traditions begun in the Ptolemaic Mouseion of Alexandria, meanwhile, continued into the Christian era. There toleration and pluralism were maintained and in the first century that city was host to the teachings of pagan Greeks, hellenized Jews, and Christians alike. Tradition assigns the introduction of Christianity into Alexandria to St Mark, around the year A.D. 45, and by the end of the first century it seems that groups of Christian students followed the pagan custom of gathering around masters to gain enlightenment. In some instances the groups consisted simply in persons seeking religious instruction in the new faith, in what were, essentially, catechetical schools.... The evidence is not available for any positive descriptions to be made, but it does seem like a catechetical school was established in the second century under the direction of Pantaenus, a figure completely obscure except for the record that he was the teacher of Clement, another great apologist of the early Christian church. In Alexandria can be found the beginnings of the institutional study of Christian doctrine (Bowen, 1972, p. 240).

The institutional development and study of Christian doctrine thus begins in Egypt, in the second century, in Alexandria, where the educational practices of the older Greco-Egyptian and Hellenic Jewish schools converged and coalesced in Christian formal education. (Marcos, 2010; Matusova, 2010; Rodenbeck, 2001; Römer, 2018). It thus bears repeating: Egypt is in Africa and Alexandria most likely is the place where most of Christianity's early converts in the Roman world resided. The idea of Christianity's birth in Africa is a popular theme in Africana intellectual circles but one that mainstream Western Christianity generally ignores or neglects. When summarized and brought to light, however, the evidence appears irrefutable:

The global Christian mind has been formed out of a specific history, not out of bare-bones theoretical ideas. Much of that history occurred in Africa. Cut Africa out of the Bible and Christian memory, and you have misplaced many scenes of salvation history. It is the story of Abraham in Africa; Joseph in Africa; Moses in Africa; Mary, Joseph, and Jesus in Africa, and shortly thereafter Mark and Perpetua and Athanasius and Augustine in Africa (Oden, 2007, p. 14).

We can add Origen and Jerome to the list above, as the former theologian was born in Alexandria and the latter studied there at its Christian school. Each of the bible stories listed above that purportedly occurred before the Jesus mythos is central to Christian belief because Christians made the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the official bible of the Christian Church (Matusova, 2010; Rodenbeck, 2001; Römer, 2018). It served that role for nearly four centuries until Jerome translated Old Testament scripture from Hebrew to Latin to complete the famous Latin Vulgate Bible officially adopted by the Roman Catholic Church in 405 CE (Tov, 1988). According to the Jewish scholar Guy Stroumsa (2012), this appropriation of the Septuagint by Christians in the centuries leading to the establishment of the Latin Church may have caused many Jews to abandon it entirely. He contends the Ptolemaic Greek translation lost its appeal, especially within the Rabbinate, after it became the bible of Christians (Stroumsa, 2012). However, some evidence suggests Jews did not abandoned the Septuagint as quickly as Stroumsa claims. It indicates Jews continued to use the Septuagint because it was written in Greek, which had been their colonial language for centuries and which they retained even after Rome imposed its rule over the Mediterranean world (Greenspoon, 2003).

Greek colonization of Egypt fell to Roman colonization in 30 BCE, which in turn fell to Christian colonization of the Roman Empire in the fourth century CE. Successive invasions and occupations, however, did not end or erase the dissemination of knowledge from Alexandria, as is indicated by Rome's assimilation of the Greek literature and philosophy for which the city was an incubator, distribution center, and repository. Educational policies changed under colonial conditions, but the transmission of allegoric theory and methods continued through successive regimes and emerged intact within

Christian education in Egypt more than four centuries after the founding of the Mouseion and Library. (Duarte, 2019; Laporte, 1988; Matusova, 2010; Ramelli, 2012; van den Hoek, 1988, 1997).

The next chapter continues the discussion of the transmission of Jewish Hellenic allegoric practices from Philo to the first generation of Christian scholars in Alexandria. It examines and analyzes how they contributed to defining Christian identity based on notions of sin and salvation, and how this conceptual framework resulted in the social construction of the whiteness/antiblackness dichotomy. It thus identifies specific texts that evidence, embody, and exemplify Christian antiblack rhetoric. It also identifies the prominent theologian who bears the most responsibility for its standardization and dissemination.

CHAPTER FIVE:
THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF ANTIBLACK DISCOURSES
IN CHRISTIANITY

The moral and social values attached to black skin emerged early in the formation of the Christian tradition. The interplay between curiosity, ambiguity and ambivalence, and the sensual were joined with the devil as the symbol of evil and sin to confirm traditional myths and establish new myths about blackness and black skin (Hood, 1994, p. 85).

Introduction

This chapter examines the early history of Christian education in Alexandria and focuses its structural analysis on three critical issues: (1) the training and production of several of the faith's most influential and innovative educators and theologians in a system deeply grounded in Hellenism and the Greek *Paideia*; (2) the massive and fundamental influence of Alexandria-based Christian theologians in the development of Christian ideology and its intellectual tradition which now spans two millennia; and (3) the resulting social consequences of early Christians using their faith to rupture the ancient system of cultural translation by weaponizing the dehumanizing monotheist dichotomy of believer/non-believer to define Self/Other based on notions of white = good, black = evil, and thereby establish the basic framework of the cult's identity and dogma.

The classic account of the history of Christian education in Alexandria comes from Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260/265 – 339/340 CE), an early Christian historian and exegete who composed his most notable work, *Ecclesiastical History*, in the 290s. It furnishes the

earliest surviving chronological account of the Christian community and Church dating from the Apostolic Age to his own time. As the historian Peter Borgen notes: “Eusebius continued the Alexandrian tradition, but in Palestine. He incorporated a lengthy notice regarding Philo in his *Ecclesiastical History* and gave extensive citations from Philo in his apologetic writings” (2003, p. 137). Eusebius’s writings therefore verify the centrality of Philo’s treatises to Christianity and their reception by the Church leadership. Moreover, his genealogy of Christian education in Egypt attributes its beginnings to a purported disciple of Jesus. He thus connects the founding of the first Christian school in Alexandria directly to the evangelical ministry of the purported “son of god” by way of Mark the Evangelist.

Like Eusebius, many early Christians believed this Mark is the author of the New Testament gospel which bears his name. Coptic Christian traditions in Egypt include the narrative about his sojourn in Alexandria, his role as a founder of its Christian community, and also claim he was martyred in there in 68 CE (Oden, 2007; Oliver, 2016). Even though he purportedly composed the first and hence the oldest Christian gospel: “Not much is known about him or his family except for a few references in the Bible. The general assumption, originating in the West, is that Mark was born and bred in Palestine” (Oliver, 2016). The historian Thomas Clark Oden, however, argues for his birth in North Africa and asserts he was its first evangelist on the continent (2007). Eusebius, perhaps following a widely known oral tradition, contends:

They say that this Mark was the first to be sent to preach in Egypt the Gospel which he had also put into writing, and was the first to establish Churches in Alexandria itself. The number of men and women who were there converted at the first attempt was so great, and their asceticism was so extraordinarily philosophic, that Philo thought it right to describe their conduct and assemblies and meals and all the rest of their manner of life (Eusebius Pamphilus, 1856, p. 65).

In extolling the sect's origins and "philosophical" acumen, Eusebius cites Philo as an eyewitness to the arrival of Christianity in Alexandria. In this instance, however, he misinterprets the text at issue which has been shown instead to describe an obscure Jewish sect known as *Therapeutae* who lived on the outskirts of Alexandria (Seland, 2014). Still, Eusebius's statement proves the Jewish Philo had retained his stature and prominence in Christian literature more than two centuries after his death. Philo's surviving writings currently number about 30 extant manuscripts containing at least 850,000 words. Their preservation and transmission evidences their centrality and value in Christian theology (Philo, 1991; Runia, 1993). Yet in his surviving corpus—preserved by Christians rather than Jews—not a single mention of Jesus or Christianity can be found (Seland, 2014). In terms of the advent of the new cult, Philo, the great thinker and didact, seems a myopic observer at best.

Philo witnessed firsthand events that transpired in the Roman empire in the first half of the first century CE. A well-respected scholar from a prominent Jewish family whose brother worked in colonial administration for the Romans, Philo traveled in the highest Jewish social circles. At some point in his life he visited Jerusalem and wrote about its Second Temple (Philo, 1991). Yet he never mentions any of the events that transpired pertaining to the ministry of Jesus or his arrest, trial, sentencing, or crucifixion, which, according to Christian tradition triggered an earthquake and daytime darkness in Jerusalem. Nor did he note the resurrection and ascension of Jesus into heaven. Each incident is central to Christian theology and thus have been recounted as witnessed events in the canonical gospels (the primary sources of these stories); yet Philo wrote not one word about any of them. On these and other key components of the Jesus story, including his purported

miracles, Philo is silent. His silence, however, comports with the reality that no verifiable contemporary reports of Jesus and his ministry exist (Ehrman, 2014; Thompson, 2009).

Despite its flaws, Eusebius's history presents us with a chronicle of early Christianity that locates its beginnings in Egypt at a moment nearly commensurate with its conception in Roman Judea. His identification of Mark as the founder of the Christian school in Alexandria places it among the earliest centers of Christian education on record, along with Jerusalem and the city of Antioch in Syria (where Jesus's followers were first called "Christians") (Crossan, 1999). Eusebius's list of the school's founders and initial leaders nevertheless appears fanciful in some cases. In fact, he apparently mislabeled early sites where Christian instruction took place as "schools" even though they may not have been formally organized or perhaps focused mainly on preparing converts for baptism rather than developing Christian doctrine (van den Hoek, 1997). Eusebius also does not provide a formal title of the Alexandrian institution and refers to it primarily as the "school of instruction" (van den Hoek, 1997).

Other efforts to reconstruct the list of the school's "heads," as they were titled, produced several revisions. Some early scholars notably removed Mark from list and started it with Athenagoras, who is followed in the first two centuries CE by Justus, Eumanus, and Marianus (Oliver, 2015). Athenagoras, listed variously as the school's first head (and sometimes as following three listed above), had been a major critic of Christianity while working as a teacher at the Mouseion. He famously experienced an epiphany circa 176 CE that led him to convert to Christianity after which he became a major "defender of the faith" (Oliver, 2015, p. 4). Athenagoras thus furnishes a direct link between the Mouseion and the Christian school. His few surviving works show a scholar:

“Addressing pagans in their own terms” and rarely using the bible in his treatises (Trigg, 2003, p. 321). His successors, however, some of whom were his contemporaries, proved instrumental in bringing Philo’s work and methods into routine use in Christian writing and catechetical instruction:

The teachers of the catechetical school in Alexandria—Pantaenus, especially Clement and Origen—made use of Philo's writings in making the connection between the biblical sources and philosophical ideas and categories. They also followed Philonic methods of exegesis. A main difference was, of course, that their expositions were written in a setting basically located outside the Jewish community. Moreover, their presupposition was that Christ, not the laws of Moses, was the center of revelation (Borgen, 2003, p. 136).

The above account of the history of Christian education in Alexandria sets the stage for the forthcoming discussions that document the advent of antiblack discourses in early Christianity as devised by prominent Christian exegetes for didactic purposes. The discussions also examine the prominent role of the Alexandrian theologians, Clement, and Origen, in founding the Christian hermeneutic tradition. Clement’s pioneering role in introducing Philo’s methods to Christian pedagogy and didactics is evidenced by his own works and by the accounts of his students and biographers who frequently credit and commend his educational innovations and influences. Origen, on the other hand, is recognized and treated here as the theologian directly responsible for the development of the cult’s most significant catechism on sin and salvation, which relied on the prominent use of “black” as metaphor and idiom.

Clement of Alexandria

The surviving texts of Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215 CE) unquestionably reveal his early and extensive use of Philo’s writings to bring Hellenic (Platonic) philosophical ideas and practices into Christian biblical exegesis. Clement’s work thus “provides one of our earliest windows, after the New Testament, on early Christian biblical interpretation” (Trigg, 2003, p. 309). His writings supply therefore supply a direct connection between Hellenic Jewish thought, as exemplified by Philo, and emerging Christian belief.

Clement relied on the authority of the Septuagint and frequently interpreted its texts literally. However, in his surviving writings he also carefully distinguishes between his historical interpretations of scriptures and his exegeses of their purported deeper meanings. He even applies the same symbolic and metaphorical framework to his expositions as his Jewish predecessor: “Like Philo, Clement uses the image of body and soul. According to Clement, the interpreter’s aim is to advance from the body of Scripture to the soul” (Borgen, 2003, p. 137). Also, like Philo, no evidence exists to link Clement to the practice of metaphorically denigrating African bodies. Such ideas apparently did not exist in the Philonic/Hellenic Jewish tradition that informed Clement’s education in the second century. His importance here rests therefore on the exegetical apparatus and philosophical methods he famously acquired from the tradition and brought into early Christianity. It is Clement in fact who standardizes the hermeneutic practices his pupils and successors subsequently use to devise and formulate antiblack Christian rhetoric.

Through his intellectual embrace of the Hellenic Jewish tradition, Clement brought Pagan ideas in the form of Greek philosophy into the foundation of Christian theology. His innovations are plainly evident in his explication of the *Logos* (divine reason or word of

god). This concept in Greek thought is traced to the philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 550 – 480 BCE) who:

propounded the idea that the opposites so clearly perceptible in the world, are actually in balance and stability in an orderly way. He came to the conclusion that the world is a balanced adjustment of opposing tendencies so that even though all things are in flux, behind the strife between opposites is a hidden harmony. Heraclitus named this principle of balance, stability, and order, the *Logos* [author's italics] (Evans, 2016, p. 2).

By Clement's day the concept had evolved into a prominent tenet of Gnosticism (a Jewish Christian belief that probably originated in Alexandria in the first century) (Hoblík, 2014). The *Logos* concept explained the generative principles that created the cosmos, especially the creative power of god's *Word*. Through Clement and other early Church Fathers, this Pagan idea contributed to the conception of the holy trinity or triune god later posited and reified in Christian orthodoxy. Its prior presence in Philonic literature in Alexandria is well attested:

A relatively consistent meditation on God, Logos and powers in relation to the Holy can be found in Philo's exegetical treatise "Questions and Answers on Exodus", which offers a good example of how sacral symbolism became the subject of a rationalizing (Philo aptly differentiates between "dianoetic" and "literal" meaning, cf., e.g., *Quaestiones et solutiones in Exodum* 2:47) allegorical interpretation that leads to clear differentiations (Hoblík, 2014, p. 6).

Clement not only endorses and promotes the Philonic notion of the *Logos* or Word of God, it is possible he also knew of the *Logos* tradition in ancient Egyptian belief. Egyptian texts present a highly developed concept of the *Divine Word* millennia before Heraclitus and the advent of Greek thought. An extraordinary example can be seen in the "Memphite Theology," a treatise dating from 700 BCE, but which most likely preserves a tradition that began with the founding of the city of Memphis sometime between 4000 and 3500 BCE (Frankfort et al., 1946). Recognized by Egyptologists as one of the most remarkable texts

in the ancient world, African scholar George G.M. James regards it as providing the “basis for the entire field of Greek Philosophy” (James, 1976, p. 139). In it, the deity Ptah, who represents Thought, Logos, and Creative Power, conceives the world in his mind before creating it by his own Word:

This is the most elaborate Egyptian account of the creation by the Word, and it differs from the biblical account in two ways. The first is the role of the heart, that is the planned conception of creation—an idea absent from the bible. The second is the role of the script, the hieroglyphs, mentioned on two occasions. For what the heart thinks up are not the names of things but their “concepts” and their “forms.” Hieroglyphic script is a rendering of the forms and relates to the concepts by way of those forms. The tongue vocalizes the concepts “thought up” by the heart and given outward and visible from by the hieroglyphic script (Assmann, 2003, p. 353)

Despite its differences with the biblical account of creation, echoes of the Memphite Theology can be seen in opening passages of *Genesis* and in the idea of Jesus as the *Word* made flesh (Assmann, 2003). Clement’s awareness of the Egyptian tradition perhaps can be inferred from his stated knowledge of its sacred literature:

He speaks of forty-two “absolutely essential” books that formed the central core of any temple library and were attributed to Thoth-Hermes himself. The priests were the repositories of this knowledge. Thus they were not required to know all the books, but to concentrate on specific subjects in accordance with their rank or office (Assmann, 2003, p. 412)

In his work titled *Stromata*, or “Miscellanies,” Clement describes and categorizes a list of subjects contained in the ancient Egyptian canon. Items in his bibliography have been verified through comparison with surviving records from ancient Egyptian libraries (Assmann, 2003). His bibliography thus indicates a standard canon or corpus of ancient Egyptian literature and knowledge existed in his day and was still held in high esteem in Greco-Roman Egypt despite the fact the ability to translate ancient Egyptian texts declined significantly under Greek rule. Yet again this study posits the possibility of ancient African ideas and beliefs being absorbed and reworked by Greeks and Jews before Christians

received them in the form of Jewish Hellenism. Of the many ideas assimilated and transmitted in this fashion, the concept of the *Logos* is among the most critical to Christian theology. Its centrality is evident in the Gospel of John, which identifies Jesus as the incarnate *Logos*, or the word of god made flesh: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). This notion is foundational to the Christian trinity. It also appears in the New Testament book of *Revelations* where its prophetic portrayal of the second coming of Jesus reeks of apocalyptic violence:

¹³ And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

¹⁴ And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

¹⁵ And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

¹⁶ And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS (Revelations 19:13-16).

While Clement served as a key Christian mediator and purveyor of Philo’s theories and methods for biblical interpretation, as an allegorist he did not devise or deploy metaphors involving blackness and Ethiopians. This study traces the origin of that institutional practice to his contemporary and student, Origen. However, during both men’s lifetimes, an Alexandrian text of unknown origins— the *Epistle of Barnabas*—supplied an early conceptual framework for the development of Christian antiblack rhetoric and discourses.

The Epistle of Barnabas and the Black One

The *Epistle of Barnabas* lacks a precise dating. Some scholars initially believed it was the creation of Barnabas, the purported cousin of Mark the Evangelist, the legendary founder of the Christian catechetical school in Alexandria. Clement apparently is the source of this

erroneous idea which took root and endured for centuries (Paget, 2006). Recent scholarship pointing to the text's use of Alexandrian exegetical methods and several other dateable characteristics locates its composition in Egypt in the early decades of the second century: "The letter is clearly written after the destruction of the Second Temple; and the absence of any mention of the second Jewish revolt, particularly in a document so tainted by an anti-Jewish spirit, indicates a *terminus ad quem* of about 130 C.E." (Paget, 1994, p. 9). John Dominic Crossan, a leading scholar of early Christianity, sets the date of its composition at the end of the first century CE as "probably between 96 and 98 C.E." (1999, p. 569). Even though this more exact dating remains speculative, the *Epistle's* origins at or near the beginning of the patristic era stamps it as one of the earliest Christian treatises. Cited by Clement, Origen, Didymus the Blind, Eusebius, Jerome, and other Church Fathers, it remained a key Christian text until well into the fifth century CE. Origen and Jerome held it in high esteem to the point of viewing it as canonical (Paget, 2006). It thus comprises and represents what is viewed here as one of the earliest identifiable written example of Philonic exegetical practices in Alexandria's Christian community even though the authorship remains unknown:

The Epistle of Barnabas ... moves interpretation in the direction of what will be known as Alexandrian exegesis: describing a deeper insight into Scripture. The author draws on traditional prooftexts or *testimonia*, assuming that the Old Testament is a prophecy of Christ. He understands the legal and ritual provisions of the Old Testament allegorically as moral provisions for the Christian life. The Old Testament is interpreted by means of christocentric allegory and typology. The author does cite Matt. 20:16 and 22:14 with a quotation formula, which may indicate a very early recognition of the Gospel as Scripture on par with the Old Testament (Hauser & Watson, 2003b, p. 41)

The *Epistle* presents an early and foundational Christian doctrine known as the "Two Ways," which initially appears in a first century CE text known as the *Didache* ("teaching")

in Greek), and which also bears the title: *The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*. Its didactic content outlines and covers Christian ethics, ceremonies and rituals like baptism and the Eucharist, and the structure and organization of the Church, led scholars to view the *Didache* as a catechetical work that evolved into a pastoral manual to provide basic instruction for pre-baptismal and new Christian converts (Lake, 2020; Paget, 1994). Its teachings define and delineate two ways or choices in life—*The Way of Life* and *The Way of Death*—one virtuous and the other wicked, with the former leading to salvation through Jesus and Christianity, and the latter leading to Satan, eternal damnation, and hell (Lake, 2020). Several passages from the *Didache* share identical language with chapters 18–20 in the *Epistle of Barnabas*. In the *Epistle* the common passages are presented verbatim, rearranged, or simply abridged. Scholars thus find text in the *Epistle's* iv, 9 either come directly from *Didache*, 16, 2–3, or vice versa (Lake, 2020; Paget, 1994).

This discussion focuses on two passages: iv, 9 and xx, 20. What its analysis finds most striking is the possibility they represent the first instance in Alexandrian Christian literature (and Christian literature, generally) of the “blackening” of evil in direct association with Satan as its personification. The first such reference appears as follows:

Wherefore let us pay heed in the last days, for the whole time of our life and faith will profit us nothing, unless we resist, as becomes the sons of God in this present evil time, against the offences which are to come, that the **Black One** may have no opportunity of entry. Let us flee from all vanity, let us utterly hate the deeds of the path of wickedness [emphasis added] (Lake, 2020, p. 103).

This first reference to an evil figure identified as the “Black One” in the *Epistle* warns believers they will face god’s judgement according to their deeds. The text also offers a prescription for moral behavior and righteous conduct to prevent them from succumbing

to the temptations of the world. The next passage, however, furnishes a more detailed description of the “Way of Death” and those who succumb to it:

But the Way of the **Black One** is crooked and full of cursing, for it is the way of death eternal with punishment, and in it are the things that destroy their soul: idolatry, forwardness, arrogance of power, hypocrisy, double-heartedness, adultery, murder, robbery, pride, transgression, fraud, malice, self-sufficiency, enchantments, magic, covetousness, the lack of the fear of God; persecutors of the good, haters of the truth, lovers of lies, knowing not the reward of righteousness, who “cleave not to the good,” nor to righteous judgment, who attend not to the cause of the widow and orphan, spending wakeful nights not in the fear of God, but in the pursuit of vice, from whom meekness and patience are far and distant, “loving vanity, seeking rewards,” without pity for the poor, working not for him who is oppressed with toil, prone to evil speaking, without knowledge of their Maker, murderers of children, corrupters of God’s creation, turning away the needy, oppressing the afflicted, advocates of the rich, unjust judges of the poor, altogether sinful [emphasis added] (Lake, 2020, p. 116).

Who is the “Black One” or ὁ Μέλας (*Ho Melas*), as rendered in ancient Greek? The text proclaims *his way* is the “Way of Death,” but the author of the *Epistle* apparently does not feel a need to identify the evil being as Satan. This omission indicates readers instantly will comprehend the epithet’s meaning. In this sense, the *Epistle* gives good cause to assume the association of Satan with blackness had become a commonplace in Christian discourses by the latter decades of the first century. If so, this blackening of the devil took place precisely when Christianity is strategically parting with its Jewish identity to forge a new cult.

How pervasive and persuasive the association of blackness with Satan may have been in Jewish Christian thought in first century Alexandria remains a matter of speculation. Nevertheless, events that followed the *Epistle’s* composition confirm the antiblack ideas it contains took root in Christian catechism. By the fourth century CE, Didymus the Blind (c. 313-398), who wrote numerous exegetical works and taught at the Alexandrian Christian school, “rules out any understanding of ὁ Μέλας as other than Satan

who is in turn identified as the devil” (Rothschild, 2019, p. 228). The *Epistle*’s reference to ὁ Μέλας thus gives reason to hypothesize it denotes a transitional period in early Christian thought when evil personified is *blackened* but not yet *Ethiopianized*. Accordingly, “black” appears to be moving from the abstract to the literal, or from adjective to noun. The use of the “Black One” as an appellative in the *Epistle* thus introduces a profoundly more significant meaning and function for *melas* than its basic adjectival form suggests. This process culminates in spectacular fashion in monastic literature in Egypt in the fourth century CE, when the *Ethiopianizing* of Satan, as indicated by Didymus, becomes commonplace and socially consequential (Brotóns Merino, 2018; Byron, 2002; Rothschild, 2019).

Hence the *Epistle* clearly marks a transitional period in early Christian thought when evil personified is blackened but not formally *Ethiopianized*. This initial conception nevertheless constitutes a distinction with a real difference because its final formulation indicates a cognitive transfer of meaning from the primarily abstract (the devil) to the concrete (African people). It also evinces a Christian refinement and amplification of the Satanic concept, which in its earlier variants in Jewish thought and literature appears far less definitive in conception and more multi-purpose in usage:

The history of the word “satan” in some respects follows a trajectory that is the inverse of the one described above. “Satan” in modern speech is a word that is typically reserved for a particular individual, who is supposed to correspond to “the Satan” of the Hebrew Scriptures (Zech 3; Job 1–2). In the early literature, however, the noun שָׂטָן could refer to many different individuals. In addition, the ancient meaning of this noun has been lost to modern interpreters, as biblical scholars have inadvertently read later notions of Satan into earlier texts that speak of *satans* or *the Satan* (Stokes et al., 2016, p. 260).

The historian Christopher Rollston identified and examined every appearance of the term Satan and found it in “a grand total of only four chapters out of more than nine hundred

chapters in the Hebrew Bible: Zechariah 3, Job 1-2, and Chronicles 21” [italics added] (2016, p. 2). He thus concludes Satan “is not a major character in the Hebrew Bible” (p. 2). Yet, the devil, as he is commonly known, emerges as the most significant actor in Western Christian history and dogma next to its one-true-god. Rollston’s finding thus indicates Satan acquires a distinct and powerful role and purpose in Christian theology which vastly exceeds his conception in the Hebrew Bible.

Christianity’s hijacking and magnification of Satan exposes a deliberate process whereby early Christians appropriated and redeployed Jewish beliefs to establish their cult. It bears repeating, Christian theologians read the Hebrew Bible through the lens of Christian theology for two major purposes: (1) to establish a prophetic, literary provenance for the gospels; and (2) to appropriate, transform, and claim the Hebrew Bible as their own text by renaming and re-canonizing it as the Christian *Old Testament*. The need to historicize and “universalize” the Jesus story in the gospels drove early Christians to use the Hebrew Bible as its preamble in the form of a prophetic text that foretells the advent of the Christian cult. Biblical scholars denote this uniquely Christian methodology with the term: *typological*. Typology and the typological imagination need to be understood as performing a critical role in the construction of the cult of Jesus by inventing and reifying a Christian scriptural tradition before Christianity even existed:

Early Christians straightened out the unfolding of temporality (with its gaps and vicissitudes) into a theological timeline fantastically based on two distinct but related notions. First, they posited a present (“this is now”) exclusively as a Christian present. They cut off a Jewish “that was then” from a Christian “this is now.” They also imagined a specific direction to Christian time. They believed that the Christian new time—a “this is now—*superseded* a “that was then” of Israel. Such a temporal logic also enabled early Christians to divide up a shared scriptural tradition. Christian subsumed the Hebrew Bible into an “Old Testament” and conceived of this Old Testament as a text anterior to their New Testament. “Christian-ness” was thus affirmed by the repetitive cutting off of the old Jewish

time from the new Christian time. Even though Christians shared literary genres and rhetorical conventions with pagan and Jewish contemporaries, their notion of supersession came to distinguish their reading and writing (Biddick, 2003, p. 1).

The author of the *Epistle* employs this typological approach in his exegesis and therefore may provide one of the earliest examples of Christian supersessionism. The text cites several passages from the Hebrew Bible, specifically from Exodus and Daniel, as irrefutable proof the Jewish scriptures prophesize the coming of Jesus as messiah (Paget, 2006). This typological method clearly did not come from Jewish theology for the obvious reason Jews did not seek a provenance or justification for their beliefs within other literary traditions that predated their own. Moreover, the *Epistle* breaks entirely with Jewish conventions by expressing and disseminating anti-Jewish commentaries solely for supersessionist purposes.

The Christian animus toward Jews as exhibited the *Epistle* contributed to what has been described and labeled as “ethnic reasoning” in early Christian texts. The concept of ethnic reasoning explains the delineation of clear differences between the Jewish and Christian faiths based on a need to define and assert the rights of Christian cultists as a purportedly distinct “ethnic” community within the Roman empire (Kok, 2010). Denise Kimber Buell, a professor of Religion, explains it thusly:

Many Christian texts depict Christians as members of a people, like Jews. “Race” does not mark the dividing line between Jews and Christians. Christians depicted Christianness as having an “essence” (a fixed content) that can be acquired. Christians could define conversion as both the transformation of one’s ethnicity and the restoration of one’s true identity. By portraying this transformation as available to all, Christians universalized this ethnoracial transformation. Instead of positioning Christianness as *not-race* or aracial, many early Christian texts defined their version of Christianity as a race or ethnicity, sometimes in opposition to other rival articulations of Christianness, and sometimes in contrast to non-Christian groups and cultures (including, but not limited, to those defined as “Jews”) [author’s italics] (2005, pp. 8-9).

Christians performed and exhibited this “reasoning” initially through the construction of the Jewish “Other” in a strategy designed to undermine the integrity of Jewish faith and traditions: “The rallying cry of [the Epistle of] Barnabas is that one must be either Judaeen or Christian, not both Judaeen and Christian” (Kok, 2010, p. 92). These strategically crafted practices of inclusion/exclusion and supersession exist and appear fully operational in the text. Yet despite Buell’s defense of using the term “race” in such ancient contexts, this study finds it misleading and counter-productive. The concept of “race” according to the analysis performed here emerged in the medieval era in Western Christianity’s treatment of Jews in Europe as medievalist Geraldine Heng and others document (Hahn, 2001; Heng, 2018, 2019; Ramey, 2014; Whitaker, 2015). Additionally, the insightful work of Erich Gruen warns scholars to be wary of projecting current views about ethnicity into the distant past. In terms of the worldview of ancient peoples, he states: “The topic of ethnicity speaks more to our concerns than to theirs” (2020, p. 6). He clarifies this point as follows:

It is worth observing right from the start that ancient Greeks, Jews, and Romans did not struggle with this subject as moderns do. We possess no treatises or monographs from antiquity devoted to the matter of ethnicity. The ancient were not absorbed in examining, analyzing, or agonizing over the concept. They took for granted the bundle of customs, rituals, and values that constituted their collective identity. Those practices and observances themselves could shift and vacillate, even coexist with myths of divine or heroic origins, but retained central importance for the self-definition of the ancients (2020, p. 6).

Gruen also explains the rare Christian use of the expression “third race” to distinguish themselves from “Others”—which first appears with Clement of Alexandria and then in Paul’s *Letter to the Galatians*—is routinely misinterpreted and misunderstood. Current misinterpretations begin with translating the term “genos” (“lineage” or “kinship”) as “race” (Gruen, 2011, 2020). Reading “race” into these texts confounds the issue at hand. For example, instead of making racial/ethnic distinctions, a close reading reveals Clement,

Paul, and other patristic writers are promoting the belief Christians are the true descendants of Israel—the chosen people promised by god to Abraham—because the Jews proved faithless and disobedient. As Gruen states: “The principle thrust here is not racial divergence but *supersession*” [emphasis added] (2020, p. 211). Again, *supersession* means claiming the entire Jewish tradition and redefining it as a preamble to the birth of Jesus and the revelation of Christianity. By these means Christians declared Judaism obsolete and called for all Jews to convert to the newest “revealed” faith. Through typology and supersessionism Christians, in their minds, became the new Jews.

The *Epistle of Barnabas* exhibits and applies this ideology in making its incendiary claim the Jews no longer enjoy god’s favor. According to the author, Jewish worship of the golden calf, as recounted by Moses in Exodus 32, marks a catastrophic moment in Jewish history because the act of worshipping a “false” god from Egypt purportedly broke their sacred covenant with the “one-true-god.” The *Epistle* claims from that instance forward Jews ceased to be god’s chosen people (Paget, 2006). As the author would have it, the sacred contract passed directly to Christians and their faith centuries later with the birth of Jesus. This historiographical sleight-of-hand enabled the inventors of Christianity to claim their faith superseded the Jewish revelation of the one-true-god and replaced the Jewish faith. They performed this theological theft in part by designating the Hebrew Bible as the “Old Testament” of Christianity to make it the prophetic preamble of the messianic and salvific gospel of the “New Testament”—which reconceptualizes one-god-ism to appoint and incorporate Jesus as the son of god who also is god and savior of humankind.

The *Epistle*, as noted, refers to the devil as ὁ Μέλας “the Black One” but not once as an African/Ethiopian. Another early Apostolic text of unknown authorship titled the

Shepherd of Hermas notably deploys *melas* (black) eighteen times in its discussion of human sin (Brotóns Merino, 2018). Some scholars date *Hermas* to circa 144 CE but it may be much older. Written in Rome, in Greek, this compilation of apocalyptic texts is characteristically prophetic in intent and employs symbolism as its most salient feature. Its brief description follows here:

The *Visions*, *Mandates*, and *Similitudes* of Hermas constitute by far the longest work conventionally included among the works of the Apostolic Fathers. It is also the one work of early Christian literature, apart from the Revelation to John, to present itself as an original prophecy. As such, it rarely quotes Scripture as authoritative, although it contains many allusions to both Testaments (Trigg, 2003, p. 312).

The text features five visions of an enslaved person named Hermas followed by a set of parables. The visions include that of a “beast” whose primary characteristic is “black.” It also describes the building of a tower of the lord, the stones of which are the faithful or true believers. “Black” stones are mentioned on several occasions but wind up being excluded from the tower. Their omission conveys what happens to sinners who fail to repent and seek salvation (Brotóns Merino, 2018). This exclusion of the black stones constitutes yet another early example of linking sin to blackness. Gay Bryon, a professor of New Testament Studies, identifies the *Shepherd of Hermas* as part of a literary genre designed to confront and address the purported persecutions early Christians experienced in Alexandria, in Rome, and throughout the Mediterranean. She finds the apocalyptic language and color-symbolic themes that typify this literature serves to warn and admonish sinners to repent and seek salvation. The texts also offer strategies to enable Christians to survive persecution (Byron, 2002). Byron clarifies their discursive objectives and intent by explaining how the use of *melas* as a symbolic color in both the *Epistle of Barnabas* and the *Shepherd of Hermas* aided early Christians in defining themselves and protecting their

cult's identity and integrity in the face of purported political and existential threats. Her exegeses of the two texts notably identifies and addresses this transitional phase in the literature before "Ethiopian" becomes the preferred term for blackening sin:

In the Alexandrian Jewish-Christian context of *Barnabas*, *melas* served as a polemical device for instructing the community about vices. In the Roman Jewish Christian context of the Shepherd of Hermas, *melas* and related terms served as a way of signifying the perceived threats to the community. Both documents highlight the diversity of early Christianity and the complex modes of communicating its beliefs and values. The references to blackness in these texts do not refer to Blacks or Ethiopians as particular ethnic enemies of the communities. The symbolic language about blackness was part of a rhetorical strategy that functioned within the writings as a form of resistance to the perceived internal and external threats to the community (2002, p. 69).

Byron does an outstanding job clarifying events and circumstances that inspired the rhetorical use of symbolic color terms within the centers for the development of Christian theology in Africa and Europe. Blackness in these specific contexts initially is presented without any ethnic association with African people. However, this study views the symbolic use of the color black as a prerequisite for the eventual substitution of the literal "Ethiopian" for the symbolic *melas* in later Christian discourses. The findings of biblical scholar Brotóns Merino, following her exhaustive analysis of the *Epistle of Barnabas*, confirm this study's hypotheses about the original nature of the use of *melas* in both the *Epistle* and *Hermas*:

the analysis of μέλας [*melas*] in Hellenistic and Biblical literatures does not provide conclusive data to say that the author of the Epistle of Barnabas finds inspiration in that literature to refer to the Devil as ὁ Μέλας and that the principal source for the writers of Early Christian literature is mainly the New Testament (Brotóns Merino, 2018, p. 15).

By excluding Hellenistic literature and the Hebrew Bible, Brotóns Merino directs scholars to look within early Christian literature for the origins of this diabolical usage of "black." This study arrived the same conclusion by eliminating the possibilities early Christians got

their inspiration for Ethiopianizing the devil from pre-existing ideas about the meaning of “black” in Egypt, Ptolemaic Egypt, Roman Egypt, or in Rome itself? While many Christian converts came from Egyptian, Jewish, Greek, and Roman populations in Egypt and elsewhere in the Mediterranean, the pre-Christian cultural baggage they brought with them into the Christian cult apparently did not contribute to “blackening: Ethiopians. In looking strictly within Christian literature for the origins of these dehumanizing allegoric practices one name stands above all others: Origen of Alexandria.

Origen of Alexandria

Origen of Alexandria (c. 184 – c. 253 CE), the prolific early Christian author and immensely influential educator and exegete not only constructed and disseminated the first known antiblack discourses in early Christianity to replace *melas* (symbolic blackness) with Ethiopians (literalized blackness) he made them central to the cult’s conception of sin and salvation. A renowned scholar of Greek literature, philology, philosophy, and the Hebrew Bible, his fame in the Christian world endured for four centuries until the changing precepts of Christian orthodoxy ruled his work heretical (Martens, 2015). Except for the unknown author of the *Epistle of Barnabas*—whose writings clearly demonstrate the Alexandrian exegetical methods introduced by Philo—Origen appears only second to Clement in treating hermeneutics as a discipline. He was the first Christian theologian to use it systematically and write a formal commentary about it (Ramelli, 2012). During his career he composed an estimated 2,000 treatises on biblical hermeneutics that profoundly imprinted Christian theologians and early Christian beliefs and discourses.

A student at the Christian catechetical school in Alexandria, he later headed the school from 193 to 215 CE and then founded a second one in Caesarea, in Judea, where the Christian Churches revered him as the ultimate authority on theology (van den Hoek, 1997). Even though Latin Church authorities posthumously accused him of heresy, some scholars still regard him as “the greatest genius the early church ever produced” (McGuckin, 2004, p. 25). This study views him and his work as unequalled amongst his patristic peers in establishing the centrality of antiblackness to Christian doctrine and dogma.

The name “Origen” suggests his parents were Pagans. It means “progeny of Horus,” indicating the real possibility he converted to Christianity early in his life (Ramelli, 2009). Eusebius, writing a century after Origen to defend him against the charge of being a Pagan philosopher, insists he was born a Christian. Like Philo and Clement, Origen also believed philosophy offered a means to search for the truth and attain salvation. He unapologetically writes: “that being a Christian philosopher, both fully Christian and fully philosopher, like Pantaeus and Heraclius, is perfectly possible and consistent” (Ramelli, 2009, p. 220). Being labeled a “Christian Platonist,” by his adversaries and fans alike, reflects a belief that he Hellenized Christianity and thereby corrupted the faith. As noted, however, no such “pure” form of Christianity ever existed. Its theology is based on a concatenation of beliefs, symbols, concepts, and texts borrowed and systematized from the Hebrew Bible, Jewish Hellenism, Homeric literature, Neoplatonism, and indirectly from ancient Egyptian sources that informed the others. Origen acquired and refined his basic principles and methods of Christian hermeneutics while working within Alexandria’s complex, multicultural milieu. He thus applied his “Greek” learning to the study of the Hebrew Bible (*Septuagint*) and

particularly to the task of interpreting its scriptures to find evidence to validate the New Testament gospels of Jesus as savior-god. Hence, like Philo and Clement, he firmly believed the allegorical method furnished a tool to take readers beyond the literal to the recondite and esoteric meanings of texts. Origen's Greek training, however, offered two distinct interpretive approaches:

This education included *methodikon* and *to historikon*. *To methodikon* dealt with linguistic issues of the text: etymologies of words, figures of speech and thought, tropes, and style. *To historikon* dealt with background of the text to explain its content and references. It involved the hypothesis or underlying theme, the flow of argument developing the hypothesis, and the obvious meaning of the narrative. It was concerned with the biblical writers' aims and motivations. Philosophical education stressed that a text had a *hyponoia*, the "undersense" or deeper sense (Hauser & Watson, 2003a, p. 44).

As was common amongst Alexandrian exegetes, Origen employed and stressed the *to methodikon* method with its emphasis on its *hyponoia* or "deeper sense." In Antioch, the other early center of Christian education, Christian scholars preferred the *to historikon* methodology with its grammatical and rhetorical aspects. Despite key differences: "Both schools understood that the literal wording of the text of the Bible points to a deeper meaning" (Hauser & Watson, 2003a, p. 43). Although the two traditions are by no means as clearly demarcated as their names and associated practices may imply, the "historical" or more "literal" approach appears to have prevailed in the movement toward defining Christian orthodoxy and probably contributed to Origen's fall from grace to heresy. In any case, his Alexandrian education enabled him to develop his basic exegetical approach, which itself is allegorical in that it stems from an allegoric conception of the constituent parts that comprise a human being. According to Origen:

biblical texts had three senses — literal or physical, moral, and spiritual — that are analogous to the philosophical division of the human person into body, soul, and spirit. The moral sense would seem to deal with the attainment of virtues and the

spiritual sense with messianic realities. However, in Origen's exegesis the distinction between moral and spiritual dissolves, and he often does not set out all three senses for a text (Hauser & Watson, 2003b)

Despite the partial victory of the *to historikon* exegetical approach emphasized by the Antiochenes, and the accusations of heresy after this death, Origen's methods continued to dominate biblical exegetical practices into the middle ages. His reception by and influence on Jerome and Augustine, two preeminent founding fathers of the Latin Church, accounts for his enduring presence in Christian theology (Brown, 2003; McGuckin, 2004; Ramelli, 2013). Jerome and Augustine's reliance on Origen's biblical commentaries thus demonstrates his centrality:

From the Alexandrian school Jerome was profoundly influenced by Philo and Clement of Alexandria, but especially by Origen. This is seen most clearly in his use of allegorical interpretation to interpret more difficult passages of Scripture. With the Antiochenes he begins with the literal and historical sense of the passages, but with the Alexandrians he uses allegorical interpretation to find the deeper, spiritual meaning. The content and themes of his commentaries are heavily dependent on those of Origen but also on Jerome's own unique contributions. He left commentaries on the Major and Minor Prophets with the exception of Jeremiah. The format of the commentaries is to provide a translation from the Hebrew and the Septuagint, a literal commentary with notes on the text and Jewish interpretation, and a spiritual, allegorical commentary that often followed the works of Origen quite closely (at points word for word). He also left commentaries on Matthew, Galatians, Ephesians, Titus, and Philemon (Hauser & Watson, 2003b, p. 48).

Jerome studied at the catechetical school in Alexandria. This famous translator of the Hebrew Bible from Hebrew into Latin thus acquired his knowledge of Alexandrian exegetical methods firsthand at their source. Before he produced the Latin Vulgate Bible, the name by which the official bible of the Catholic Church is known, "he used Origen's *Hexaplaric Septuagint* and other Greek versions as the textual basis for his earlier translation of the Psalms and several other Old Testament books" (Hauser & Watson, 2003b, p. 48). Origen constructed the *Hexapla* in the third century using the Alexandrian

to *methodikon* approach: “This huge work presented in six narrow columns the Hebrew text, the Hebrew text transliterated into Greek characters, the Septuagint text, and the text of three other Greek versions prepared in the second century A.D. by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion” (Metzger, 1993, p. 40). Origen’s critical edition of the Old Testament proved immensely valuable for Christian scholars like Jerome due to its arrangement and comprehensive content.

Augustine’s reception and use of Origen however is more complicated (Heidl, 2009; Ramelli, 2013). Early in his career Augustine relied on Origen’s interpretations of key texts in the commentaries he wrote to explain several critical metaphysical ideas and concepts:

In this period Augustine, very consistently indeed, also shared with Origen the conception of the resurrected body as spiritual, angelic, luminous, and ethereal... Augustine's use of images from the Song of Songs in Conf. 9,2,3 shows his familiarity with Origen's exegesis of this biblical book. In Aurelius's library in Carthage Augustine could have had access to some *commentarioli* in Matthaëum, "small commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew," which Aurelius considered to have been composed or translated by Jerome; the latter, however, denied that he had ever worked on them. In fact, they probably are a translation of exegetical passages from Origen, whose interpretation of the Lord's Prayer was taken up by Augustine in his commentary on the Sermon of the Mount, which he began in 339/4 CE (Ramelli, 2013, p. 303).

Augustine also appears to use Origen’s work on occasion without recognizing him as the author. However, the historian György Heidl furnishes compelling evidence from Augustine’s book *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* (“About the Genesis of the Manicheans”) that, like Jerome, he knew Origen’s commentaries firsthand. *De Genesis* contains clearly identifiable passages that echo one of Origen’s texts word for word (Heidl, 2009). In addition, Augustine's use of themes interpreted from the bible’s *Song of Songs* in his *Confessions* (c. 400 CE) also indicates his familiarity with Origen's exegesis of this text in

which he employs an infamous antiblack metaphor (Augustine, 2019). After Origen's work came under attack as heresiological, Augustine appears to become more aware of its presence and influence on his own hermeneutics, which he then corrects (Heidl, 2009; Ramelli, 2013). Still, Origen's writings and methods survived specifically because Augustine, Jerome, and other influential theologians cited and thus preserved them. This evidence explains in part why his antiblack metaphors became commonplace in Christian doctrine and rhetoric. It now is time to examine his definitive and enduring contributions to antiblack ideology and discourses.

The Inky Stain of Wickedness and the Black Bride

Origen's interpretation of *Song of Songs* lies at the heart of Christian antiblack theological rhetoric and dogma. The poem originally appears to be connected to festive performances and may have originated in ceremonies associated with the sacred marriage of Ishtar and Tammuz, a 4000-year-old Sumerian ritual Jews would have encountered during their Babylonian exile in the sixth century BCE (Bloch & Bloch, 1998). The text appears in the last section of the Hebrew Bible known as the *Ketuvim* or "Writings." Its style and contents also suggest parallels with ancient Egyptian love poetry. Jewish legend, however, attributes its authorship to the legendary King Solomon (c. 970-931 BCE). Textual analysis and the fact it is written in Aramaic, however, indicates a date of composition circa third century BCE (Bloch & Bloch, 1998). Its spurious association with Solomon clearly led to its acceptance and inclusion in the Jewish canon sometime during the second century CE.

Jews today recite selected verses of the *Song* at Passover and interpret the text as referring to the love between god and the Jewish people. Indeed, love is its literal subject.

Accordingly, the book's first section conveys in highly eroticized language a woman's expression of her desire for her lover. The possibility a woman composed the text has yet to receive the scholarly attention it merits. In any case, the woman protagonist metaphorically describes herself to her audience (the "daughters of Jerusalem") as "black but beautiful" like the "tents of Kedar" and the "curtains of Solomon." The complete translated passage in question is as follows:

I am black but beautiful, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon, Do not consider me that I am brown, because the sun hath altered my colour ... Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun ... (cited in Courtes, 2010, p. 203).

Soon thereafter in the story she meets her lover. The pair then engage in a highly charged dialogue replete with excessive compliments before the section closes with an admonition from the self-identified "Black" woman to the daughters of Jerusalem to take great caution before pursuing relationships. Other sections follow, but the focus here is on the woman's self-identification as "black."

Although *Song of Solomon* "literally" is about love and sexual longing between a woman and her lover and says absolutely nothing about god's relationship to humankind, its influence on Christianity and Christian literature has been massive due to its allegoric uses. The nearly universal and deeply held belief it offers its readers something far more profound in meaning and value explains its enduring prominence and popularity.

The notion that the Song of Songs should be understood in its plain normal sense has been firmly resisted throughout most of history. Advocates of the allegorical view have been adamant that there must be some "spiritual" message to the book that exceeds the supposed earthly theme of human sexuality. As a result the allegorists have stressed a spiritual meaning that goes beneath the surface reading. The outcome of this method, however, has been a host of interpretations as numerous as those who follow this approach. Jewish interpreters understood the text as an allegory of the love between God and the nation of Israel, and Christian interpreters have suggested that the book depicts love between Christ and His bride,

the church. The interpretation of the details, however, became quite varied and fanciful (Tanner, 1997, p. 26).

Origen composed his massive ten-volume commentary on the text around the year 240 CE, more than a century before the official canonization of the New Testament (McGuckin, 2004). The “spiritual message” he purportedly finds, interprets, and exhaustively comments upon, indicates he believes the *Song* allegorically depicts the love between Jesus and the Christian Church—an institution for which Jesus the Jew had no knowledge of or experience with as it did not exist in his day. The adoption of his allegory by Christian writers indicates the Bride-Church metaphor became the standard interpretative gloss on the popular text in the centuries that followed (Byron, 2002; Goldenberg, 2003). In viewing the woman as a stand-in for the Church as the “Bride of Christ,” Origen turns her expression of blackness into a metaphorical tool to explicate the path to salvation from sin and evil or according to his perspective, from blackness to whiteness. Although not his apparent intent, his interpretation of the *Song* posed dire consequences for African peoples. The fact Origen views the “black bride” as also representing “gentiles”—those born and living in sin due to ignorance of Christ and the Christian revelation—contributed to the Christian construction of “Others” as inherently sinful and irredeemable, or “black” without the light of Christ. Origen repeatedly drives this point home. Having established the metaphorical view that the woman’s blackness signified sin and ignorance as his starting point:

Origen then erected an exegetical superstructure, beginning with the verses in the *Song*, that saw the “daughters of Jerusalem” (the born Jews) mock the black maiden for her blackness (her gentile birth), who, although indeed, black, is beautiful (“black but beautiful”) through faith in Jesus and conversion to Christianity. Eventually the maiden’s blackness diminishes and she “becomes white and fair” based on a reading of *Song* 8:5 found in the Old Greek translation: “Who is she that comes up having been made white?” (Goldenberg, 1997, p. 48).

The exegetical superstructure Origen erected to analyze the text enabled him to interpret the “Black” maiden’s speech within the contexts of Hellenic Christian beliefs he acquired through his Alexandrian training and education. He makes the most of the opportunity to present his analysis by writing reams of commentary. His allegoric assertions and explanations of the maiden’s blackness, however, are encapsulated in the following statements about the symbolic Bride: “darkened with exceeding great and many sins and, having been stained (infectus) with the *inky dye of wickedness*, has been rendered *black and dark (niger et tenebrosus)*.” He concludes: “Once she [the Bride or soul] begins to...cleave to Him [the Bridegroom or Christ] and suffer nothing whatever to separate her from Him, then she will be made *white and fair (dealbata et candida)*” [emphasis added] (Origen, 1956, p. 179).

In Origen’s lifetime and for centuries that followed this remarkable commentary became a standard rhetorical feature in Christian catechism and homilies on sin and evil. Its simplicity, which also may explain its universal appeal and adoption in early Christian discourses, ultimately resulted in a profoundly negative characterization of African people that “literally” dehumanized and demonized them through the metaphorical association of the color black with human skin. Deeply rooted in this allegoric imagery and evident throughout Origen’s text is the Christian belief all humanity is born in sin and hence blackened until saved by the light of the gospels. However, the calculated use of Ethiopians to symbolize the transformative power of Christian conversion objectified them in ways that amplified, reified, and essentialized their purported blackness and thereby materialized and embodied the abstract color’s negative denotations in the representative form of real human beings.

The historian Jean Marie Courtes adds this useful insight into Origen's conception of the maiden's blackness: "Neither Nature nor the Creator made the Bride black. She got her colour *ex accidentibus*, through exposure to the sun, but by a process which was the reverse of that undergone by the Ethiopians" (2010, p. 203). If her blackness is not natural, meaning a matter of heredity and genetics, then its remediation or cure cannot be achieved by material means. According to Courtes, Origen insists that no matter the unnatural origination of the woman's blackness, conversion to Christianity will make her white in spirit. Conversion thus gives her a soul, a spirit in Christ. Despite the devastating use and misuse of this allegory over the centuries that follow, it simply boils down to these few metaphorical concepts repeated frequently in Origen's text and supported by additional scriptural references including the story of Moses's Ethiopian wife as told in *Numbers* 12:1. Origen's catchphrase for sin—"the inky dye of wickedness"—thus resonates across time and space from late antiquity to the present era staining and libeling Africans with "blackness," a pigment of the Western imagination, in perpetuity. Goldenberg summarizes its reception and appeal among Western Christians theologians thusly:

The popularity of this exegetical theme of Ethiopian blackness can be gauged by a sampling of Fathers from Origen's time through the sixth century, in whose writings we find his interpretation of biblical Ethiopians as sinners, usually meaning the unbaptized gentiles, in one form or another or one verse or another. Peter of Alexandria, Didymus the Blind, Apollinaris, Ambrose, Paulinus of Nola, Ephrem, Apponius, Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, Cassiodorus, Fautus, Bishop of Riez, Gregory the Great, and Ennodius all draw on this allegory.... In sum the patristic hermeneutic tradition saw the biblical Ethiopian as a metaphor to signify a person, who, not having received a Christian baptism, is black in spirit and without divine light. In a similar way "Ethiopia" came to symbolize the as yet unevangelized and spiritually unregenerated world of sin (Goldenberg, 2003, p. 49).

Gay Byron's insightful analysis of symbolic blackness in early Christian literature, defines and labels the practices exemplified in Origen's work as "ethno-political rhetorics." Her

research points to the role this rhetoric performs in the construction of the Christian Self, versus the non-Christian Other.

Ethno-political rhetorics are discursive elements within texts that refer to “ethnic” identities or geographical locations and function as political invective. Ethnicity is the chief constituent component of any ethno-political rhetoric. There are several ways of understanding ethnicity, but generally it is conceived of as a relationship between two contrasting individuals or groups of people. It is considered a social construct that draws attention to the differences that exist within communities. By drawing attention to ethnicity, one can begin to see at least one way in which group boundaries construed within early Christianity led to “insiders” and “outsiders.” This form of early Christian self-definition was dependent upon ethnic-othering (2002, p. 2).

While this study follows Erich Gruen’s (2020) cautious approach in examining ancient views of ethnicity and cultural differences, Byron’s work usefully demonstrates how “ethnic rhetoric”—which in Origen’s commentary pertains to a kind of generic “blackness”—served the political agenda of early Christians in defining their cult in opposition to the then dominant Pagan “Other.” Christians clearly drew boundaries that defined their identity but expanded them at the same time to assimilate converts of any hue or background. Christians also viewed conversion as transformative of the entire person—mind, body, soul—because “Christianization” metaphorically “whitened” them. Becoming Christian thus meant acquiring more than a new identity because baptism made converts into consecrated members of god’s chosen people. Paul even tells “gentiles” that baptism in Christ will enable them to become “descendants of Abraham, as Jews already are” (Buell, 2005, p. 76). Christian ethno-political rhetoric thus accommodated ethnic differences by erasing them in Christ to make them “insiders” through a new lineage and kinship defined as Christian and traced backed to the legendary Jewish patriarch Abraham.

Byron also identifies this form of “Othering” people in Greco-Roman writings about so-called *Barbarians*—texts Origen no doubt encountered in his Alexandrian

education. She also cites an instance in the New Testament, in Corinthians 14:11, when Paul uses *barbaros* according to its original Greek meaning to refer to foreign speech. The Romans also followed suit in adopting the term: “After the rule of Augustus, Romans assigned the name *barbarus* to all tribes that had no Greek or Roman accomplishments (Byron, 2002). Unsurprisingly, the Romans also applied the label to any outsiders viewed as threatening imperial rule. Alexandrians probably used it frequently during the first few centuries of Roman rule, as conflicts with Ethiopians increased on Egypt’s southern border. In Origen’s text, “Othering” non-Christians as Ethiopians is further accomplished through countless references to “black” as emblematic of sin, evil, and vice. He even ventures beyond eyesight to invoke the sense of smell as a marker of difference. According to his theory, Christ leaves a good odor everywhere, but sin smells putrid (Byron, 2002, p. 75).

Origen probably did not compose his commentary on *Song of Solomon* in Alexandria; nevertheless, it presents a clearly Alexandrian methodology (Bloch & Bloch, 1998). Hence this study concludes Alexandria and Alexandrians figure decisively in the invention of the Christian cult and the incorporation of antiblack ideology into its doctrine. It bases this finding on the fact the earliest formulation of Christian antiblack discourses appear in two works of unknown authorship (*The Epistle of Barnabas* and *Shepherd of Hermas*) written in Alexandria roughly two centuries before Origen, and on Origen’s Alexandrian-influenced exegeses on blackness and sin. Consequently, this study identifies Alexandria, the great center of Egyptian-Hellenic-Jewish-Christian education in Egypt as the birthplace of Christian antiblack rhetoric. Consequently, it contends the city’s Christian school developed, preserved, and transmitted this ideological framework to Origen and

others. That it persisted and grew even more virulent over time can be documented with certainty, as shown below.

Ethiopianizing the Devil

The fourth century marked a pivotal moment in the establishment of Christian ideology and orthodox belief with the translation of the Hebrew Bible into the Latin Vulgate Bible by Jerome, and the enactment of the *Edict of Thessalonica* in 380 CE which made Christianity the official faith of the empire (Johnson, 2012). The fourth century particularly stands out in the career of Christian antiblack discourses. With the advent of monasteries and monastic life in Egypt early in the century, antiblackness took a new decisive and critical turn. This study previously established second-century Egypt as the site where “Satan” as the “Black One” begins his ignominious career as the object of Christian exegesis and condemnation. By the fourth century CE “black” demons suddenly began to appear everywhere bedeviling and tempting monks in the guise of hypersexualized Ethiopian women, men, and boys.

The first dateable evidence of the devil as Ethiopian appears in the *Life of Anthony*, a biography of the founder of monasticism in Egypt and the first Christian monastery, written by Athanasius of Alexandria, a Church Father, between 356 – 362 CE (Athanasius, 1950; Rothschild, 2019). Athanasius’s book suggests that by the fourth century the “Black One” had fully emerged in Egypt the form of an “Ethiopian”—a personification that proved catastrophic for African people in the centuries that followed. The historian Clare Rothschild refers to this transformation of color-coding from the symbolic to literal as “Ethiopianizing the devil” (Rothschild, 2019). Many Christians probably assumed in

advance the somewhat amorphous “Black One” was indeed “African,” so his final depiction as such may have been anticlimactic. In any case, demonization constitutes the ultimate form of Othering. From this point on the so-called “Black” or Ethiopian represented a reified “Other” in a demonic sense that transcended all other categories and characteristics.

Much of this early devilish literature focuses on sexual temptation to make its points about sin and evil vices that corrupt humanity. Stereotypes about African sexual immorality and hypersexuality existed in Greco-Roman literature prior to the advent of Christianity and thus were known to Christian writers. Byron states that Athanasius, in composing his biography of Antony “participated in a literary climate that associated sexual immorality with Blacks” (2002, p. 86). Out of this environment came lurid accounts of “black” demons which are more revelatory about the Christian psyche and obsession with sexuality than anything else—especially in relation to monastic settings with celibacy and carnal denial defined as major requirements of monkhood. The following summary text is indicative of scandalous encounters with various demonic figures Egyptian monks routinely imagined and avidly reported. It relates Athanasius’s characterization of the techniques demons used to seduce and corrupt the faithful:

The devil's sexual attack follows a doubled pattern: first, suggestions of "dirty thoughts," unsuccessful, lead to the appearance of a woman, whose color is not mentioned; then "thoughts" of "the ease of pleasure," unsuccessful, lead to the appearance of the black boy. The boy parallels the woman as an erotic temptation but with a difference: he is a representation of evil both more accurate and more powerful than the woman. Athanasius presents the devil's female appearance as deceptive, not revelatory of the devil's nature: "The wretched devil dared at night even to dress up like a woman and to imitate one in every way merely to deceive Antony." In contrast, the black boy represents the devil's true nature: "As if he were beside himself, he finally appeared to Antony in form [phantasia] as he is in his mind [nous], as a black boy. In Athanasius's view, the mind or rational faculty was the location of the self's true nature. The form of the black boy reveals that, as

Antony tells the devil, "you are black in your mind and as weak as a boy." That is, the devil is evil (black) and powerless (boy). But the revelatory appearance of the black boy makes clear not only the devil's evil but also Antony's virtue: it is his amazingly steadfast resistance to temptation that forced this clarifying appearance (Brakke, 2001, p. 502).

Antony's virtuous rejection of "black" demons furnishes a model for Christians everywhere. Confirmation in the New Testament by John, Luke, and Paul of the devil as god's opponent meant those who bore an unfortunate resemblance to the icon of evil were vilified and condemned by association. The theological "Othering" of "Blacks" as the exemplars of sin and evil thus did not require the invention of "races" in a taxonomic-hierarchical, biopolitical schema. Nor did it rely on a notion of superiority based on perceived ethnic or cultural differences. Christians, in theory, viewed all humans in theory as "black" sinners until conversion gave them their real identity as god's chosen people. They touted this purported universality of their faith at every turn and pointed specifically to Ethiopians as evidence of god's willingness to accept all, even real "black" people, in "his" flock (Byron, 2002; Goldenberg, 2003). Dark skin therefore was never a barrier to entry into the cult despite its negative associations. Instead, Christian antiblack rhetoric purposefully emphasized god's grace and the oneness of humankind in Christ. Christians reiterated this point incessantly while using Origen's allegory of "black but beautiful" as their proof text. But the "but" in the phrase, as we have seen, did not "beautifully" erase the negative valences which permeate and thus determine the meaning of "black" in Christian thought.

Christian evangelicals claim their faith is the only true system of beliefs for all humankind, the propaganda for which depends upon a rhetoric of conversion and inclusion. Yet, despite their claims the blackness of sin can be overcome, for African converts the

expected internal whitening of their souls remained completely invisible and hence intelligible. Africans darker skin coloring meant the inky stain of wickedness endured indelibly. African conversion and piety notwithstanding their sin stayed on public display and African salvation critically remained outside the public sight and mind. Ultimately, as this study contends, the salvific message of grace did little or nothing to temper antiblackness once it became a central feature of Christian dogma. Rothschild explains this situation by referencing Origen as follows:

Christians, he [Origen] argues, can view blackness as a recoverable condition: ‘If you have repented, however, your soul will indeed be black because of your old sins, but your penitence will give it something of what I may call an Ethiopian beauty.’ But from the length at which he discusses blackness in this commentary – even acknowledging that his argument is slightly obsessive – we infer that Origen was aware of the threat posed by blackness even as he understands it as an impermanent state for those who repent (2019, pp. 235-236)

If Origen did in fact consider the potentially negative consequences of his allegorizing no evidence exists he communicated his concerns widely or that his and later generations of theologian perceived or addressed them. By “Ethiopianizing the devil” and sin Christianity reached a point of no return where the personification of evil as black became orthodox belief. Before moving on, however, it is important to note one more metaphor central to Christian identity and theology.

Paul’s Slavery Metaphor

This brief discussion begins with an overview of slavery in the first century CE world of the Apostle Paul when the composition of the New Testament began. As previously noted, Christians ultimately merged slavery with dark skin to construct a theological rationale for the global commodification of African peoples.

Every citizen in the Greco-Roman world understood the reality of slavery in a way that we do not. While using prisoners of war as captured slaves had been commonplace, Greece and Rome transformed it into an institutionalized system of large-scale employment of slave labor in both the countryside and the cities. It has even been suggested Roman wars became slave hunts. It has been estimated that over 30% of the population of Roman Italy at the beginning of the Christian era were slaves, had been freed from slavery, or were of slave origin, though the figure was about half that elsewhere in the Empire. This extraordinary figure shows that everyone knew what slavery was like as everyone would have known slaves and, apparently, very many would have lived in slavery for a time at least and often from childhood (Turner, 2013, pp. 2-3).

Paul also viewed slavery within the contexts of a historicized myth of his Jewish people. His metaphorical use of it in his writings appears in several idiomatic formulations including: “enslaved by spies;” and “enslaved by sin,” both of which are found in *Galatian* and *Romans*. He thus speaks of slavery as oppressive. But it is in referring to Christians as “slaves of righteousness” in Romans 6-18 that he posits its positive meaning and value for Christians. The Catholic scholar Geoffrey Turner argues the foundation for Paul’s positive understanding of enslavement is Christological (the doctrine of Christ in terms of his divinity), which led him to conclude:

Christ Jesus was in the form of God (*en morphe theou*) but lowered/emptied himself to take ‘the form of a slave (*morphēn doulou labon*), being born in human likeness.’ The last clause strongly suggests that **being human entails being a slave**; the two go together. And in verse 8 becoming a slave leads to humility, obedience and death, though the death, a literal death on a cross, eventually leads to exaltation. If Christians are to live ‘in Christ’ as Paul repeatedly says they do, they identify themselves with him through baptism (Rom 6.3f.) not only as a son/daughter of God, as a child and heir (Rom 8.14–17), but also as a slave. In one sense, then, to be a slave is simply part of what it is to be Christian so far as Paul is concerned [emphasis added] (2013, p. 7).

The historian Brent D. Shaw exposes another aspect of slavery’s centrality in Christian dogma that appears to have been forgot, lost, or deliberately erased. It is worth quoting here at-length:

It is not just the fact of whatever accommodation was reached between Christianity and slavery (to speak merely of ‘accommodation,’ however, would surely misjudge the actual relationship), but rather the plain fact that the core message of Pauline and post-Pauline Christianity was calqued on the model of the slave-holding family. The centrality of slavery—with its paradigm of the slave-holding ‘lord’ at the head of his patriarchal family, and the concomitant image of the ‘savage discipline’ of the whip—was a critically important template in the development of Christian ideology, especially, it seems, in the last quarter of the fourth century. It was an age of the most intense creation of ideas that were to have a profound impact on the West, not the least on the prevalent theodicy whose origins and development were to be found in the models provided by chattel servitude (1998, p. 51).

The sociologist Orlando Patterson identifies three key words in Paul’s theology—*redemption, justification, reconciliation*—that he argues reveals “the extraordinary role of the slave experience as a metaphoric source” (Patterson, 1982, p. 70). Patterson contends redemption means *emancipation* from sin; justification symbolizes the slave’s *manumission* and his restoration from social death, while reconciliation restores the former slave’s *membership* in the community. These three ideas evolve directly from the Christian belief in salvation from sin—the “master concept” that unifies Christian theology (p. 70). Jesus’s human sacrifice through crucifixion thus saves (liberates) his followers from the wages of sin, which is spiritual death. But emancipation from sin means divine enslavement and submission to god through his son Jesus. Divine enslavement—accepting Jesus as Lord and Master—emancipates the sinner from death and rewards him with life everlasting. Patterson concludes his analysis of the slavery metaphor in Christianity with this observation:

Whatever other factors explain Christianity’s conquest of the Roman world, there seems little doubt that the extraordinary way in which its dominant symbolic statements and meanings are informed by the experience of slavery was a major contributing factor. For the same reason too, Christianity was to provide institutional support and religious authority for the advanced slave systems of medieval Europe and of the modern Americas (p. 72).

After Christianity became the official cult of imperial Rome, Christians became the de facto owners of Rome's slave society, the largest in the world at that moment in history. As should be evident at this point, the toxic combination (conceptual blending) of metaphorical blackness with the metaphor (and reality) of slavery in Christianity and its theology eventually created a paradigm that justified the dehumanization and perpetual enslavement of African people as a principle of Christian belief and faith.

Establishing the centrality of antiblack metaphors in Christian theology, however, constitutes only half the story. Metaphor, as scholars have demonstrated in recent decades, is not a simple literary device. It constitutes an essential tool of human cognition. As such, it explains both the idiomatic blackening of Africans linguistically and its manifestation and endurance in the form of a socialized reality that reifies and maintains antiblackness as the ethos and polity of the West.

Conceptual Metaphors

Scholars working in the field of linguistics in the mid-twentieth century radically transformed thinking about metaphors and dramatically changed their definition and meaning (Imre, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Ma & Liu, 2008; Stefanowitsch, 2006; Thibodeau et al., 2017). As a result, the idea they operate primarily as literary and rhetorical devices gave way to growing recognition of their critical role and function as conceptual processes and procedures integral to human thinking and thought. Accordingly, even though people generally remain unaware of their cognitive operations, metaphors comprise a critical mechanism by which humans think and socially construct reality. Two pioneers in this field, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, explain it thusly:

The most important claim we have made so far is that metaphor is not just a matter of language, that is, of mere words. We shall argue that, on the contrary, human *thought processes* are largely metaphorical. This is what we mean when we say that the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined. Metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person's conceptual system [author's italics] (2003, p. 6).

Metaphors in our conceptual system assist and guide cognition by explaining one thing by reference to another purportedly similar thing, idea, or concept. People think and communicate with them constantly without recognizing their pervasiveness and utility in everyday thoughts and actions, particularly the ways they structure knowledge and social reality:

The concepts that govern our thoughts are not just a matter of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around the world, and how we relate to other people (Lakoff & Johnson, 1981, p. 287).

“Black” and “white” may be the two most frequently used terms for constructing metaphors in the US given their roles in defining and designating the two most prominent socially constructed groups: African Americans and Euro-Americans. Their ability to determine a person’s existential reality and social status remains undiminished despite the fact neither accurately describes the individuals or groups to which they are applied given the wide variations in human physical appearance. These purportedly human pigments of the “White” imagination thus began their lives as *conceptual metaphors* for the purpose of color-coding social identities in the West, initially to distinguish between sinners and the saved, but later to distinguish those persons enchained to perpetual bondage from those who could and did enslave them. Consequently, as per Lakoff and Johnson, these two simple words when used metaphorically cognitively structure and essentialize how people see, evaluate, and value each other.

The allegoric idea of “evil” as “black,” for example, provides a semantic framework that invites the word “black” into service to define a host of related concepts: filth, depravity, corruption, ignorance, and so forth, thus expanding its denotative scope and authority. Mukti Barton, a scholar of religion, offers a useful catalog of some the deeply negative meanings the word “black” conveys:

The New Oxford Dictionary lists 36 negative uses of the term, black: Blackest day, future black, black mood, black humour, black look, blackest sin, black books, black clothes [sign of mourning], look on the black side, not as black as one is painted, black out, black and white [good and bad], black art, black bindweed [the flower is white, yet it is called black], black box [because it is mysterious], black death, black dog [= melancholy], black economy, blackening somebody’s name, black flag, blackguard, black hole, black information, black knight, blackleg, blacklist, blackmail, black magic, black mark, black market, black mass, black metal, black Monday, black money, black sheep, black spot. The dictionary gives just one positive use: In the black = not owing any money... **In fact, in everyday language, people who talk about something negative simply add the term black.** [emphasis added] (2004, p. 170).

In social practice this metaphorical scaffolding justified and rationalized centuries of genocide and chattel bondage. Its cognitive-social function thus underscores the importance of recognizing the ideological nature and function of extended metaphors (Jameson, 2020). It also confirms the importance of analyzing and understanding the sociohistorical contexts of their formulation and application:

To understand a historically specific expression of conceptual metaphor one must understand how the cognitively universal properties of metaphor interact with a particular social and cultural context. In addition, to understand a historically specific instance of allegory, one has to understand how the inherent pragmatic constraints of allegory as a discourse form interact in their turn with the particular social and cultural context (Crisp, 2001, p. 9).

This study examined the socio-historical contexts in which the concept of human blackness emerged following Homer’s construction and application of the neologism “Ethi-ops” (sunburnt) to identify a specific African population. Its documented origins in Greek epic

poetry as a *nickname* led to this investigation and analysis of it as a conceptual metaphor as defined in cognitive linguistics. The mechanisms that constitute and determine its cognitive functions and operations are described as follows: “A conceptual metaphor consists of a set of correspondences, or mappings, between a ‘source’ and a ‘target’ domain. The meaning of particular metaphorical linguistic expressions is based on such correspondences” (Kövecses, 2010, p. 197). The purpose of this cognitive procedure of mapping is to:

explain a less known concept or experience in terms of other well-known one. Conceptual metaphors have a simple structure composed of a source domain where we place the well-known concept and a target domain where we place the new or less known concept. By using structural mapping, some of the main attributes of the concept framed within the source domain are transferred to the concept put in the target domain, enlarging this way its semantic field. Since knowledge is an abstract concept without any reference to some tangible objects, authors use explicit or implicit metaphors in dealing with it and with knowledge management. The first class of metaphors developed for knowledge explanation is based on those that contain physical objects with tangible attributes in the source domain (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018, pp. 29-30).

This study contends African people metaphorically categorized as “burnt-faced” served as tangible objects to exemplify and explicate the abstractions of sin, evil, filth, death. The colors “black” and “white” as descriptors and labels for human beings also eventually transcended their poetic, figurative, and metaphorical characteristics when used in science to define human differences as biological and treat them as natural, normative, and universal rather than as socially invented concepts. With this conception deeply entrenched in “modern” human consciousness and perception, the burning question arises: what can be done about it? The philosophy professor Stephen Asma asks a question this study deems central to the future of humankind: “is it possible to replace these root metaphors with morally and theoretically healthier metaphors?” (1995, p. 22).

From this perspective, answers to Asma’s question remain far out of reach. In fact, the more scholars learn about the centrality and character of metaphorical whiteness/blackness the more challenging it appears. For example, the “one drop rule” in US culture derives from the utterly absurd belief a single drop of “black” blood (the presence of any African ancestry, visible or not) makes a person’s racially “black.” The ongoing consequences of this fabricated idea of biological hypodescent is indicative of the normativity and pervasiveness of white mythology.

Moreover, recent studies have shed new light on how these beliefs are embodied and essentialized in individuals and society by revealing and analyzing the cognitive connections between psychological concepts of moral purity and physical purity. This research further illustrates the seeming intractability of such beliefs by using empirical evidence that shows: “ideas of dirtiness and impurity are themselves grounded in the perceptual experience of the color black, which is seen not just as the opposite of white, but also as a potent impurity that can contaminate whiteness” (Sherman & Clore, 2009, p. 1019). Other studies with similar objectives find children and adults alike tend to make negative inferences when shown black objects—a response researchers show as operating across many cognitive domains (Sherman & Clore, 2009). Blackness thus looms vastly larger in the “white” imagination than whiteness because it is viewed as a mortal threat to the integrity of whiteness and the “purity” of self-identified “white” people:

Because of the shared connection of blackness and immorality with impurity, associations between darkness and valence in the moral domain have a metaphorical quality. Accordingly, the concept of immorality should activate “black,” not because immoral things tend to be black, but because immorality acts like the color black (e.g., it contaminates) (Sherman & Clore, 2009, p. 1020).

Immortality acts like the color black not because only because Western Christianity introduced and reified this notion. Consequently, in the realm of humankind the notion “Black” contaminates “White” stems entirely from Western Christian ideology and its metaphorical representation of Africans as the exemplars of evil and immorality in the world.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the historical processes and cognitive mechanisms through which antiblack ideology emerged as a central feature of Christian catechetical instruction and discourses. By documenting the role of early Christian theologians in the construction of cognitive metaphors that associate sin with African bodies and skin color it has shown how such ideas informed mainstream Christian thought at its inception and thereby became a permanent feature and fixture in Western Christian dogma and didactics. Rather than provide an exhaustive compendium of these discourses beginning with the *Epistle of Barnabas* in the first century to the present, it selectively illustrates how early Christian texts and scholars formed the critical bridge between Philonic exegeses and Christian hermeneutics to establish an antiblack discursive framework and paradigm. It also examined how Origen incorporated blackening of skin as an indicia of sin into a popular and enduring allegory with the intent of unlocking hidden and symbolic meanings in Hebrew scriptures.

This study’s structural analysis of whiteness/antiblackness concludes somatic blackness juxtaposed and contrasted with spiritual whiteness is the central theme that informs Western Christian ideology and identity and by extension the modern identities of

Europeans and the non-Europeans they colonized and socialized within this white supremacist regime and modality. The centuries of dehumanization and genocide associated with the creation of the so-called modern world thus occur as direct consequences of the intolerance of one-true-godism and the believer/non-believer dichotomy it instantiates and reifies. Accordingly, this study identifies and defines Judeo-Christian-Islamic one-true-godism as the most consequential and deadly form of “Othering” in human history. However, this episode is just the beginning of this story.

In Chapter Six this study examines how antiblack dogma coupled with Western Christianity’s construction of its theo-political identity as Christendom informed notions of imperialism/colonialism through the cult’s biblical belief in its god-given right to rule the world (dominionism). These discussions and others that follow investigate the development of European-centered thinking (eurocentrism) and the Christian Intellectual Tradition as two aspects of the same epistemic processes and ideology to delineate how they dominate knowledge-making (epistemology) in the world today to maintain and perpetuate whiteness/antiblackness in neocolonialist modalities.

CHAPTER SIX

DOMINIONISM, CHRISTENDOM, AND THE ORIGINS OF EUROPE AND EUROPEANS

We have come to recognize that the political is the total, and as a result we know that any decision about whether something is unpolitical is always a political decision... – Carl Schmitt, “Preface to the Second Edition” of Political Theology (1934).

Introduction

Previous chapters investigated and analyzed Christianity’s birth and development—in what Christians viewed as a hostile Greco-Roman colonialist milieu—to show how colonialism informed and determined the cult’s identity and doctrine. This chapter continues the discussion of colonialism to decolonize it. Its primary objective is to expose the direct role of Western Christian theology and politics (theo-politics) in forming and informing the colonialist policies and practices western nations used to conquer and pillage the world. The term “theo-politics” basically refers to governments and laws determined by and subject to “religious” authority. In theory it basically denotes a system of governance with god as sovereign. In practice it refers to the spiritualization and reification of political ideas and beliefs based on the view human laws are derived from god as related in scriptures. The “spirit” of nationalism and ideas of nation and sovereignty thus are deeply determined by the notion of god ruling through “his” designated intermediaries: Popes, Kings, Emperors. Carl Schmitt, a constitutional law scholar who coined the term “political theology” in 1922, offers this useful analysis for the discussions that follow:

All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development—in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipresent God became the omnipresent lawgiver—but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts (2005, p. 36)

This study identifies this exact process of ideological transfer at work in the manner Western Christian beliefs and values supplied the ideational framework for the development and conduct of western colonialism. It thus rejects the standard view of western colonialism which treats it primarily as a socioeconomic phenomenon the conduct of which involves an imperial power using military force to achieve *dominion* over foreign territories and peoples. It does so because this typical definition completely overlooks or obscures critical evidence of its roots in Western Christianity's evangelical identity and mission. Therefore, in conducting its sociohistorical structural analysis of the concept, it utilizes a decolonialist methodology to re-define and re-frame its origins and operations. This approach aims to break new ground by redefining western colonialism based on its sociohistorical development in Western Christianity, a process that began in the fourth century CE (Fletcher, 1997).

As its history shows, Christianity's relationship to colonialism constitutes one of the greatest ironies of the ancient world. The cult's unique social construction commences in the first century CE with its emergence as a Jewish-Christian sect in Roman colonized Judea. Yet, less than four centuries later, it manages to colonize Rome itself and become the most powerful cult in the Mediterranean world. Western historians generally do not regard the Christian accession of imperial power as a form of colonization; they tend to view the internal takeover of a state or an empire as either a political or military coup. Nevertheless, this study contends the Christian takeover of Rome operated and succeeded

as a *spiritual coup*. To seize the reigns of empire, Christians won a somewhat bloodless victory by “colonizing” the hearts, minds, and souls of its ruling and wealthy elite (Fox, 1987). The nature and conduct of this spiritual warfare, or spiritual seduction therefore sets it apart from every previously known form of conquest in antiquity.

To present and defend its evidence-based effort to redefine western colonialism this study identifies and examines three critical events in the invention of Western Christianity that it argues collectively gave birth to western colonialism as it is understood today: (1) the enactment and imposition of Christian orthodoxy at the Council of Nicaea by more than 300 bishops under the direction of the Emperor Constantine in 325 CE; the imperial decrees that legally imposed Christianity as the official “state religion” of the Roman empire in 380 CE; and (3) the banning of all other faiths (Paganism) in 389 CE (Fletcher, 1997; Fox, 1987; Johnson, 2012). With this information and analysis this study traces the roots of western colonialism to Latin Christianity and the Catholic Church’s internal takeover of the Roman empire, which commenced as early as 313 CE (Fox, 1987; Johnson, 2012).

Two factors compelled the Catholic Church to conduct a brutal colonialist campaign in Europe after Christians seized political control of Rome: (1) the “Great Commission” in New Testament gospels that commands Christians to go forth and convert all non-believers to the faith; and (2) the fact Rome and Europe remained more Pagan than Christian until the 390s, as did the rural areas in Roman colonies in Spain, Gaul, and Northern Italy. To eliminate any threats to the absolute power of the Roman Church, Church authorities relentlessly attacked both heretics and Pagans to force their conversion or destroy them (Fletcher, 1997; Fox, 1987). They did so “legally” under the imprimatur

and divine authority of theological (god's) law, which ultimately regulated and governed every aspect of life in the Roman Catholic empire.

The *Theodosian Code* codified by the Roman rulers after 312 CE and published in 438 CE consisted of 16 books containing more than 2,500 constitutions (laws enacted by Roman emperors) to regulate the empire. Sixty-five of the decrees targeted heresies and heretics as part of the Church's efforts to purge the faith of dissidents who held beliefs the majority of Christian bishops voted to condemn and reject as "unorthodox" after fierce debates (Bettenson, 1943; Fletcher, 1997; Fox, 1987). The code thus included the imperial edicts that made Christianity the only legal faith in the empire, which in effect banished Paganism in all its myriad forms and expressions.

Based on the history of this highly "organized" cult's violent conquests within and beyond Europe, this study identifies the theo-political agenda of Latin Christianity as furnishing the ideological framework for the conception and conduct of Western European colonialism. The following discussions analyze and illustrate how Western Christianity's crusade to impose its version of one-god-ism on non-Christian "Others" defined and determined the conduct of western colonialism initially in Europe and the so-called "Holy Land" in the Levant, and then worldwide after the so-called "discovery of the Americas in the early modern era. In investigating this social history this study looks beyond various nationalist trappings and localized expressions of colonialism—English, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, et cetera—to locate and explicate its central organizing principles and purposes.

As explained below, the global competition for socioeconomic power and hegemony, which gives western colonialism the appearance of a socio-political scheme to

westernize and thus dominate the world, obscures the original and underlying motive and mission of western imperialists—the voluntary or forced conversion of the world’s populations to Western Christianity. Consequently, this study finds in its basic formulation and conduct Westernization = Christianization. The current scholarly definition of western colonialism thus obscures the true mission of western imperialists—the voluntary or forced conversion of the world’s populations to Christianity. Decolonizing western colonialism exposes its underlying motive, which this study defines in part as the cult(ural) destruction of other beliefs and the beliefs of “Others.” Hence it argues western colonialism mandates and imposes a type of “replacement policy” whereby Western Christian “nationalism” (Christian identity) supplants all forms of localized nationalism and sovereignty to create and convene a new international world order.

The process of Christianization by any means necessary, including enslavement and mass murder, began in Europe in the fourth century CE and later expanded overseas during the Christian Crusades in a series of attempts to reclaim the so-called “Holy Land” in the Levant (Fletcher, 1997). Despite the cult’s repeated setbacks and critical failures (even within Europe) Western Christians remained zealous and unwavering in their commitment to evangelizing their faith worldwide. The “discovery” of the Americas in the fifteenth century thus gave new life and impetus to crusading, as Western European imperialists shifted their efforts to Christianizing (colonizing) the entire western hemisphere in the name of their god.

Despite economic competition and political rivalries within Europe, the overseas expansion of the western nation-states and empires clearly remained ideologically-centered on the Western Christian beliefs and values that defined and determined colonialism.

Christian soldiers (conquistadores) thus arrived in the New World bearing the Cross in their arsenals as a symbolic weapon (Miller, 2010; Washburn, 1962). They raised it aloft ceremonially in each New World locale at the precise moment of first contact with indigenous peoples. At the commencement of such encounters, they insisted Amerindians show absolute fealty to the Christian god. This demand in the form of an official Church-sanctioned proclamation served as a preamble to their demands for gold and other valuables (Seed, 1992, 1995). During these “ceremonies of possession,” Christian soldiers informed bewildered and uncomprehending Amerindians the Christian god had granted the European invaders the absolute right to conquer and possess the peoples and lands they encountered as they navigated the globe (Miller, 2010; Miller et al., 2010; Seed, 1992, 1995). Hence even a cursory review of the rhetoric and actions of the invaders confirms their intent to impose Christian dominion over conquered peoples irrespective of local beliefs (Bartosik-Vélez, 2002; Chidester, 2013; Gladwin, 2017; Prior, 1999). Commencing Cristóbal Colón (aka Christopher Columbus) western colonialist discourses and actions in the Americas irrefutably demonstrate an unquestionably Christianizing modality and regime that began with Christian takeover of Rome a thousand years earlier (Fletcher, 1997). The arrival of the Spanish in the Americas in 1492 not only continued an ongoing process it also comprised a dress rehearsal and steppingstone for the Christianizing conquests that followed worldwide.

The following sections investigate and illustrate how Western Christianity’s theopolitics determined and promoted the dehumanizing colonialist policies of the early modern era that gave birth to racial slavery and genocide. Hence this study’s deconstruction and structural analysis of Christian evangelism and its conduct worldwide reveals western

colonialism's genetic relationship to it. Whether seen as operating in the guise of "peaceful" Christian missions to non-believers or as military crusades of conquest, occupation, and forced conversion, this study contends Western Christians deliberately set out to colonize space (geography), time (history), and minds (epistemology) to establish the social conditions on earth they believed would bring about the second coming of Jesus and the end of the world.

The Great Commission and Christian Dominionism

To achieve its objectives of reframing and rebranding Westernization (colonialism) as Christianization, this chapter identifies, analyzes, defines, and centers related notions of Christendom, European identity, and eurocentrism within a common discursive framework it labels the *Colonizing Discourses of Christian Dominionism*. This term/concept redefines the discourses and ideology of western colonialism from a decolonialist perspective according to its specific theo-political intent and purposes. It enables this study to expose and reject the false notion western colonialism constitutes a socio-political event that began in the 1500s and ended as various nations claimed their independence from their colonizers in the 1960s and 1970s. Instead, it finds events that began in Rome in late antiquity reified and deployed a set of beliefs and values with devastating consequences for non-Christians worldwide. These beliefs and values that dehumanizing non-Christian "Others" now inform and direct the neo-colonialist modality of western imperialism to continue the Christian cult's mission to evangelize and convert the world as mandated by New Testament scriptures. Several key passages in the Christian Bible specifically command and authorize the followers of Jesus to go forth and convert all nations on earth, the most

notable example of which appears in Matthew 28:18-20 (for others see: Mark 16:14–18; Luke 24:44–49; John 20:19–23):

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Known collectively as the *Great Commission*, these scriptures command and authorize Christians to compel non-Christians to accept Christianity (Fanning, 2014; Kgatle, 2018; Smith & Lalitha, 2014). According to Don Fanning, a professor of theology:

Following the resurrection there were five reiterations of the Great Commission, one in each of the Gospels and the Book of Acts (Matt. 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:19-23; Acts 1:8). It is called the “Great” Commission because of the final emphasis He gave it before the Ascension. This is what the disciples and all the church were to be about. There is little argument that these declarations are the guiding principles of the life of Jesus, and that He seeks to impart them to His followers (2014, p. 1).

This New Testament mandate explains the juggernaut of Christian missionary soldiers constantly circling the globe seeking converts and destroying “indigenous” belief systems in the process. Additional support for the zealous evangelization of non-believers also appears repeatedly in writings attributed to Paul. He explicitly states his aim to preach the gospel “to the ends of the earth” (Romans 15:19). Equally important to obeying this New Testament “commandment,” Matthew 24:14 informs Christians their savior-god Jesus will not return until they or their disciples proclaim the “gospel of the kingdom” to “all the nations, and then the end will come.” Revelation 5:9 further defines this mission as encompassing “every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” Contemporary Christian evangelicals thus remain spiritually and materially committed to fulfilling the Great Commission as indicated by this definitive statement from a prominent textbook for missionaries:

If the Christians alive today were simply to commit themselves to multiplied disciple making, it would be mathematically possible to reach the world's population by the fourth or fifth generation of new disciples. It is possible to fulfill the Great Commission in our generation (Terry, 2015, p. 74).

Christians conduct their relentless global crusades according to the precepts of another equally hegemonic concept known as *Dominionism*. Dominionism enters Christian belief through the Christian interpretation of Genesis 1:26-31 in the Hebrew Bible:

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

Christians appropriated this Jewish scripture and the idea of god's "blessing" of dominion in Genesis and reimagined it as the authority of the Old Testament *Father* manifested in "his" *Son* for the purpose of achieving the Great Commission authorized in the New Testament gospels. Although the essence of Dominionism can be defined by the statement "be fruitful and multiply," its conduct also is determined by the belief Christians must establish god's kingdom on earth before Jesus can return and save the faithful (Hedges, 2008). This "second coming" requires them to conduct spiritual warfare to defeat the forces of Satan and thereby take control over all areas of human life. Its achievement or fulfillment thus denotes the triumph of the Great Commission—the Christian takeover of the world and establishment of the god's kingdom on earth (Maltby, 2008).

Even though some Christians in the US view Dominionists as extremists, they are a major force in the nation with a growing number of followers in politics and government. Their major presence in social media, broadcast media, and publishing enables them to disseminate a powerful and consistent message demanding Christian rule of the nation:

The popular Christian textbook *America's Providential History* cites Genesis, which calls for mankind to "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping

thing that creeps upon the earth” (Genesis 1:26–27) as evidence that the Bible calls for “Bible-believing Christians” to take dominion of America and the world: “When God brings Noah through the flood to a new earth, He reestablishes the Dominion Mandate but now delegates to man the responsibility for governing other men. “The authors write that God has called the United States to become a Christian nation and “make disciples of all nations” (Hedges, 2008, pp. 212-213).

The notion of making “disciples of all nations” constitutes a basic definition of colonialism.

Having identified theo-political ideology as the inspirational force behind the West’s colonialist expansion worldwide, this study calls for reconceptualizing western colonialism to redefine it as the ideational and ideological result of the merger of Christian Dominionism and its Great Commission. To that end it reframes Christian evangelism as the originating operative modality of western colonialism. This effort serves to repair a huge deficit in the current definition of the term:

Colonialism is a form of imperialism based on maintaining a sharp and fundamental distinction (expressed often in law as well as in fact) between the ruling nation and the subordinate (colonial) populations. Such an arrangement arises more naturally in consequence of conquest of a remote territory with a population of a conspicuously distinct physique and culture (Bullock et al., 1988, p. 410).

The dictionary of modern thought from which the above is quoted lists colonialism under its entry for *imperialism*. While its definition speaks of a “sharp and fundamental distinction” between the colonizers and the colonized, it nonetheless completely ignores Christian belief, which proved to be both a “fundamental distinction” and key determiner of social status in the interactions of the colonizers with the colonized. Being identified and labeled infidels or heathens (non-Christians) meant forced conversion for some conquered peoples; for others it meant enslavement or extermination. In examining a more recent definition of the cognate *settler-colonialism*, this study finds it too omits any reference to “faith,” yet recognizes colonialism as a social structure and cites its deadly consequences for colonized peoples:

The specific formation of colonialism in which people come to a land inhabited by (Indigenous) people and declare that land to be their new home. Settler colonialism is about the pursuit of land, not just labor or resources. Settler colonialism is a persistent societal structure, not just an historical event or origin story for a nation-state. Settler colonialism has meant genocide of Indigenous peoples, the reconfiguring of Indigenous land into settler property. In the United States and other slave estates, it has also meant the theft of people from their homelands (in Africa) to become property of settlers to labor on stolen land (Rowe & Tuck, 2016, p. 4)

Neither this definition nor the one above clarifies how colonialism relates to imperialism, a problem that results in colonialism's uncritical use as a synonym for it. However, Edward Said, a founder of the field of postcolonial studies, offers a particularly useful distinction to differentiate the two concepts in his groundbreaking text, *Orientalism*. Said contends imperialism constitutes the ideology and theory of sociopolitical domination whereas colonialism refers specifically to the methodology and practice of imperial conquest and rule (1993). This study accepts Said's basic definition. It concurs with using "colonialism" to denote the *practices* by which the conquest and rule of a territory by foreign invaders is carried out for purposes of socioeconomic exploitation and occupation or settlement. Accordingly, it endorses Said's method of using "imperialism" to refer to the *structure* of colonialism—the values, attitudes, beliefs, and theories that form and inform it. However, given their origin and purpose, it also labels the combination of structure and practice that defines colonialism/imperialism as constituting a functional modality identified here as the *Colonizing Discourses of Christian Dominionism*. Again, this term/concept serves the precise purpose of exposing and identifying colonialism/imperialism in its early modern western variant as synonymous with *Christianization* (evangelism).

The anthropologist Clifford Geertz maintains: "there is no such thing as human nature independent of culture" (1973, p. 49). Geertz's remark refers to his contention the behavioral mechanisms underlying human social interactions are determined by "*cultural*

patterns, historically created *systems of meaning* in terms of which we give form, order, point, and direction to our lives” [italics added] (1973, p. 52). This study views Geertz’s cultural patterns and systems of meanings as *cultural discourses* in the Foucauldian sense of the term—meaning they are tools of social organization and modalities for knowledge and power production (whether grounded in fact or ideology) (Foucault, 1972). Consequently, given its focus on the functions of *cult*, which is implied in the word “culture,” this study finds Western Christian (cult)ural values and beliefs informed and determined the (cult)ural patterns and systems of meanings that furnished the discursive and epistemic frameworks out of which Western Europeans devised their colonialist agendas. Hence the social and legal structuring of colonial life based on “Black” chattelization, and the expropriation of Amerindian lands embodied preexistent Western Christian (cult)ural discourses that became (cult)ural practices as Western Europeans imposed their beliefs on diverse “Others” in the Atlantic world and beyond. These (cult)ural discourses thus functioned as *colonizing discourses* in their specific roles of disseminating the Christianized rhetoric of discovery, invasion, and settlement at home and abroad:

Underlying the idea of colonial discourse [...] is the presumption that during the colonial period large parts of the non-European world were *produced* for Europe through a discourse that imbricated sets of questions and assumptions, methods of procedure and analysis, and kinds of writing and imagery, normally separated out into the discrete areas of military strategy, political order, social reform, imaginative literature, personal memoir and so on [author’s italics] (Hulme, 1986, p. 2).

Colonial discourses “produced” an *imaginary* New World for Western European consumption modeled on a logic of Western Christian (cult)ural differences that became the colonial differences that cohered with conquest and the invention and establishment of

hierarchies of class and caste in New World colonies. Colonial discourses thus embodied the epistemology or more precisely, the *agnology* (culturally induced ignorance), used to construct the world outside Europe solely as a resource to be appropriated, dominated, and consumed for the benefit of Western Europeans.

Although England launched a propaganda campaign in Europe in the 1500s to attack and condemn Spain for its brutal colonization of Indigenous peoples in the Americas, English colonial discourses and practices in the 1600s differed little from their Spanish rivals. They in fact originated within the same Western European episteme—the conceptual basis of which came from Christian doctrine, the canonical laws of the Latin Church, and the heritage and traditions of Roman and Christian colonialism in Europe and the Mediterranean (Green et al., 2007). Spain and Portugal established the precedents for the invasion and settlement of New World territories. Yet the colonial matrix of power that developed during the period from 1500 to 1800, which furnished the foundation and infrastructure for the global capitalist system that prevails today, was the collective creation of western nations including late arrivals England, France, and Holland, as evidenced by their common and consistent use of the *Colonizing Discourses of Christian Dominionism*.

Western European invader-settlers transplanted Protestant and Catholic Europe in the Americas in the forms of New Grenada, New Amsterdam, and New York. They arrived as soldiers for Christ in a great Christian army with the dominionist charge “to be fruitful and multiply” and the Great Commission of spreading the light of the gospels to benighted “savages.” They thereby continued and advanced the global Christian dominionist crusade that formally began with the Catholic Church’s efforts to Christianize Europe after the death of Constantine in 312 CE. What started as an uneven but zealous effort within the

Roman empire to convert Pagans to the new faith ultimately became an organized campaign of coercion and violence worldwide with the official backing of the state:

From a popular mass movement, supported by member donations and run by amateurs and poorly-paid clergy, under Constantine, Christianity was transformed into an *elite* organization, lavishly funded by the state and thus able to bestow wealth and power on the clergy. [...] Subsequently, the task of completing the Christianization of the empire shifted from persuasion to coercion: laws against pagan practice, confiscation of pagan temples and property, and the use of the rapidly expanding monastic Christianity to provide shock troops to stamp out the last vestiges of non-conformity—including a variety of Christian heresies (Stark, 2001, pp. 107-108).

The concept of Christian conversion—which ceremonially is enacted and reified by baptism—emerges from the precepts and practices of one-god-ism (Stark, 2001). No true equivalence exists in the belief systems of Pagan societies. Pagans recognized and syncretized so-called foreign gods or divinities into their beliefs generally as a matter of course without disrupting the stability and integrity of their faiths (Assmann, 1996b). Unlike the uncompromising demands of exclusivity from the one-true-god of monotheism, Pagan beliefs required no such vow or compliance. The absence of “non-believers” or “infidels” in Pagan societies thus precluded the possibility of essentializing certain groups as “Others” based on their spiritual beliefs or lack thereof or marking them accordingly for forced conversion, enslavement, or extermination (Assmann, 1996b, 2010; Fox, 1987; Stark, 2001). Rodney Stark’s explanation of conversion illuminates what the term denotes from this perspective:

I reserve the term ‘conversion’ for the *formation of a new and exclusive religious commitment*. The term thus applies to a shift from non-exclusive religions to exclusive ones, as from ancient Egyptian polytheism to Judaism, or from one exclusive religion to another, as from Christianity to Islam. It does not apply to shifts in patronage from one non-exclusive god to another. Nor does it apply to shifts of affiliation *within* a particular exclusive religious tradition, such as between Islamic sects [author’s italics] (2001, p. 106).

The first generation of Christians invented and canonized the Great Commission, but a new urgency emerged for its conduct and completion after the Latin Church seized the reins of imperial power in the fourth century. At the exact moment of Christianity's "triumph" in Rome, the vast majority of Europeans were non-Christians (Fox, 1987; Hillgarth, 1986). This demographic reality compelled the Church and its political minions to move first within the sub-continent to establish and enforce its sovereignty over the peoples it viewed as subjects within its immediate purview before it directed its attention abroad (Fletcher, 1997; Hillgarth, 1986). The internal campaigns of conversion that followed set a bloody precedent for the conduct of a series of external Christian Crusades to recapture Jerusalem centuries later. These "unholy" wars met the criteria and dictates of the Great Commission for which the image of Charlemagne the Great (c. 748-814 CE), who became the iconic "Christian Soldier" of his era, served as a useful propaganda tool for recruiting and motivating Christian knights and warriors (Fletcher, 1997).

After eight major campaigns of crusader warfare in the Middle East failed to retake Jerusalem from its Muslim claimants and occupiers during the years 1096 to 1221, several centuries passed before a completely unexpected opportunity appeared for the expansion of the Latin Church. The "discovery" of the Americas by Cristóbal Colón—coming as it did in the wake of the final expulsion of the Moors from Spain in 1492—gave the Church new targets for conversion in the millions of unsuspecting Indigenous inhabitants of the New World. The Americas thus afforded the West another chance to prosecute the Great Commission. Its conduct, however, took the distinct form of violently imposing Western Christian beliefs, values, and antiblack ideology on Native Americans, and on West

Africans shipped to the New World in chains according to the dictates of the Colonizing Discourses of Christian Dominionism.

The fact Western colonialism/imperialism derives its core ideology from dominionist scriptures in the bible compels this study to reframe Western colonialism/imperialism as a definitively theo-political construct. It finds further evidence to support this revisionist effort in the dominionist idea and belief in *Christendom* in Western Europe. The term “Christendom” identifies the geopolitical power and configuration of the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages when the Christian world viewed itself initially as in direct confrontation and competition with Paganism, but soon thereafter included the rapidly expanding Islamic world as a massive threat to its power and existence (Stark, 2001). Based on its theo-political conception, organization, ideology, and history this study defines Christendom as Western Christianity’s imagined “holy land” in Western Europe where the idea of a pure “white” Christian homeland gave birth to notions of white supremacy and eurocentrism.

The coalescence and materialization of this ideology in the geo-historical construct of Christendom began with and was driven by sectarian violence. Few studies of Christian history examine the brutal means by which Western Europeans were Christianized (Fletcher, 1997). The deliberate silence of historians on this critical issue indicates a refusal or failure to question the appropriateness of conversion and the right of Christians to force their beliefs on non-Christians anywhere, including Europe. This uncritical scholarly acceptance of pro-Christian imperialist/dominionist propaganda leaves unchallenged the false impression Christian monks simply went forth and miraculously converted the masses of Western Europeans from their traditional Pagan beliefs to Latin Christianity (Cusack,

2011). Most people today, especially educated Christians, possess little or no knowledge of the campaigns of terror waged within Europe by the Church and its allies. This internal holy war occurred in the centuries prior to the Church unleashing the same forces against Muslims during the Crusades, and then against Indigenous peoples in the Americas. Scholarly silence on the issue of Christian terrorism thus gives credence to the Christian fiction that mere exposure to the “one-true-faith” compelled the submission and acceptance of entire Pagan communities once a monk or priest related the gospel of Jesus to them (Cusack, 2011; Fletcher, 1997). However, as the historian of religion Carole Cusack points out:

To uncritically view conversion to Christianity as a positive and to fail even to mention the wanton destruction of Pagan culture and religion, is to applaud and ratify the results of colonialist expansion and globalization, while ignoring the cynical and brutal means through which that end was reached (2011, p. 49).

Cusack’s research identifies the dominionist nature and agenda of western colonialism and the historical significance of Europe’s violent internal conquest by the Latin Church to convert the region’s populace. The Church’s relentless prosecution of its policies led to the segregation, torture, exile, or extermination of Jews, Muslims, and other dissenters according to the dictates and application of Latin Christian law (Boyarin, 2009; Fletcher, 1997). Bringing this history into wider view provides additional confirmation of this study’s contention that Europeanization (Westernization), the social construction and socialization of European identity, is in fact identical to Christianization, the process of conversion designed to bring Europe’s populations under the dominion of the Latin Church. Hence these findings lead this study to conclude Europe becomes *Europe* only when it becomes *Christian Europe* (Christendom), and Western Europeans become *Europeans* only when they become *Latin Christians*.

When Christianity became the official and only legal faith of the empire in the fourth century, the Latin Church co-existed with other Christian denominations in Africa and Asia some of which dated from the religion's origins in the first century CE (Jenkins, 2009). Doctrinal disputes over orthodoxy from its founding hardened divisions among various Christian sects during the cult's formative first four centuries. After the separation of the Roman empire into western and eastern branches and the founding of Constantinople in 330 CE, the political reconfiguration that followed contributed to the development of Western European identity by destabilizing and unraveling the fragile ideological bonds that held eastern and western Roman Catholic communities together. The geographical east-west political division of the empire then gave birth to the Latin Church (Roman Catholicism) in Rome and the Greek Church (Eastern Orthodox) in Constantinople—a separation that fueled and eventually solidified their disagreements over doctrine (Johnson, 2012).

The use of two languages—Greek and Latin—for liturgical purposes also exacerbated the conflict. It proved particularly problematic for widespread Christian communities because it: “further amplified cultural differences that became encoded in religious categories.... [and] is responsible for the construction of the religious traditions that have become embedded in the terms ‘Greek East’ and ‘Latin West’” (Roudometof, 2013, pp. 231-232). Indeed with Roman Catholics in Europe worshipping in Latin as their official liturgical language: “‘Latin’ thus had a role in the self-description of the people of Western Europe and obviously helped to lend a kind of conceptual cohesion to groups of varied national origin and language” (Bartlett, 1993, p. 19). Having already attained wide usage among Europe's elite as a result of being the *lingua franca* of imperial Rome, once

Latin became the sacerdotal language of the Western Church (unlike Greek which never attained that status in the Eastern Church) it also acquired “a quasi-ethnic nuance, as in the phrase *gens latina*, ‘the Latin people’” (Bartlett, 1993, p. 19). This idea of the “Latin people” also can be understood in terms of how Western Europeans self-identified and where they placed their “nationalist” loyalties: “They were members of Christendom first, and after that were they were the subjects of nations” (Jenkins, 2011, p. 13). This belief in the precedence of Christian identity over local or national social constructs persisted in the West through the age of European maritime exploration and discovery. From Cristóbal Colón to John Smith initial encounters with indigenous peoples in the Americas typically involved European explorers first identifying themselves as Christians before stating their nationalities (Blackburn, 1997a; Chaplin, 2001; Juster, 2016; Pagden, 1993; Seed, 1995). This fact underscores the critical role of “Christian” identity in determining how western invader-settlers defined and conducted their relations with Amerindian and African “Others.”

The Birth of Europe

The examination of the birth of “Europe” that follows offers a critical framework for understanding the mechanisms by which whiteness/antiblackness informs the construction of Western European identity. It also sets the stage for the discussion of the Christian Intellectual Tradition in Chapter Seven and its related investigation of the origins and emergence of eurocentrism, which remains the dominant epistemic apparatus worldwide. To determine the origins and nature of European-centered thinking and thought logic dictates beginning with an investigation of the origins of European identity. European

thought requires European thinkers; hence the need to examine the sociohistorical contexts within which European identity evolved. The aim here, however, is not to posit the existence of an essentialized homogenous Western European identity and culture. Instead, this study demythologizes Europe's imaginary homogeneity and its manufactured historical lineage in ancient Greece. It takes this approach to expose the critical role of Christianization in its formulation, the explication of which is essential to its successful redefinition. Throughout this process it also recognizes and accounts for the complex, diverse, and conflictual nature of European identity, which perhaps is best evidenced by the region's frequent and savage internecine wars. Conversely, it considers the emergence of European-centered thinking and thought (eurocentrism) as illustrative of the power of Western Christianity to impose its agenda on Europe's diverse ruling elites and those they ruled for the purpose of carrying out its dominionist mission of total conquest and conversion (Bartosik-Velez, 2014; Kadir, 1992; Muldoon, 1994).

This study thus treats eurocentrism as a direct creation and outcome of dominionist thought. In its current usage the term denotes both the monocentric worldview that centers human knowledge, knowledge-making, and history in Western Europe, and the corresponding socio-political agenda of the West to treat all other world cultures as epistemologically and culturally inferior according to its distinctly subjective and self-serving criteria and perspective (Amin, 1989; Sardar, 1999; Shohat & Stam, 2009). Plainly stated, eurocentrism constitutes: "a discourse that enacts the exceptionality, universality, and *whiteness* of Europe, and its naturalization" [italics added] (Araújo & Maeso, 2016, p. 4). The term thus homogenizes the entire population of the sub-continent by positing and

conveying the *idea* of Europe as a racial and geographical construct rather than an ideological one:

“Antiquity and Greece” as “the cradle of European civilization,” for instance, is an ideological construct that has produced certain geographical boundaries in order to separate “Europe” from “non-white” peoples and places, retrospectively re-signifying the Greece-Rome-Europe sequence as Western/white civilization. Deconstructing this sequence is not only an exercise in acknowledging other civilizations and the diversity of other cultures that have shaped “Europe,” but also in unravelling the political assumptions and conceptualizations it conveys (Araújo & Maeso, 2015) (4&5).

The idea of “Europe,” as shown below, rests primarily on an imaginary cultural geography and a manufactured sociohistorical continuity that intentionally obscures and erases the region’s debts to other cultures and the cultures of “Others”—especially African and Asian influences on the Greco-Roman cultures the West claims as the seedbeds of its civilization. The Greece-Rome-Europe sequence which served in later centuries to establish the notion of a monolithic “Western/White civilization” persists to this day as a key component of the eurocentric ideology that since colonialism has posited and asserted Europe as ethnically and culturally pure and thus devoid of outside influences. As discussed previously, Greeks and Romans appropriated African knowledge and culture and routinely incorporated it without credit or attribution. The deliberate erasure of external influences on Europe, however, is belied by the sub-continent’s name. While scholars continue to debate its etymology—with some positing a Greek origin and others finding evidence for its roots in Persian or in a Semitic word for “sunset”—this study prefers the Greek mythos that identifies an Afro-Asian princess or sea nymph named *Europa* as its eponymic source (Fornäs, 2012).

A widely disseminated version of the story, as told by the Greek historian Herodotus in the fifth century BCE, relates the kidnapping of Europa by Zeus, the father-

god of Greek myth and ruler of Mount Olympus. Appearing to her in the guise of a tame white bull, Zeus lures Europa onto his back and spirits her away from Phoenicia to Crete where she gives birth to three of his sons (Fornäs, 2012). Her kidnapping and “seduction” (a term that serves as a thinly disguised euphemism for rape), when placed in the context of similar accounts about the founding of ancient Greek communities, seems to suggest the partial populating of Southern Europe during the Iron Age by Afro-Asian migrants coming from the Levant:

However, the image of her and the bull makes it difficult to decide with whom to identify as a European: is it Europa herself, the bull, their mutual union or the land of Crete to which they travel? In certain respects, male European elites may find it easier to identify with the combined whiteness, eroticism, strength and smartness of the divine bull, but it is not he who bears the name of Europa. One might construct Europeans as bull/god and Europa as the land he loves, following a common idea of feminising the inhabited land, but this comparison halts here, as she is obviously more human than he. One could therefore instead identify with her and see him as some kind of higher fate placing Europeans in Europe, equipping them with divine gifts. Also, she does not appear quite as maternally nourishing as motherlands and mother goddesses tend to be, instead her marked geographic mobility affirms a central aspect of European history, from the Greek and Roman networks, over Crusades and colonial empires to the modern European forms of culture and communication that have always tended to be restlessly on the move, up until the expansive EU itself (Fornäs, 2012, pp. 10-11).

The ancient Greeks typically divided the world as they knew it into three regions—Europe, Asia, and Libya (which referred to North Africa)—each of which bore a feminine name (Brunschwig & Lloyd, 2000; Kennedy, 2016). The initial use of Europe as a geographical term, however, did not convey any sense of a collective or shared cultural or political identity among its diverse populations because much of the region to the north and northwest of Greece remained unknown to them. Moreover, the ancient Greeks generally dismissed the northern regions as uncivilized. Instead, they oriented themselves to the

south, especially to Egypt and Persia, which they regarded as centers and repositories of ancient knowledge and culture (Bernal, 1987; Hall, 1989; Isaac, 2004; Keita, 2005).

Nearly two millennia passed therefore before the term *Europe* began to be widely employed in Europe. Its routine usage began in 800 CE when the Latin Church chose it to designate the *imperium* of Charlemagne (also known as the Carolingian Empire, 800-888) after Pope Leo III proclaimed him “Emperor of the Romans”:

The European idea was truly born as a political and cultural project in the eighth century ad, when the Christian church used it as a name for Charlemagne’s Carolingian Empire. This identification closely linked Europe to Christendom in discourses constructing a genealogy that moved Europe another step to the west and made it the true but dislocated inheritor both of the biblical world and of Greek antiquity, as mediated through Hellenic and Arabic intermediaries (Fornäs, 2012, p. 11).

Charlemagne’s achievements as a warrior-king and empire-builder earned him the sobriquet “Father of Europe.” In the centuries that followed the ruling elite modeled themselves after him and sought “the mantel of Holy Roman Emperor” to take up his legacy (Simms, 2013, p. 5). Hence the conflation of Europe and Christendom in the theological discourses of the Latin Church in the eighth century constitutes a major milestone in the development of European identity and a crucial ideological nexus in the emergence of Western imperialism. If in fact this *naming* of Europe identifies the moment when the *idea* of Europe acquired its corporate identity, then the concept was born covered in the blood of countless numbers of “Europeans” designated as Pagans and heretics who were sacrificed in internal crusades—some of which Charlemagne famously led—to convert the diverse populations of the European sub-continent to Latin Christianity (Fletcher, 1997; Hillgarth, 1986).

The Latin Church ultimately failed to achieve its goal of bringing all Europeans into its fold through conversion and crusades. Jews, Muslims, and Pagans resisted and yet continued to reside within Christian domains (Boyarin, 2009; Stark, 2001). The doubt and anger caused by their presence fueled the Latin Church's enforcement of its orthodoxy and its violent suppression of non-Christians in Western Europe (Boyarin, 2009). These challenges and obstacles to its sovereignty also influenced the Church to go to war against the perceived threat of Islam. However, during the period from 1096 to 1221 CE, eight major Christian crusades in the Levant failed to retake Jerusalem from its Muslim claimants. In Europe itself, however, the war against Islam persisted in the Iberian Peninsula until Spanish forces achieved victory in 1492 with the defeat of the last Moorish stronghold of Grenada (Carew, 1992, 1994). However, the "discovery" of the Americas by Cristóbal Colón—coming as it did the same year Moorish rule ended in Spain—provided the Church with new and rich targets of conversion in the millions of unsuspecting inhabitants of the New World. The Americas thus afforded the West another chance to prosecute the Great Commission and expand the boundaries of Christendom as it unleashed and imposed its Christian identity, culture, and antiblack ideology and discourses, on the New World. Prior to that world-changing event, however, a series of critical incidents in the mid-fifteenth century illustrate how antiblack discourses that began life with the birth of Christianity in its first four centuries suddenly were imposed on millions of unsuspecting people in West Africa a millennium later.

Papal Edicts and the Catholic Church's Authorization of African Enslavement

On June 18, 1452, a papal edict known as *Dum Diversas* issued by Pope Nicholas V set the world on a course of genocide and slavery from which it has yet to recover. Viewed as controversial in its time it nevertheless gave the Portuguese King Alfonso V—addressed below as “Your Royal Majesty”—the Church’s blessings to conquer Saracens (Muslims) and Pagans and reduce them to permanent slavery:

[...] Your Royal Majesty in the most sacred intention of this kind, we grant to you full and free power, through the Apostolic authority by this edict, to invade, conquer, fight, subjugate the Saracens and pagans, and other infidels and other enemies of Christ, and wherever established their Kingdoms, Duchies, Royal Palaces, Principalities and other dominions, lands, places, estates, camps and any other possessions, mobile and immobile goods found in all these places and held in whatever name, and held and possessed by the same Saracens, Pagans, infidels, and the enemies of Christ, also realms, duchies, royal palaces, principalities and other dominions, lands, places, estates, camps, possessions of the king or prince or of the kings or princes, and to lead their persons in perpetual servitude, and to apply and appropriate realms, duchies, royal palaces, principalities and other dominions, possessions and goods of this kind to you and your use and your successors the Kings of Portugal (published in Latin in Jordão, 1868, p. 22).

Also known as a *Papal Bull*, the directive targeted the Church’s most powerful enemy, Islam, as represented by the Moors and Arabs in North Africa. However, its authorization to consign Pagans and infidels to “perpetual servitude” referred specifically to West African populations. Beginning in the 1440s, the Portuguese met and traded with diverse West African groups at various stops along the coast as they navigated their caravels south on a mission to reach Asia. In 1488 they finally reached and sailed around the southern tip of Africa into the Indian Ocean (Russell-Wood, 1978; Saunders, 1982). While venturing south, the Portuguese discovered and converted the uninhabited islands of Sao Tome and Cabo Verde into centers of slave trafficking and sugar production and thereby established

a pattern of African enslavement that soon became the hallmark of New World plantation-based economies (Blackburn, 1997b; Phillips, 2014; Saunders, 1982).

From 1442 to 1493 the Latin Church under the auspices of Pope Nicholas V (1397–1455) and Pope Alexander VI (1431-1503) issued a series of papal bulls (ecclesiastical laws) that authorized the capture and enslavement of West Africans. Edicts also were issued to authorize and legalize the colonization of New World territories by Spain and Portugal. Two papal bulls in particular, the *Romanus Pontifex* (1455) and the *Inter Caetera* (1493), are referred to by legal scholars as the *Doctrine of Discovery* because they comprise an international (Christian) law designed to regulate the “discovery,” conquest, and colonization of non-Christian lands and prevent conflicts from arising in the West’s scramble to acquire New World territories (Miller, 2011). The principalities, empires, and emerging nation-states that constituted Latin Christendom thus shared the same Christian imperialist ideology that justified Western European expansion across the globe. Latin Christianity therefore is key to explaining how ideas about blackness and slavery became transnational and were not limited to Spain and Portugal, the sites where “Black” slavery primarily existed in Western Europe (Blackburn, 1997a, 1997b; Russell-Wood, 1978).

With the increasing presence of enslaved West Africans in Iberia, Portugal and Spain became the principal think tanks, laboratories, and staging grounds in Western Europe for early modern antiblack policies and practices (Elbl, 1997; Magalh et al., 1997; Marcocci, 2016; Russell-Wood, 1978; Sweet, 2003). The Iberian West African trade and the West’s imperialist expansion into the Americas in the sixteenth century furnished new venues to conduct the Christianizing campaigns that began in Europe in the fourth century. In notable instances, however, Western Christians barely went through the motions of

converting Pagan souls to their faith and instead focused on converting Pagan bodies and labor into a lucrative system of human chattel and economic exploitation (Phillips, 2014; Saunders, 1982). However, Western Europeans clearly were not unified in either their political or theological approaches in colonizing New World societies but shared and acted on the fundamental Christian imperative of conquering and converting the world's population to Christianity.

The enactment of the *Colonizing Discourses of Christian Dominionism* in the establishment of western colonialism in the Americas can be documented from the arrival of the first European explorer in the Americas. In fact, the first voyage of Cristóbal Colón (aka Christopher Columbus)—the archetypic New World Christian Crusader—constitutes the first example of the appearance and imposition of the Colonizing Discourses of Christian Dominionism in the New World. The true story of his mission, which embodies and exemplifies the very notion of a Christian crusade, continues to be rarely acknowledged in western academia (Carew, 1994).

Cristóbal Colón and the Origins of Christian Dominionism in the Americas

When Cristóbal Colón (c. 1451-1506) and his minions staggered ashore on the Bahamian island of Guanahani on October 12, 1492, they commenced the first act of what Pan African Studies scholar Jan Carew refers to as the “rape of paradise” (Carew, 1994). Colón had no idea where he and his crew had landed. Yet his manifold ignorance about the island's location and inhabitants did not prevent him from claiming sovereignty over both in perpetuity for Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic monarchs of Spain, who financed his search for a western passage to India. In the logbook in which Colón documented his first

voyage, the contents of which he dictated to a sailor, the entry recorded for Friday, October 12, 1492, conveys in somewhat undramatic fashion the momentous arrival of the Spanish in the Americas:

The vessels were hove to, waiting for daylight; and on Friday they arrived at a small island of the Lucayos, called in the language of the Indians Guanahani. Presently they saw naked people. The Admiral went on shore in the armed boat, and Martin Alonzo Pinzon, and Vicente Yáñez, his brother, who was captain of the Niña. The Admiral took the royal standard, and the captains went with two banners of the green cross, which the Admiral took in all the ships as a sign, with an F and a Y and a crown over each letter, one on one side of the cross and the other on the other.... The Admiral called to the two captains, and to the others who leaped on shore ... and said that they should bear faithful testimony that he, in presence of all, had taken, as he now took, possession of said island for the King and Queen his Lords, making the declarations that are required, as is now largely set forth in the testimonies which were then made in writing (Columbus, 1893, pp. 36-37).

Before a small and awestruck assemblage of “naked” Taino—a subgroup of the Arawak people who originated in South America and whose territories ranged from near the mouths of Orinoco and Amazon Rivers on the continent through the islands of the Lesser and Greater Antilles in the Caribbean Sea—Colón performed the first *Ceremony of Possession* in the Americas (Seed, 1992, 1995). Colón’s account of his first landfall and human contact thus documents the first use of the *Ceremony* to mark a European claim to territory in the New World. Brief descriptions of its first performance appear in two sources now lost—Colón’s original logbook from his first voyage and a book he wrote years later—both of which were used by Bartolomé de las Casas (c. 1484-1566), a New World colonist and the first priest to be ordained in the Americas, to construct the narrative. Las Casas’s editing of the text is evident as follows: “Where the narrative is in the first-person Las Casas is using the Admiral’s [Colón’s] words. Where it is in the third he is giving his own rendering” (Columbus, 1969, p. 37). The Admiral’s account of his initial impression of the first people he encountered in the Americas began by noting their nakedness. His Christian

dominionist viewpoint appears next with the observation Amerindians, under the strict guidance and control of European colonists, would easily be prepared for colonial “servitude” and submission to the Latin faith:

They should be good servants and very intelligent, for I observed that they soon repeat anything that is said to them, and I believe that they would easily be made Christians, for they appeared to me to have no religion. God willing, when I make my departure I will bring half a dozen of them back to their Majesties, so that they can learn to speak (Columbus, 1969, p. 56).

In other log entries Colón repeats his belief Amerindians had no religion. He also compares their physical appearance to that of Canary Islanders and notes they do not resemble in skin color or other features the African peoples found at the same latitudes on the opposite side of the Atlantic. He later decides to divide the Indigenous peoples he encounters into two cultural categories—good (peaceful) savages, and bad (cannibal) savages—and argues for the enslavement of the latter (Columbus, 1969).

Before continuing it is necessary to explain the decision to use Colón, the Spanish version of the explorer’s surname, rather than the Anglicized *Columbus*—which made its first appearance 47 years after his death “in Richard Eden’s partial translation of Sebastian Münster’s *Cosmographiae*,” the earliest German-language atlas of the world (Bartosik-Velez, 2014, p. 8). It is noteworthy the bringer of disease, slavery, settlers, and genocide to the Americas bears such an appropriate appellation given his inaugural and instrumental role in New World colonization. Lea Ypi, a professor of political theory, explains the roots of his name thusly:

In its first, Latin use, the verb ‘to colonize’ derived from ‘colon,’ which meant ‘farmer, tiller, or planter.’ It refers to the Roman practice of settling in a hostile or newly conquered country by citizens who retained their rights of original citizenship, while working on land bestowed to them by the occupying authorities (2013, pp. 160-161).

The name Colón thus possesses deep roots in the Roman empire, the great colonizer of Europe and the Mediterranean World. Current understandings of the term *colony* in the West reflect the long memory of Roman conquest and settlement in Western Europe (and elsewhere) that established the basic principles and practices of colonialism according to Roman law. This historic meaning and etymology of the term did not go unnoticed by Las Casas, Colón's contemporary, who interpreted his entire name as a prophetic sign:

So it was that he was named Christopher, that is to say *Christum ferens*, which is Latin for the bearer or carrier of Christ, and he signed his name in this way on a number of occasions ... His family name, Colón, means 'new settler' a fitting title for a man whose industry and whose labors led to the discovery of numberless souls ... The name suited because he brought the first settlers from Spain ... to found colonies, or new settlements of incomers, among and alongside the indigenous inhabitants of these immense territories and to build a new, mighty, vast, and most noble Christian church and earthy republic among them (cited in Bartosik-Velez, 2014, pp. 11-12).

The Hispanicized version of Colón's full name thus appropriately translates as: *Christ-bearing-settler-colonist*. It both expresses and exemplifies the Western European philosophy and praxis of Christian dominionism, as Las Casas clearly confirms. This idealized role of crusading Christian Knight corresponds perfectly with how Admiral Colón viewed and styled himself. According to historian Pauline Moffitt Watts, Colón cultivated two self-images, the first being that of a great explorer and "Admiral of the Ocean Sea," a title he negotiated with the Spanish monarchs prior to his first voyage in partial compensation for his expected discoveries. The second self-image, which comports to the notion of *Christ-bearer*, came to dominate his views of himself as explorer, entrepreneur, and colonist. During his four voyages to the New World:

He came to believe that he was predestined to fulfill a number of prophecies in preparation for the coming of the Antichrist and the end of the world. According to his calculation, these events were not far off. This second self-image is epitomized in the signature that Columbus adopted: *Christoferens*. It is an awkward

Latinization of his given name ... Until recently, little attention has been paid to Christopherens—that is, to the spiritual dimension of Columbus's personality, to the religious and cultural environment out of which it developed, and to its possible influence on the genesis of his voyages of discovery. Yet Columbus's apocalyptic vision of the world and of the special role that he was destined to play in the unfolding of events that would presage the end of time was a major stimulus for his voyages. Moreover, his apocalypticism must be recognized as inseparable from his geography and cosmology if a balanced picture of the historical significance of his Enterprise of the Indies is to be achieved (Watts, 1985, p. 74).

This core element of Colón's identity and character, his deep religiosity and penchant for mysticism, was evident throughout his career. References to biblical prophecy abound in his diaries and logbooks, the entries of which were interlaced with prayers and other explanations of his beliefs. His most important apocalyptic writings, however, were composed between 1501-1502 after his third transatlantic voyage. They appear in a compilation of texts known as *El Libro de las Profecias* (Book of Prophecies) (Watts, 1985). In this work, as he had done in earlier writings, Colón, reflecting the popular millennialist views in Iberia in his day, called for Christian dominion over the world. In doing so he imagines his mission as serving the specific purposes of discovering of the Garden of Eden, and funding and launching a last crusade to recover Jerusalem from Muslim rule and prepare for the Second Coming of Jesus. He also saw his work as facilitating the selection of the last World Emperor to lead the crusade and welcome Jesus upon his return—a role for which he favored the Spanish monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella (Columbus, 1969; Delaney, 2006).

Colón thus conceived and conducted his four transatlantic voyages with a far greater agenda than seeking an Atlantic passage to India (Columbus, 1893; Delaney, 2006). The goals and objectives for his enterprise clearly drew upon and reflected widespread eschatological beliefs in Catholic Spain that held the second coming of Jesus to be

imminent (Delaney, 2006). Although grounded in biblical scripture, Iberian beliefs in the end-of-days also gained currency within the context of the Latin Church's struggle against Islam, a conflict that dominated Western Europe and the Mediterranean region from the Moorish invasion of Spain beginning in 711 CE until their final defeat by the combined forces of Ferdinand, King of Aragon, and Isabella, Queen of Castile, and Leon.

Colón witnessed firsthand the Spanish rulers' triumphant entry into Granada, the last Moorish stronghold in Spain, on January 2, 1492, when it fell after an eight-month siege. Eight months later on August 3, 1492, with the backing of the Catholic monarchs, he set sail on his world-changing journey in search of India with two broad objectives in mind: (1) acquiring gold to fund a new crusade; and (2) spreading Christianity worldwide (Delaney, 2006; Watts, 1985). In his diary he stated his desire to find gold "in such quantity that the sovereigns. . . will undertake and prepare to go conquer the Holy Sepulchre; for thus I urged Your Highnesses to spend all the profits of this my enterprise on the conquest of Jerusalem" (Delaney, 2006, p. 261). This merger of gold and Christian eschatology figures heavily in all of Colón's writings. He believed precious metals possessed the spirit of the divine, meaning they contained a numinous force or power that when used in support of evangelism and holy war would advance the Christianization of the world: "In his mind, God and gold, mining, and conversion, were not clear and distinct goals as the later missionaries to America were to make them. They were indissoluble" (Pagden, 1993, p. 19).

For his biographer Las Casas, Colón was not only a person anointed by god, he also was a heroic figure akin to the great leaders of the Roman empire (de las Casas, 1542 [1991]). This view of the Romans as exemplars of imperialism was typical in his day. The

historic impact of Rome in Western Europe, and its enduring legacies in law and governance, provided a template for the newly emerging Christian imperialist nation-states of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Evidence of this widely shared view of Roman colonialism appear frequently in European accounts of the invasion and settlement of the Americas (Pagden, 1995). The common use of the term *colonies*—“to refer to the territory [of] settlers who created new communities for themselves and their descendants while remaining dependent on the mother country in political and economic matters”—illustrates this shared heritage of Roman law and culture in Western European societies (Ypi, 2013). However, it is noteworthy the term “colonist” did not gain wide usage until the eighteenth century. Spanish settlers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries referred to themselves as “planters” (*pobladores* in Spanish) and to their colonies as “kingdoms in the possession of the Crown of Castile” (Elliot, 2006, p. 9). The use of the term “planters” semantically links the Spanish mission to dominionist language in Genesis. The Spanish saw themselves “planting” Christianity wherever they went (Seed, 1995). This notion of colonists as *planters* performed the same rhetorical role in England’s vocabulary and discourses of settler-colonialism (Hakluyt, 1584; Russo & Russo, 2012). Here, however, it is important to return to Cristóbal Colón’s ceremony of possession to illustrate how it dispossessed Amerindians of their land and freedom in the name of Jesus Christ.

During his first of four voyages, the same protocols and processes of appropriation that greeted the residents of Guanahani were witnessed by countless other Amerindians on islands Colón “discovered” for Spain, including Hispaniola and Cuba. He explains his mode of “discovery” as follows: “Generally it was my wish to pass no island without taking possession of it. Though having annexed one it might be said we had annexed all”

(Columbus, 1969, p. 60). Colón's first theatrical enactment of possession thus constituted a dress rehearsal for its countless repetitions in the Americas during the critical era of Spanish invasion and conquest in the six decades from 1512 to 1573 (Blackburn, 1997a). Other western European nations developed their own ceremonies for the same purposes. As the historian Patricia Seed points out: "Colonial rule over the New World was initiated through largely ceremonial practices—planting crosses, standards, banners, and coats of arms—marching in processions, picking up dirt, measuring the stars, drawing maps, speaking certain words, or remaining silent" (1995, p. 2).

Colón's *Ceremony*, as described in his logbook, includes all the basic components that came to typify the Spanish version of the ritual—bearing royal banners, planting crosses, and marking the occasion with a speech. The speech, which Colón probably improvised, later was expanded and standardized in 1514 by Juan López de Palacios Rubios, a jurist on the Council of Castile (Muldoon, 1980). Designated the *Requerimiento* (Requirement) and read aloud in Latin at the moment when the Spanish made first contact with Amerindians, the speech was not intended as a greeting from strangers seeking diplomatic relations, "but [as] a declaration of war" (Seed, 1995, p. 68). After informing the unfortunate souls assembled to greet them "you can do freely as you wish [...] and we will not compel you to turn Christians," the speaker closed with the following ominous declaration:

But if you do not do it [...] with the help of God, I will enter forcefully against you, and I will make war everywhere and however I can, and I will subject you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and His Majesty, and I will take your wives and children, and I will make them slaves ...and I will do to you all the evil and damages that a lord may do to vassals who do not obey or receive him. And I will solemnly declare that the deaths and damages received from such will be your fault and not that of His Majesty, nor mine, nor of the gentlemen who came with me (Seed, 1995, p. 69)

Despite the fact the Taino did not comprehend a single word of the speech (as was the case with the trees or empty abodes it was addressed to when humans were not present), Spanish explorers claimed the mere recitation of the *Requerimiento* permanently established their legitimate rights of sovereignty over newly “discovered” lands, their inhabitants, and resources. An exemplar of legal sophistry grounded in canon law as adjudicated by the Pope, the *Requerimiento* furnished a theological pretext for the use of violence against non-Christians, purportedly in the form of a “just war” of last resort. From its inception, however, the *Requerimiento* should be regarded as a fallaciously constructed proposition of *submit-or-die*, a choice without a choice, because submission also required the denial and destruction of a targeted people’s spiritual traditions and culture:

At its core, the *Requerimiento* was an effort to marshal contemporary understandings of canon law to justify the ongoing use of violence against natives in the New World. Converting the Spanish conquest into a just war would legitimize the effort in the minds of theologians and lawyers in Spain and of King Ferdinand, who ordered the writing of the document in the first place. Thus, the *Requerimiento* has two parts: first, a recitation of what the natives must do (i.e., accept Christianity) and, second, detailed threats of what will occur if the natives do not comply (Goldman, 2016, p. 2).

The immediate threat of holy war against Amerindians unless they submitted to Catholicism distinguished Spanish colonial practices from those of its European rivals. The French staged processions with uniforms and music and sought to form alliances with the peoples they encountered and eventually gain their consent to be ruled. English colonists made the conversion of the “Natives” to their Protestant cult a priority, but initially chose a less aggressive missionary approach to bring Amerindians to Christianity (Seed, 1995).

The Spanish alone operated according to an official protocol that made the threat of war against non-Christians an orthodox and routine practice in the colonization of the

Americas. In her comparative analysis of the *Ceremonies*, which remains the standard reference work on the subject, Patricia Seed points out the *Requerimiento* closely resembled the practices of Spain's longest imperial rulers—Muslims from North Africa and the Middle East—whose wars of Islamic conquest or jihad made similar demands of submission on conquered peoples (1995). But prior to the birth of Islam in the early seventh century, evidence shows the Latin Church authorized the use of similar rhetoric and tactics in efforts to Christianize parts of Western and Northern Europe (Stark, 2001). It thus appears this practice likely originated within the Roman Church and was first used against non-Christians in its crusade to establish Christendom in Europe. In any case, all Western European imperial powers cited the same legal basis and authority to conduct their “just wars” against non-Christians. While criteria may have differed somewhat, they generally reacted to any recalcitrance or resistance to conversion (colonization) by the Indigenous as punishable by war, torture, enslavement, or in some cases, outright genocide (Waswo, 1996).

Conclusion

Catholic Spain and Portugal entered the New World bearing the Christian Cross and the Crowns of Castile and Portugal and with the authority of a theo-political legal “Doctrine of Discovery” devised by the Latin Church and endorsed by European monarchs. Protestant England entered the New World bearing the Cross and a corporate charter from King James (Bartosik-Velez, 2014; Berlin, 1998; Cañizares-Esguerra, 2018). Although England's King and wealthy elite drafted the license for its citizens to invade, plunder, and occupy the Americas, the English too conducted their invasions according to the Latin

Church's "Doctrine of Discovery." In both cases, antiblack ideology and Christian dominionism proved central to colonialist endeavors. Moreover, despite the interval of an entire century between the arrival of the Spanish and the founding of England's first New World settlement in Virginia in 1607, the English unpacked the same Christian cultural baggage in their New World settlements (Washington, 1984). Accordingly, they believed in their god-given cultural superiority over Amerindians and thus their right to convert and rule them or enslave or eliminate them. Hence, they entered the Americas in pursuit of the same dominionist goals as their Iberian predecessors. They thus crossed the Atlantic highly motivated to emulate the practices of Spain and Portugal to secure access to the wealth and resources their Iberian rivals extracted and shipped to their metropolises. This massive increase in their rivals' territorial reach and power directly threatened England's economic and national security (Pagden, 1995). Of equal importance, as Protestant latecomers they deeply feared being left out of the global colonialist competition to harvest souls and achieve the Great Commission (Adelman, 2015; Cañizares-Esguerra, 2018; Pagden, 1995).

The next chapter explores and analyzes English colonialism to illustrate how its Protestant version of the *Colonizing Discourses of Christian Dominionism* informed the polity and ethos of the United States and its white supremacist ideology. A critical part of the forthcoming discussion demonstrates why the constitutional articles designed to enact and codify the "separation of church and state" and "freedom of religion" at the nation's founding perpetrate a monstrous fraud on the public. Rather than protecting and enforcing the two principles, the nation's state legislatures and state and federal courts historically

have assisted in the overt campaigns led by “White” Christian nationalists to make the United States not just “Christian” in terms of its national identity but the next *Christendom*.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ENGLISH COLONIALISM AND THE DOMINIONIST LEGACY IN THE UNITED STATES

In the twenty-first century, 70.6 percent of Americans self-identify as Christians, 58 percent of them still segregate themselves by race on Sunday mornings, and white Protestants make up the majority of this 58 percent. These facts belie the claim, popularized after Barack Obama's 2008 presidential election, that America is living in a postracial society. And yet, the role played by religion in white people's lived experiences of race, racism, and white class privilege in the united states tends to be neglected by philosophers and religious studies scholars, except perhaps when considering white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. — Julia Robinson Moore & Shannon Sullivan (2018).

Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion of English colonialism in North America. It examines the rhetoric and practices of the settler-invaders who founded England's first overseas colony in Jamestown, Virginia in 1607 to show they used the same *Colonizing Discourses of Christian Dominionism* as their Iberian rivals. Even though England split from the Catholic Church in 1532 under the direction of Henry VIII and established the Church of England to join and advance the Protestant movement that had swept across Northern Europe that century, their interpretation of the bible's Great Commission did not differ in any respects from their powerful Catholic rivals (Johnson, 2012).

This chapter also examines the colonial laws used to regulate slavery in the English and Iberians systems (North America versus Latin America) to identify their origins in Europe and how they differed in severity in application. It then pivots to discuss how civil notions of secularism—represented in the US by the legal separation of church and state,

and prescription of religious freedom—obscure the social reality that Christian identity, values, and dogma structure and determine the US laws and have done from the nation’s founding.

In recent decades in particular state legislatures in the US have passed a host of laws—anti-gay, anti-Black, anti-immigrant, anti-abortion, anti-Muslim, et cetera—based strictly on Christian beliefs. Their codification clearly demonstrates the hegemonic control “White” Christian nationalists have over levers of government. It also demonstrates their undemocratic conviction that the principles embodied and enacted in the US Constitution are only to be interpreted within the framework of biblical doctrine as they define it. This chapter thus concludes by exposing the nature and impact of the ongoing wars waged by US evangelical soldiers on the targets of Christian hatred in the nation. Unsurprisingly, the current US Christian holocaust is unfolding the same way it did a millennia ago during the Christian Crusades by being fought on two separate fronts: an internal one within the US “holy land” to establish it as the new *Christendom*; and an external one waged overseas, particularly in Africa, as US Christians continue the faith’s brutal campaign to achieve the Great Commission mandated in the New Testament.

English Christianizing Discourses and Cult(ural) Baggage

The English entered the business of New World conquest and colonization a century after the Spanish already in possession of a clearly defined concept of the term “plantation” and its cognates:

“In the Chesapeake, the *planting* of a colony, a term used for all efforts to establish overseas settlements, took the form of cultivating tobacco as the staple, or main export, crop. Men who cultivated land were known as *planters* and their

landholdings, whether large or small, were called *plantations*” [author’s italics] (Russo & Russo, 2012, p. 7).

This popular idea of “planting a colony” in the New World may in fact constitute the earliest version of the American Dream. English dreams of settling in North America—as articulated by Richard Hakluyt (the elder), Richard Hakluyt (the younger), Thomas Heriot, Walter Raleigh, John Smith, Samuel Purchas, and a host of other writers—evinced desires for freedom, opportunity, and prosperity that appear to comprise the same basic aspirations for success in the US today (Hakluyt (the elder), 1585; Hakluyt, 1584; Mancall, 2007). Like most current US residents, however, promoters, and prospective English colonists in the early 1600s vastly underestimated the obstacles they would face in pursuing their dreams. Yet even as the trials and tribulations of settling in the North America became widely known, especially during Jamestown’s deadly and disastrous early years (1607-1623), the English prophets and preachers of overseas settlements continued to produce an extensive body of promotional literature. According to historian Andrew Fitzmaurice:

[...] the English produced more literature promoting colonization in this period than any other European country. Through to the demise of the Virginia Company, numerous tracts and pamphlets in particular, but also histories, verse, and plays, were produced debating the virtues of colonization. This literature was composed by a wide variety of authors from noble to humble birth, by authors who never set foot in America, by others who participated in voyages, and by many who lived in the New World (2003, location 144).

English versions of the standard European discourse of colonization appear in numerous works by writers and editors who zealously assume the roles of propagandists for North American settlement (Mancall, 2007). English writers and those of competing European nations expressed their primary objective of their colonialist agenda as Christianization of Amerindians. A work published in 1610 by the Virginia Company titled—*A true and sincere declaration of the purpose and ends of the plantation begun in Virginia*—

exemplifies the Christian rhetoric typically used to characterize European invasions and claims of sovereignty over foreign lands and peoples as the realization of a divine plan:

The *Principall and Maine Ends* (out of which are easily derived to any meane understanding infinitlesse, & yet great ones) were *first* to preach, & baptize into *Christian Religion*, and by propagation of the *Gospell*, to recover out of the armes of the Divell, a number of poore and miserable soules, wrapt up unto death, in almost *invincible ignorance*; and to endeavour the fulfilling, and accomplishment of the number of the elect, which shall be gathered from out all corners of the earth; and to add our myte to the treasury of Heaven, that as we pray for the coming of the kingdome of glory, so to expresse in our actions, the same desire, if God have pleased, to use so weak instruments, to the ripening & consummation thereof [author's italics] (West et al., 1610).

The rhetorical tropes of defeating Satan and recovering Amerindians “out of the armes of the Divell” present colonization as a holy war against Paganism, ignorance, and idolatry. The use of expressions like “the elect,” and the “kingdome of glory”—key concepts derived from Christian eschatology—connect colonialism in English minds with apocalyptic beliefs about the second coming of Jesus, the end of the world, and the establishment of a new Heaven and Earth in the world to come. Collectively the terms comprise the standard grammar and lexicon of Christian dominionism. Like other Western Europeans, the English clearly viewed the prospect of New World colonization in prophetic terms that made their settlers and settlements part of a divine plan for Christians to rule the world in the name of Jesus Christ (Hakluyt, 1584; Mancall, 2007).

The rhetoric touting colonization as a mission of salvation did have limits. It remained a common refrain until Amerindians resisted. Settler-invaders forgot about conversion in such instances and typically resorted to removal or extermination as more expedient measures to rid themselves of heathens and heathenism. Evidence from colonial histories show that instead of saving souls from the devil through Christianizing (Westernizing) Indigenous peoples, the wars of conquest, theft, and dispossession

conducted to acquire Indian territory for settlement inaugurated centuries of genocide and racial oppression (Churchill, 1997; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Reséndez, 2016). Still, rhetorical justifications for the appropriation (*salvation*) of foreign lands from so-called savages, and for the enslavement of millions of West Africans to make the lands profitable, never ceased to refer to the Christian gospels for their divine authority.

Many of the early settlers who heeded the calls from the promoters of English colonization arrived believing they were establishing a new society in a New World, one in which they could leave Old World problems behind. Yet they did not and could not leave behind their social identities which were grounded in Western Christian beliefs, and which also viewed England as a beleaguered state that needed to confront, contest, and out-compete the growing power and wealth of Spain for its survival (Elliot, 2006). Consequently, intrinsic economic, cultural, and Protestant dictates guided English settlement decisions, which means even when confronted by the incredible “newness” of the “New World” they instinctively chose to replicate and enact Old World methods, values, attitudes, and beliefs in their settlements:

Emigrants to the New World brought with them too much cultural baggage for it to be lightly discarded in their new American environment. It was, in any event, only by reference to the familiar that they could make some sense of the unfamiliar that lay all around them. They therefore constructed for themselves new societies which, even when different in intent from those they left behind, unmistakably replicated many of the most characteristic features of metropolitan societies as they knew — or imagined — them at the time of their departure (Elliot, 2006, pp. xiii-xiv).

Origins of Whiteness/Antiblackness in North America

This study contends whiteness/antiblackness arrived in colonial Virginia in 1607 in the cult(ural) baggage of the first English settlers—which means it preceded the arrival of the

first enslaved Africans in the colony by more than a decade. The claim the English invader-settlers were predisposed to antiblackness is far from new. The historian Winthrop D.

Jordan argued this point in the 1960s:

In England perhaps more than in southern Europe, the concept of blackness was loaded with intense meaning. Long before they found that some men were black, Englishmen found in the idea of blackness a way of expressing some of their most ingrained values. No other color except white conveyed so much emotional impact. As described in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the meaning of black before the sixteenth century included, ‘Deeply stained with dirt; soiled, dirty, foul.... Having dark, or deadly purposes, malignant; pertaining to or involving death, deadly’ ... Embedded in the concept of blackness was its direct opposite—whiteness (Jordan, 1968, p. 7).

Archival research conducted by British historians and scholars in the fifty years since the publication of Jordan’s *White Over Black* reveals the existence of a much larger African presence in England in the century prior to overseas settlement than previously known (Habib, 2008). These findings indicate whiteness/antiblackness were not just abstract ideas and concepts in England in the 1600s. How did those Africans come to England? The British historian David Olusoga states: “Most black Tudors probably arrived in Britain via the Iberian and Mediterranean worlds” (2016, p. 58). Some arrived with their enslavers or employers, while others were captured on Spanish and Portuguese ships seized by the English as conflicts over trade and orthodox faith with their Iberian rivals provoked and fueled centuries of hostility and conflict.

Documents in Spanish and English archives also reveal the involvement of a small cadre of English merchants in the Iberian slave trade in the fifteenth century (Ungerer, 2008). In fact, Andalusia in Spain emerged as a major base of operations for English Mediterranean trade and investments as early as the mid-1400s. English ventures began in Iberia at the pivotal moment when the Portuguese were mapping and exploring the

coastlines of West Africa in search of a sea route to Asia (Ungerer, 2008). As their shipbuilding and navigation skills grew, English sailors and merchants followed the Iberians to the coasts of West Africa and across the Atlantic to the Caribbean in the 1500s in search of gold and to pursue similar opportunities for trade and plunder (Guasco, 2014).

These events facilitated an increase in the African presence in England. This growth in their numbers also gave the English regular opportunities to associate the commonly used synonyms for *black* (“dirty,” “foul,” “malignant,” as listed in the Oxford English Dictionary) with real “Black” persons they encountered daily on the streets of London, Bristol, or Liverpool. In any case, recently discovered information about “Black” lives in parish records, tax returns, inventories, wills, and other archival documents reveal fragments of the complex lives and social realities of those who made “black” history in England in the early modern era.

Imtiaz Habib, Miranda Kaufman, David Olusoga, Onyeka Nubia, Mariska Sherwood, and Hakim Adi deserve credit for recovering and rescuing what Imtiaz Habib refers to as the “missing (Black) subject” from the English archives (2008, p. 1). Their studies illuminate and complicate the analysis of antiblackness by “paint[ing] a very different picture about the size, continuity and historical seriousness of the black presence in England well before English black populations became known through the transatlantic slave trade” (Habib, 2008, p. 1). As a complement to these recent archival finds, Kim F. Hall’s study of race and gender in Renaissance-era English drama, literature, and visual and decorative arts provides an indispensable guide to the presence and pervasiveness of various literary and artistic tropes of whiteness/antiblackness in England before and after colonists began emigrating to the New World (1995).

Hall's monograph, with its Africana feminist framework, broke new methodological ground when it appeared nearly a quarter century ago. Her critical analysis of Tudor and Jacobean literature exposes the centrality of blackness to the construction of early modern Englishness and related notions of whiteness and white supremacy. Hall especially attends to the intersectionality of race, gender, and class in analyzing the literary conceits that produced the tropes of "white" and "fair" to contrast English women with "dark" and "black" "Others." Her analysis reveals English self-fashioning and self-representation during the Elizabethan period changed and evolved within the contexts of their overseas encounters and interactions with Africans and Amerindians. Her explication of literary "descriptions of dark and light" in well-known English texts, including works by Milton and Shakespeare, shows that in their discursivity and semiosis: "rather than being mere indications of Elizabethan beauty standards or markers of moral categories [the descriptions] became in the early modern period the conduit through which the English began to formulate the notions of 'self' and 'other' so well known in Anglo-American racial discourses" (1995, p. 2). Hall's findings thus substantiate three of the historian Winthrop Jordan's key arguments about English antiblackness: its presence in England prior to English colonization; its virulence in comparison to other Western European states; and its centrality in the formulation of whiteness as the primary form of English and Anglo-American self-identification and self-representation in the colonies (Jordan, 1968; Jordan, 1974).

More recent studies of English conceptions of whiteness/antiblackness stress caution when interpreting literary tropes about skin color, particularly in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries when notions about the roles of climate,

environment, and hereditary in determining differences in the physical appearance of human populations were subjects of frequent debate. In her study of “categories of difference” in eighteenth century British culture, Roxanne Wheeler identifies problems that occur when more commonly known nineteenth century ideas about “race” provide the interpretative framework for the analysis of similar notions from centuries earlier. She states: “[...] there was not yet consensus among Europeans about the extent to which humans were different from each other, what caused these variations, or about how to value the visible differences” (2000, p. 6). Wheeler thus proposes an “elastic conception of race” that takes into account “older conceptions of Christianity, civility, and rank [as] more explicitly important to Britons’ assessment of themselves and other people than physical attributes such as skin color, shape of the nose, or texture of the hair” (p. 7). This study heeds Wheeler’s call. It examines skin color, but through the specific lens of the “older conceptions of Christianity” and associated metaphorical interpretations of it.

Joyce E. Chaplin’s (2001) groundbreaking study of English and Amerindian encounters in North America from 1500-1676 furnishes yet another context in which to Hall and Wheeler’s analyses. Centering her study on the role of English conceptions of science and technology in shaping their encounters with non-Europeans, Chaplin shows English cultural arrogance during the early period of “discovery” was tempered by fear of the unknown consequences of foreign climates, foreign foods, and foreign peoples on English bodies. She also points to the formation of a racial hierarchy in the colony before the advent of African enslavement. The English arrived in North America with a presumption of superiority over Native Americans being fully aware of their conquest and subjugation by the Spanish and Portuguese in South America. However, a fear of the

unknown—including superstitious fears of Native American magic and witchcraft—temporarily tempered English cultural chauvinism. English self-confidence increased in conjunction with their growing awareness of Amerindian vulnerability to infectious diseases brought from Europe. The lack of immunity to smallpox, chickenpox, influenza, typhoid, and a host of other viruses and bacteria that ravaged and decimated entire Indigenous communities made them appear physically weak and thus inferior in English eyes:

[...] when it came to making comparisons between bodies, the English saw nothing but separation and differentiation, mostly because of the high mortality rates during epidemics. [...] In the second half of the seventeenth century, when slavery spread in the Caribbean, the English used both Africans and native Americans to identify their own bodies as optimally suited to rule America (Chaplin, 2001, p. 9).

A salient example of this attitude is found in the work of John Winthrop (c. 1588-1649 CE), the Puritan governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Winthrop thanked god for the diseases that decimated Indian populations and thereby created space for European occupation. He celebrated “Native” deaths as a blessing yet agreed with the importation of enslaved Africans to build the colony (Winthrop, 1825).

Viewed collectively the studies referenced above reveal frequent instances of English ignorance, insecurity, uncertainty, and deep anxiety about their own physical bodies as contacts with non-Europeans increased in Europe, Africa, and the Americas in the 1500s. Yet such anxieties never trumped the ideology of white Christian superiority that informed and guided English relations with non-European, non-Christian “Others,” nor did they deter English migration and settlement. Each wave of invaders arrived, unpacked their Christian identities, and thereby fused them to frame and define diplomatic and social relations with Amerindians. The importation of enslaved Africans soon after the

founding of Jamestown colony resulted in the further stratification of colonial society based on the Christian ideology of whiteness/antiblackness the English used for self-defining and self-distancing. However, the class and caste system that eventually emerged from that process took decades for its official recognition and enactment to be implemented in the form of colonial slave laws.

English Colonial Laws

The act of separating English cultural baggage into discrete categories, however, reveals the English, despite their unique culture and history, operated within the same broad framework of Christian imperialism/dominionism as their Western European counterparts in claiming foreign territories for settlement and in oppressing non-Christians. If the first Africans who arrived in Virginia in 1619 were immediately and predictably consigned to the social death of permanent and hereditary enslavement, what then did the English colonists do differently from their Iberian rivals in socializing antiblackness and regulating racial bondage in their colonies? In other words, what, if anything, distinguished English antiblackness in Virginia colony from its antecedents in Spain's conquered territories in the Caribbean and Latin America? Particularly, what roles did Catholic, and Protestant sectarian differences play in establishing colonial policies and practices?

Records of the Virginia House of Burgesses, the first English legislative body established in the Americas, reveal the colonial elite passed a series of antiblack laws unlike any previously known in Europe or the Americas, laws that arguably surpassed the antiblack policies of their Iberian rivals in the severity of their proscriptions and enforcement (Jordan, 1968; Morgan, 1975). For example, the approval in 1691 of an Act

that banned so-called interracial marriages in Virginia between free “Blacks” and Whites constitutes the first legislation of its kind in world history. It specifically targeted and penalized Anglo-American women who violated the ban with banishment and fines. (Hening, 1819b). Subsequently revised and updated after Virginia became a state in 1788, the marriage ban remained in-effect until 1967 when the U.S. Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional in its decision on *Loving v. Virginia* (Cashin, 2017).

Blood fraction or blood quantum laws also distinguish the English colonies from their Iberian rivals to the South. The concept of hypodescent or the so-called *one-drop rule* used by US courts to detect invisible blackness and thereby classify a person as “Black” based on ancestry and not phenotype is unique in world history and exists in no other nation on earth (Jordan, 2014; Sweet, 2005). The ideological basis for such laws entered colonial Virginia by way of Latin Christianity’s antiblack dogma mediated by English Protestant traditions (Davis, 1991; Gross, 2008; Washington, 1984). However, colonial officials did not immediately codify and regulate antiblackness. Colonial records reveal Virginia planters began the process of crafting and enacting the colony’s slave laws in the 1640s—two decades after the arrival of the first enslaved Africans (Hening, 1819b). As the legal scholar Alan Watson notes:

Slavery as a social institution was accepted in the English colonies without legal authorization. Thus in the early days of the colony there were slaves but no law of slavery.... The statutes on slavery, as on other matters, were not made in England but in the local legislatures. Thus they were more geared to local conditions than was the law in Spanish or Portuguese colonies (1989, p. 64).

Colonial Virginia’s slave laws serve as key indices of the socialization of antiblackness and antiblack discourses in the colonial period of the US. They also comprise the primary source materials used here to draw crucial distinctions between English antiblackness and

its Iberian referents and antecedents. Watson's comment above about the role of "local legislatures" in English colonial administration identifies an issue central to understanding racial bondage and antiblackness in both colonial systems: English colonists had far more latitude in establishing colonial law than their Iberian rivals due to basic differences between the English and Iberian legal regimes. (Tannenbaum, 1946; Watson, 1989; Wiecek, 1995). However, before examining key distinctions between the two systems it useful to account for the lack of slave laws in the first decades of the Virginia colony (Nelson, 2008).

Unlike the Spanish and Portuguese who arrived in the New World with a half century of experience incorporating enslaved West Africans into their Iberian workforces and regulating slavery according to an established body of laws, the English arrived in Virginia and immediately settled on a plan to use contract workers (indentured servants) to meet the labor demands of their colony (Allen, 1997; Galenson, 1978, 1981a, 1981b). While familiar with the slave trade and perhaps having no qualms about acquiring and exploiting enslaved Africans, the problem for the colonists was getting access to a supply of captives. In Virginia's case this meant the enslaved population increased at a snail's pace until the mid-seventeenth century. By Jamestown's founding in 1607, the Iberians had already transported tens of thousands of enslaved Africans to their colonies in the Americas (Eltis & Richardson, 2010). The laws the Spanish and Portuguese used to regulate the transoceanic trade in Africans and their chattel bondage in Latin America came directly from Roman law.

The English in Virginia, on the other hand, started from scratch. Having no basis in English law, they invented the legislation needed to regulate their colonial workforce and

its growing population of enslaved workers (Nelson, 2008, 2012, 2016). The laws they crafted combined Old-World conceptions of antiblackness with local statutes and codes designed in part to differentiate in the management and treatment of three distinct exploited colonial workforces: temporary European contract workers (indentured servants), permanently enslaved Africans, and Amerindians who also could fall in either of the other two categories (Galenson, 1981b; Hickman, 1996; Higginbotham Jr, 1978).

The initial reliance in English colonies on indentured servants for laborers distinguished them from the New World settlements of their Spanish and Portuguese competitors. This novel form of contract labor enabled the English and others (Irish, Scots, Germans) to emigrate to the colonies and receive an allotment of land in exchange for selling their labor to an assignee, usually a plantation owner, for a fixed number of years (Engerman, 1999; Galenson, 1981a; Steinfield, 1991). Indentured servitude had no precedents in English society prior to colonization. It thus posed a unique set of challenges for labor management and control—especially in circumstances when indentured servants and enslaved Africans found common cause to resist and rebel against the “master” class (Steinfield, 1991). However, despite the problems of acquisition and regulation that beset the indentured system from its outset and until its gradual demise in the early decades of the 1800s, its centrality to English colonization only partially explains the discontinuities between the English and Iberian colonial systems in the treatment of enslaved Africans (Galenson, 1984; Mahmud, 2012). The publication of Frank Tannenbaum’s *Slave and Citizen* (1946) helped to shed important light on this issue.

Tannenbaum broke new ground with his comparative study of slavery in the Americas, by focusing attention on legal and sectarian differences between the two colonial

regimes, rather than relying solely on labor management and economics to account for their dissimilarities. Referring to the enslaved African in Latin America, he states:

He was never considered mere chattel ... His master never enjoyed the powers of life and death over his body, even though abuses existed, and cruelties were performed.... The Negro slave under this system had both a juridical and a moral personality, even while he was in bondage (1946, p. 98).

Tannenbaum attributes these differences in the social conditions and legal statuses of enslaved Africans in Latin America—particularly the avenues available for manumission—to the Mediterranean roots of the Iberian New World slavery system. The system the Spanish and Portuguese brought to the Americas included legal provisions designed from the outset to protect enslaved persons from extreme forms of abuse. Moreover, unlike the English who made manumission a mission-impossible for enslaved Africans in their colonies, Tannenbaum states: “Under the influence of the law and religion, the social milieu in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies made easy room for the Negroes passing from slavery to freedom” (1946, pp. 88-89).

Spain and Portugal based their colonial legal codes on the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, an assemblage of classical Roman laws collected and codified in the sixth century CE at the behest of Emperor Justinian I of the Eastern Roman Empire (Tannenbaum, 1946). The statutes assembled in the *Corpus* encompassed criminal, mercantile, maritime, and canon law (the ecclesiastical rules and regulations of the Roman Catholic Church as established in part by papal edicts). Roman law has become synonymous with the concept of *civil law*, which is created by means of legislation. Despite its antiquity or perhaps because of it, civil law based on Roman law provides the legal foundations for countries like Spain, Portugal, France, and their former colonies. Civil law establishes and follows a process whereby judges adhere to a strict legal code to determine the facts of a case and decide its outcome:

“As a result, precedent and judicial decisions have limited influence in a civil law system. Rather, lawmakers, scholars, and legal experts who help craft the legal code hold much more sway over how the legal system is ultimately administered” (Black’s Law Dictionary, 2021).

In the thirteenth century every polity in Western Europe began to adopt Justinian’s revised and updated Roman legal code except England. Legal historians coined the phrase “the reception of Roman Law” to designate this process and its timeframe. The term “reception” is somewhat misleading in that Roman law was not alien to Western European polities but was simply being revised to update their legal systems (Wieacker, 1981). The need for revisions occurred due to the disintegration of the Western Roman Empire and its replacement by several new kingdoms and principalities. The Western Empire was part of Latin Christendom, as was England. England, however, did not reject Roman law. It possessed its own legal system based on what it called *Common Law* after the island’s invasion and conquest by the Normans in 1066 (Hoeter, 2004; Hudson, 2014; Wieacker, 1981). The term denotes the body of laws that arise through custom and judicial precedents rather than from statutes. Thus, common law has been variously labeled as case law, judge-made law, or judicial precedent to distinguish it from laws and regulations created by legislative enactment:

While common law systems do have laws that are created by legislators, it is up to judges to interpret those laws and apply them to individual cases. To do this, judges rely on the precedents set by previous courts. In common law countries, certain courts, such as the Supreme Court of the United States, have the ability to strike down laws that were passed by legislators if those laws violated the Law of the Land (i.e., the Constitution) (Black’s Law Dictionary, 2021).

During the thirteenth century, when its neighbors in continental Europe “received” the Roman law, England decided to maintain its common law tradition and use Roman statutes

as needed to fill in gaps in its system of jurisprudence (Hudson, 2014). That tradition thus made England unique among its neighbors in Europe. Hence, when unpacking the cultural baggage the English brought to colonial Virginia, common law is found to be the dominant system and philosophy of jurisprudence and not civil law (Roman law). Again, unlike Spanish and Portuguese civil law and procedure, English common law did not include an existing body of statutes and regulations pertaining to slavery (Nelson, 2008). The lack of legal precedents meant the laws crafted by English colonial legislators in Virginia in a critical sense broke new ground by *modernizing* the system of slavery and its jurisprudence for the newly emerging era of racial capitalism.

Differences between the legal traditions of England and its Iberian counterparts bear directly on the expression, socialization, and regulation of antiblackness and racial bondage in English and Iberian America. The differences also help to explain how the US, which entered the colonizing and chattel bondage business later in the game, became the preeminent antiblack society in the world—the United States of White Supremacy—an empire-state with an antiblack ethos and polity unlike any other on the planet. This aspect of American exceptionalism often gets overlooked in the hype about the nation’s purported uniqueness, as does its historic role in promulgating and fostering antiblackness worldwide. Its distinctive legal system of Jim Crow (American Apartheid), for example, inspired and influenced the development of Nazi Germany’s 1930s Nuremberg Laws which denied Jews “the right of citizenship and the right to intermarry” and led to the genocidal final solution (Whitman, 2017, p. 18).

Tannenbaum refers to both law and “religion” as influencing the social milieu in Latin America in ways distinct from Anglo-America. In terms of theological differences

shaping New World slavery systems, he found Iberian Catholic regulations for the control and conversion of Amerindians and Africans produced a set of conditions and practices conducive to both manumission and the emergence of a far less rigid skin color consciousness compared to the colonies under English Protestant rule (Tannenbaum, 1946). Christian beliefs therefore both united and divided the Western European imperial states in Europe and abroad. Before the Protestant Reformation in 1517—which split Latin Christianity into two major factions—Western Europe was united in Roman Catholicism under the authority of the Pope and the Latin Church. England too dedicated itself to the Catholic world also known as Latin Christendom until it broke with the Church and the Pope in 1534 and established the Church of England with King Henry VIII as its Supreme Head (Simms, 2013).

Despite definitive sectarian and nationalist differences, Western European invader-colonists nevertheless operated according to a shared philosophy and ethos of European ethnic and cultural superiority rooted in the Christian dogma and identity they claimed authorized their dominion over all other peoples in the world (Newcomb, 2008; Robertson, 2005; Seed, 1992, 1995). While European polities continued to fight each other for dominance in Europe, they remained without exception steadfast and united in their faith-based animus toward non-Europeans and non-Christians. Their discourses of antiblackness thus stayed fundamentally the same throughout nearly four centuries of chattel bondage in the Americas. Christianity thus united Western Europeans in a shared ideology of dominionist imperialism and antiblackness and supplied the antiblack discourses that made colonialism a joint project of the West despite the competition of western imperialist states

for control of Europe and for global control that frequently resulted in continental wars and in colonial wars by proxy.

That European colonialism began as a global holy war to subjugate the entirety of humanity to Christian dominion is acknowledged in some sectors in the West but rarely fully appreciated. What remains largely unknown is how it continues to operate in the US and in other settler-colonialist states with Indigenous populations residing within their borders. The war rages on because the colonial-era legal apparatus used to justify the imposition of Christian dominion over Indigenous peoples five centuries ago has been updated and brought forward in current constitutional and statutory law in the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Miller, 2011; Newcomb, 2008; Newcomb & Change, 1992). Indigenous legal scholars in these former British colonies have led efforts to contest and overturn the laws. Still, even when confronted by the history that produced them, Christians living in those countries, even those with Indigenous and African ancestors who were forced to convert, do not necessarily find them objectionable. Given the central role of Christianity in the founding myths of European settler-colonialism, it is not surprising the concept of Christian dominion and the rights it sets forth over non-Christians (non-Europeans) remains a legal tool of the West. This situation is equally true in the US despite the purported constitutional separation of church and state. It endures because the concept of Christian dominion is integral to the Doctrine of Discovery—the Christian legal theory and policy of conquest and subjugation that legitimizes continued control of Indigenous lands and peoples (Miler & Ruru, 2008; Miller, 2005; Newcomb & Change, 1992). The fact the courts continue to uphold the legality of the Doctrine of Discovery in the US, like the ongoing legislative attacks on abortion rights clearly violate the purported intent of the

legal “separation of church and state.” However, the notion this nation is a secular society in which church and state have been separated to allow freedom of religion constitutes a fraud of massive proportions.

Church and State in the US

The image of a religious cultural tool kit is a useful one; we suggest that we need to give systematic attention to a wider range of religious cultural tools and to how structural location influences the use of these cultural tools in the forming of racial (and other) attitudes. We also need to pay attention to the racialized context that shapes the tools that are available within the religious tool kits of particular communities and traditions (e.g., the black Church, or Hispanic Catholicism in the United States), and that shapes the institutions through which religious culture is transmitted (Edgell & Tranby, 2007)

The idea of separating “faith” and “state” never occurred to the ancient Romans or the early Christians in Rome; nor did it appear in the West until the advent of western colonialism. The current purported religious/secular division in Euro-America derives mainly from European scholars in the early “modern” era who purportedly facilitated the “disenchantment” of Western Europe by introducing innovative intellectual practices that dismantled and replaced magical thinking and superstition with reason and science (Gillespie, 2008; Josephson-Storm, 2017; Keel, 2018). Western scholars temporally locate this socially transformative process that has been labeled the Enlightenment as taking place primarily in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Accordingly, western scholars largely attribute the purported sociohistorical transition of Western Europe from medievalism to modernity to the philosophical ideas and works of Christian intellectuals like Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes, and John Locke, who purportedly initiated a

secular/scientific revolution that completely transformed (modernized) Western intellectual culture.

The standard version of this Enlightenment narrative in academia invariably de-emphasizes the “Christian” identities and beliefs of the forebears of modernity and science and amplify instead their purported rationalism, empiricism, and scientism. Consequently, the religion/secular dichotomy that dominates contemporary European and Euro-American sociopolitical thought not only informs and advances the modern myth of the emergence of modernity and the modern world, it also enables the West to present the development of the scientific disciplines by Newton, Bernier, Linnaeus, Kant, Blumenbach, et al., as a purely “secular” exercise and product, rather than acknowledge their conceptual origins are located in the Western Christian intellectual tradition (Harrison, 2015; Keel, 2018). Chapter Eight, which follows, examines the role of the Christian Intellectual Tradition in obscuring the Christian origins of the western sciences.

The key issue examined in this section is how the West deploys the myth of the separation of church and state in conjunction with the myth of *modernity* as key epistemic components in the dominionist/imperialist discourses of Western superiority. This notion of secularism as a specific characteristic and property of the West also performs an essential role in justifying European and Euro-American military interventions in certain non-Western (non-Christian) societies—a practice first deployed in the Americas and in West Africa during colonialism, and most evident today in actions taken against self-defined Islamic states in the Middle East (McCutcheon, 1997). The predicate for invasion being based on a denial of coevalness that strategically marks of those societies as existing in a medieval modality which therefore requires the West to intervene to “modernize” them,

As argued and shown here, “modernization” is just a thinly disguised euphemism for Christian domination and socioeconomic exploitation).

Indeed, while the US Constitution proclaims the nation to be founded on principles of religious tolerance and pluralism, its history and current events belie those assertions. Even a cursory review of legal history reveals the existence of numerous laws that appear to protect “religious freedoms” but serve instead to protect one group of US Christians from another (for example, Catholics from Protestants) (Smith, 2015). The founding myth of the nation’s secular birth thus disguises and distorts the role of Christianity in its genesis. This study finds instead US democratic liberalism—the underlying political philosophy that informs its notions of “secularism” and what constitutes a pluralistic society—consists mainly of Protestant Christian “beliefs” stripped of their readily identifiable sectarian idioms and reformulated and reconvened in the guise of a social contract based entirely on Enlightenment principles. This rhetoric conditions US citizens to believe US society is strictly secular-political in nature. However, it is deliberately deceptive and misleading because secularism itself is a concept born within Christian theo-political ideology only to be disguised and obscured by Enlightenment ideas of “separation of church and state” and “religious liberty” espoused by US Founding Fathers. This issue will be examined fully explicated in Chapter Ten. The focus here is on recognizing the very idea of “religious” freedom is “religious” by definition.

This is a consequence of the secularization of norms based in a specific *religious* account of religion and its liberty. One can no longer invoke the theological conception of human existence to justify the principles of liberal toleration. One feels the need to provide a secular justification; but one lacks the conceptual resources to do so. That is, no scientific theory is available today which identifies the realm of religion across different cultures and societies, and which explains what it means for religious worship to be free and why a human society needs

freedom of religion in order to flourish (De Roover & Balagangadhara, 2008, p. 27).

Unpacking and simplifying the comment above identifies a massive problem related to the use of concept of “religion” in the West to define the beliefs and belief systems of peoples worldwide—it **has no basis in science or human history**. The history of “religion” shows it was not “discovered” by western scholars through global exploration and study but was invented by Christian intellectuals in the eighteenth century to serve their own hegemonic purposes. This study investigates and exposes this generally unknown fact in Chapter Ten. It thereby exposes the origins of “religion” and how it originated within Christian ideology and western academia. Its scholarly application to the study of non-Christian (non-monotheistic) beliefs worldwide for comparative purposes serves solely a propagandistic value of validating Christianity’s claims of being it only “true” and universal faith. Consequently, the very idea of “religious” freedom has no basis whatsoever outside the false western claim of discovering the existence of something it does not comprehend yet incorrectly labels as “religions” for its own discursive and rhetorical aims and objectives. It thus invites the question: what precise purpose does mandating “religious freedom” serve in a secular polity purportedly based on the rule of law and not the rule of scripture? Or, in other words, why do people need religious freedom in a free society?

When examining this problem within the framework of the constitutional provision that specifies *Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof*, the idea of separating church and state seems superfluous until and unless Christianity is substituted for the word “religion:” *Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of Christianity or prohibiting the free exercise thereof*. Hence instead of promoting “religious” tolerance and pluralism, the law

correctly appears to prohibit the selection and establishment of a single Protestant Christian denomination (Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, etc.) as the official Christian “sect” of the US to avoid disadvantaging or disenfranchising other Protestant sects. The radical idea the founders legally enshrined the rights of Muslims, Jews, and other non-Christians to practice their faiths freely in the US defies logic and reason (the twin fetishes of Western rationality). Moreover, Christianity’s virulent intolerance of other beliefs and its Great Commission to convert the world’s populations render such ideas completely illogical, untenable, and inapplicable. Evidence shows many Christians readily believe the US is a Christian nation dominated by Protestant Christianity, or should do so, while extreme Christian nationalists publicly advocate and lobby for direct Protestant Christian rule of the nation as defined by the growing US Dominionist political movement (Hedges, 2008; Whitehead & Perry, 2020).

However, most US residents tend to focus on how this process impacts national-level politics and associated debates in that arena. This distraction enables the dirty work of Christian dominionism to advance incrementally each day in individual states. Writing in support of the idea of “Christian Federalism” and the Christian foundation of the US Constitution and Bill of Rights, Archie P. Jones argues state constitutions (which antedated the federal constitution) directly inform and impact federal policies and laws pertaining to “religion.” Jones notes the work done at the local level either receives support or frequently is ignored by the federal courts thereby giving states a pass to restrict abortions, undermine recently won LGBTQ rights, et cetera. He also confirms this study’s argument about the absurdity of the idea the Founding Fathers held distinctly secular values and beliefs that

required the nation's establishment as a secular democracy. Those men came from the same states that routinely enacted laws in favor of Christian beliefs and values:

Now, the peoples of the several states were not of an indeterminate religious, cultural, and ethical background, profession, or belief. They were not—by any stretch of the imagination—either religiously, culturally, and ethically “neutral” or secularist. Nor were they to any significant—much less dominant—degree rationalistic, deistic, or what would later be called Unitarian in their religious, ethical, educational, legal or political professions and values. The peoples or societies of the several states were distinctly Christian and Protestant in their religious profession, culture (or subcultures), ethical and moral values, education, laws, and politics (1994, p. 2).

After weighing arguments from both sides of the issue (so-called conservative and liberal viewpoints), this study contends “religious freedom” in the US generally refers to the “freedom” of Protestant Christians to practice their faith without government interference or competition from other faith traditions—a position that challenges everything taught about this nation since its founding (Berman, 1974; Jones, 1994; McNicholas, 1963).

The full-throated, unequivocal declaration of the nation's founding as a secular republic (purportedly the first nation in the world to claim that distinction) thus perpetuates a massive political fraud. The pervasiveness, persuasiveness, and persistence of this modern fable underscores the need and value of decoloniality. Until scholars learn to unread the hyperbolic and eurocentric framing of US history (where are Amerindian and African beliefs in the mix?), academia will remain incapable of accessing and examining the historical reality that exists outside and beyond this jingoistic framework. A decolonial approach enables researchers to recognize the key ideological role of Protestant Christianity in the establishment of the US, and the inconvenient fact no other “faiths” throughout the nation's history have ever been viewed as its equal including its fellow monotheistic faiths, Judaism and Islam, or the Catholic Church from which Protestants

dissented and violently exited in the sixteenth century. A decolonial analysis explains, for example, how the US Supreme Court under the guise of immigration law can uphold a ban on Muslims entering the country as constitutional (Arafa, 2018; Panduranga et al., 2017). It also explains efforts by various states to enact laws aimed at restricting practices associated with Mormonism, Santeria, and other beliefs (Berman, 1974; Jones, 1994; McNicholas, 1963). What often gets lost in analyses of the establishment clause of the US Constitution and its provisions requiring the separation of church and state, or the free exercise clause in Article 6 cited above—is neither establishes in any sense whatsoever the *equality* of “religions” under the law.

Fairness in such matters seems a secondary consideration, if any, which indicates the Christian majority retains the political power to deny other faiths the rights to build temples, masjids, schools, cemeteries, or perform other characteristic actions Protestant Christians find objectionable (Hedges, 2008). It also explains why laws based on Christian morality and values that legitimized the theft of Amerindian lands, sanctioned the permanent and hereditary enslavement of Africans, restricted certain heterosexual behaviors, banned homosexuality outright, and proscribed and criminalized abortion, prostitution, and drug and alcohol consumption became key components of the US legal code. Their very existence indicates: “The very essence of our criminal system and the bulk of the acts which we criminalize emerge from the Judeo-Christian tradition, in fact, crimes have often been defined as being offensive to Christianity” (Spiegel, 1983, p. 495). Accordingly, from this perspective, the crime of being “Black” in the US should be placed at the very top of the list given the Christian conflation of blackness with sin as a “spiritual” (ontological) crime.

Dominionism, which pseudo-secularism in the US obscures, currently appears in two basic forms categorized as soft and hard (Hedges, 2008). Most US Christians embrace the softer version represented by the notion “America is a Christian nation” and its laws and governance should follow Christian principles and practices. Those who preach the hard version interpret the bible literally, believe its violent apocalyptic message, and insist Christians have a god-given duty to take control of all areas of secular life because the nation is under the control of demonic forces. Governing the US or any nation according to a literal interpretation of the bible is a real distinction with a difference between soft and hard Dominionists. The hard version if enacted (and many states currently appear to be moving in that direction) undoubtedly will unleash and impose a terrorist regime on the public:

A literal reading of the Bible means reinstatement of slavery coupled with the understanding that the slavemaster has the right to beat his slave without mercy since “the slave is his money” (Exodus 21:21). Children who strike or curse a parent are to be executed (Exodus 21:15, 17). Those who pay homage to another god “shall be utterly destroyed” (Exodus 22:20). Menstruating women are to be considered unclean, and all they touch while menstruating becomes unclean (Leviticus 15:19–32). The blind, the lame, those with mutilated faces, those who are hunchbacks or dwarfs and those with itching diseases or scabs or crushed testicles cannot become priests (Leviticus 21:17–21). Blasphemers shall be executed (Leviticus 24:16). And “if the spirit of jealousy” comes upon a man, the high priest can order the jealous man’s wife to drink the “water of bitterness.” If she dies, it is proof of her guilt; if she survives, of her innocence (Numbers 5:11–31) (Hedges, 2008, p. 17).

Initially operating somewhat under the radar, the hard dominionist, Taliban-like variety of Christian fundamentalism, has emerged in recent decades as a well-funded movement that forcefully flexes its muscles of intolerance in the US and internationally. Journalist and minister Chris Hedges, an astute observer of the movement, notes its immense and growing power:

This movement, small in number but influential, departs from traditional evangelicalism. Dominionists now control at least six national television networks, each reaching tens of millions of homes, and virtually all of the nation's more than 2,000 religious radio stations, as well as denominations such as the Southern Baptist Convention. Dominionism seeks to redefine traditional democratic and Christian terms and concepts to fit an ideology that calls on the radical church to take political power. It shares many prominent features with classical fascist movements (Hedges, 2008, p. 24)

Events in the US do not take place in isolation and serve too as launching pad for the movement's agenda worldwide. Moreover, given Christianity's inherent antiblack and white supremacist beliefs, their operations across the globe, particularly in Africa, illustrate the culturally destructive and hegemonic nature of their mission of Christianization.

Few other places in the world today where Christian dominionism/imperialism is more active than in Africa. The dawning of the twenty-first century witnessed US-based Christian groups and organizations launch a series of initiatives designed to impose or reinvigorate Western Christian values in targeted African states. These groups began expanding their dominionist reach abroad during the first term of President George W. Bush (Jones, 2020; Whitehead & Perry, 2020).

Under the guise of HIV prevention, the Bush Administration funded Christian sexual abstinence and anti-abortion campaigns across the continent to the tune of billions of dollars. The implementation of this program occurred because "neoconservative evangelicals in the U.S. made concerted efforts to build ties with African leaders in order to influence local cultural attitudes as well as legislation in Africa as a way of propping up the values of the religious right in the U.S." (Cheney, 2012, p. 84). With growing international recognition of gay rights, groups of extremists operating as Family Watch International, Exodus International (now defunct), the Family Research Council, and the American Center for Law and Justice (an arm of the Christian Broadcasting Network),

mobilized and organized to conduct a highly coordinated lobbying campaign aimed at governments in Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and other African countries. Their aim: to persuade politicians to enact a series of laws to ban same-sex marriage and punish so-called homosexual acts with prison sentences and even death. The groups poured money into the campaign to achieve their anti-LGBTQ objectives including creating and funding local African satellite organizations and groups to lobby for and legislate their dangerous agenda:

In 2010, for example, when Zimbabwe began the process of drafting a new constitution, the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), a Christian law firm founded by evangelist Pat Robertson, launched a Zimbabwean counterpart called the African Centre for Law and Justice. The outpost trained lawyers for the express purpose of putting a Christian stamp on the draft of the new constitution. The African Centre joined forces with the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), an indigenous organization, to promote constitutional language affirming that Zimbabwe is a Christian nation and ensuring that homosexuality remained illegal (Baptiste, 2014, p. 3).

The US Constitution explicitly avoids affirming the US as a Christian nation; nevertheless, the lawyers representing the American Center for Law and Justice had no qualms about pushing a Christian dominionist agenda on other sovereign states. The Zimbabwe Constitution ratified in 2013 continues to recognize and mandate freedom of religion but imposes a ban on same-sex marriage. Ironically, African politicians and faith leaders who backed the creation of onerous anti-gay laws defined and depicted homosexuality as foreign to Africa, but not the Western Christianity used to attack it (Cheney, 2012). The demonstrably absurd claim homosexuality is “un-African” also served the perverse political purposes of failed leaders like Robert Mugabe, Jonathan Goodluck, and Yoweri Museveni to distract their citizens from the real issues of corruption, poverty, and economic inequality in their nations.

This international outreach and campaign of US Christian propagandists is massive. The US-based Christian Broadcasting Network delivers its dominionist programming to 200 countries through cable and satellite. It constitutes the most powerful communication tool and propaganda factory of US Dominionists. “A survey conducted in 2010 found 74 million people in Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country, had watched at least one CBN show in the previous year. Its reach is astonishing considering Nigeria is home to about 80 million Christians” (Baptiste, 2014, pp. 4-5). In yet another irony, the only real resistance to this onslaught comes not from traditional African beliefs systems that have barely managed to survive, but from another genocidally intolerant monotheism, Islam, which also competes relentlessly and violently for African souls.

Barack Obama took office in 2008 and tried to counter the anti-gay agenda of the Christian dominionist movement by announcing “the United States would officially promote LGBTQ rights abroad as part of its development framework” (Baptiste, 2014, p. 5). His campaign promptly drew a backlash from the anti-gay Christian establishment. The Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute (which like so many other neoconservative right wing groups bears a name opposite its true agenda) immediately denounced Obama’s directive for supposedly putting “U.S. foreign policy on a collision course with religious freedom” (Baptiste, 2014, p. 5). The Institute’s response indicates it views government recognition of the equal rights of LGBTQ citizens as an assault on the “religious” freedom of right wing Christian extremists and their god-given right to define marriage, family, and “religious” liberty for the entire nation according to their values and beliefs. In 2011, Family Watch International (FWI), which claims to have members in 170 countries, held a two-day conference in Phoenix, Arizona to train UN staffers from 23 different countries

in tactics to resist pro-LGBTQ rights initiatives by the United Nations (Baptiste, 2014). This event constitutes their efforts to recruit and equip a cadre of Christian soldiers to join the endless battle over global control.

As noted, like their Western European forebears in the eleventh century, US Dominionists wage warfare on two fronts simultaneously: internally and abroad. They do so for the same reasons as their forebears: fear and abhorrence at the presence of Pagans, Jews, and Muslims living within their borders. As seen in Europe's past, Christian animus to non-Christians triggers the violent compulsion to convert or remove them. In addition to this deep-seated "religious" antipathy, the presence of marginalized and racialized "Others" (the current versions of "heathens" and "savages" of various hues) are deemed intruders who threaten the purity of the imagined New World Christendom. Recent studies also show the two election campaigns of Donald Trump threw gasoline on the fire of "White" Christian hatred thereby energizing Dominionists, and propelling their Christianizing agenda to the forefront of US government policy:

[...] voting for Trump was, at least for many Americans, a symbolic defense of the United States' perceived Christian heritage. Data from a national probability sample of Americans surveyed soon after the 2016 election shows that greater adherence to Christian nationalist ideology was a robust predictor of voting for Trump, even after controlling for economic dissatisfaction, sexism, anti-black prejudice, anti-Muslim refugee attitudes, and anti-immigrant sentiment, as well as measures of religion, sociodemographics, and political identity more generally. These findings indicate that Christian nationalist ideology—although correlated with a variety of class-based, sexist, racist, and ethnocentric views—is not synonymous with, reducible to, or strictly epiphenomenal of such views. Rather, Christian nationalism operates as a unique and independent ideology that can influence political actions by calling forth a defense of mythological narratives about America's distinctively Christian heritage and future (Whitehead et al., 2018, p. 147).

This study views those "mythological narratives" as comprising the blunt weapons of "White" Christian nationalism because they are grounded in the whiteness/antiblackness

ideology devised by its founding theologians via a series of extended metaphors. However, few in the US possess an awareness of what “White” Christian extremists are doing to engineer an overt takeover of a nation they already dominate. In 2015 this political movement launched Project Blitz, an initiative designed to organize state-level “prayer caucuses” to bring legislators together with Christian lobbyists to engineer and enact their pre-packaged dominionist legislative agenda. The independent watchdog “Religion Dispatches” identifies the powerful American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), which serves as the lobbying arm and legislation factory for many of the powerful US corporations, as the inspiration and model for Project Blitz. It also indicates the group drew some of its founders and leaders from the Congressional Prayer Caucus, a non-profit organization of Senators and Congresspersons founded in Washington, D.C. in 2005 for the explicit purpose of advancing “faith and freedom:”

There are currently 29 such groups, modeled on the Congressional Prayer Caucus (which comprises about a hundred sitting U.S. Senators and Representatives.) They range from very small in terms of publicly named members, to remarkably large; Iowa boasts 65 members, plus the Governor and Lt. Governor (Clarkson, 2018).

The pre-packaged legislation they lobby for adoption state-by-state aims to promote Christianity in public schools, legalize discrimination against LGBTQ persons, and overturn legal abortion, all of which is outlined in a 116-page lobbying playbook. Their efforts also aim at changing the composition of US courts, including the Supreme Court, by packing them with Christian extremists who will uphold the constitutionality of their dominionist laws (Clarkson, 2018).

These theo-political practices of weaponized monotheism recounted from recent events in the US demonstrate how “White” nationalist Christian sects comprise a loosely affiliated terrorist movement intent on Christianizing the nation by any means possible

including violence. The pre-eminent Christian terrorist organization in the US is the Klu Klux Klan (KKK). It achieved a massive following in the early twentieth century that included many elected government officials, clergy, and police. Its record of ritualistic Christian human sacrifice of “Black” men by lynching, burning, and castrating thousands of them spans a century (Patterson, 1998). In addition to the usual roster of Jews, “Mexicans,” and African Americans, other recent victims of the KKK and related militant Christian groups include abortion providers, Muslims, and LBGQT persons. Collectively, Christian terrorists also bear direct responsibility for the murders of gay persons in Africa and elsewhere on the globe as a result of their successful lobbying efforts in seeding and fomenting hate overseas (Baptiste, 2014).

When constructively illuminated by the history of Christian dominionism current events in the US and worldwide become predictable and understandable. The structural-historical analysis performed here shows how one-god-ism weaponizes belief through its construction of true/false, believer/non-believer, white/black dichotomies that define and dictate the conditions of social inclusion and exclusion in racially stratified societies. European expansion into the Americas in the sixteenth century brought those Old World beliefs embodied in Catholicism and Protestantism into the new lands they conquered and occupied and used them to justify slavery and socio-economic oppression. The European “scramble” for the New World thus provided a dress rehearsal for the “scramble” for Africa, the colonization of Asia, and the imposition of European languages and epistemic hegemony worldwide. Moreover, the idea independence movements ended colonialism during the twentieth century deliberately ignores the reality in most so-called former colonies of continuous exploitation and dependence on the West. The African continent,

the last place colonized by Europeans and purportedly the last place where it concluded, remains the socioeconomic and sectarian victim of Western Christian dominionism. This argument for colonialism as an ongoing process rather than a singular event also applies to the United States with its rigidly segregated Indian reservations, barrios, and hoods, and where evidence of the internal colonization of non-whites is seen in disparities in health, healthcare, wealth, education, and social justice.

Conclusion

Colonialism and Christian Dominionism arrived in the New World together not as works in progress, but as a fully integrated operational system. Colonialism therefore did not function solely as a tool of political economy or operate entirely within those parameters. It is a totalizing system that impacts every aspect of human existence (health, education, politics) and requires analysis and documentation as such. As shown here, its “modern” western ideological framework possesses deep roots that commence with the Christianization of the Roman empire. Within this theological seedbed the idea of Christendom took root and blossomed into the “we are the world” mentality that defines the West and its eurocentric ideology. Christendom embodied the notion of a unified, collective Western European identity and power capable of confronting the non-Christian world inside and outside Europe. While “Christendom” denotes and describes the powerful military alliances of Christian princes consolidating their power and that of the Church after the collapse of the Western Roman empire, its conception contributed to the eurocentric proclivity to envision Europe as the singular geographic site and source of the one true faith. That centering of Europe also led to the imagining of its Christian

populations, regardless of nationality, as superior to the rest of humankind. This set of ideas collectively created “European” thinkers and thus provided the impetus for the development of European-centered thought. The geographic location of Christendom coincides precisely with the cognitive seedbed of eurocentrism as follows:

“Spatially, Eurocentrism refers to the Atlantic imperial monarchies, the nation-states (Spain, Portugal, France, Holland, and England), and the supporting cast (Germany and Italy) whose imperial domains were lesser than the former, although they were not out of the game” (Mignolo, 2013, p. 110).

Even with the geographic center of European-centered thought properly identified and situated within the Western imperialist nation-states, the fact remains: “Eurocentrism is not a question of geography but of *epistemology*” [italics added] (Mignolo, 1995, p. 19). Eurocentrism is epistemological rather than geographical in that it serves the specific discursive purposes of imposing and reifying the cultural, “religious,” and intellectual history of the West worldwide. It accomplishes its objectives in part by rationalizing and normalizing imperialist-dominionist practices—practices that include the debasement, suppression, and erasure of the knowledges and knowledge-making of non-Europeans:

Eurocentrism makes the hierarchical structures inherited from colonialism seem natural and inevitable. Although colonialist discourse and Eurocentric discourse are intimately intertwined, the terms have a distinct emphasis. While the former explicitly justifies colonialist practices, the latter embeds, takes for granted, and “normalizes” the hierarchical power relations generated by colonialism and imperialism, without necessarily even thematizing those issues directly. Although generated by the colonizing process, Eurocentrism's links to that process are obscured in a kind of buried epistemology (Shohat & Stam, 2009, p. 138).

Chapter Eight of this study aims to surface the “buried epistemology” that informs eurocentrism and to identify it therefore as a critical product and component of what it labels the Christian Intellectual Tradition (CIT) and hence integral to the *Colonizing Discourses of Christian Dominionism* as defined above. The enforced Westernization

(Christianization) of colonized societies to exploit non-Europeans as both commodities and consumers in the globalized capitalist system established a substratum and superstructure of European-centered thought worldwide. Moreover, eurocentrism retains its core operational principles and characteristics regardless of whether it is expressed in Europe or its settler colonies (Canada, Australia, USA) or in its former colonies in the Global South.

Chapter Eight investigates eurocentrism and its hegemonic epistemology and locates its roots in the Christian Intellectual Tradition (CIT). It views and treats notions of “modernity,” Western education, Western science, and the concepts of “religion” and “world religions” as based on Western Christian methods and systems of knowledge-making and education that began during the era of global exploration and colonization. It also defines and explicates this tradition with particular attention to the CIT’s practices of ignorance-making as part of its hegemonic functions and operations. It argues that through the socio-cognitive mechanisms of eurocentric epistemology, the CIT coheres, convenes, and disseminates the beliefs and values of Christian dominionism worldwide in the current guise of secularized Western thought and education.

CHAPTER EIGHT

REDEFINING THE WESTERN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

As a long Aristotelian tradition has argued, the epistemic character of a subject results from the processes of socialization and training the subject has received. Epistemic sensibilities are formed through processes of acculturation and habituation. These sensibilities are typically tacit, implicit, and unconscious (Medina, 2013, p. 681)

Epistemology is embedded in languages and in particular genealogies. To make a long story short, a 'history of epistemology' would most likely start with the Greek words 'episteme', 'doxa' and 'gnosis' and run through modern vernacular language and variety of expression in order to describe 'epistemology' as a theory of knowledge, reflection on knowledge, or (a yet more restricted definition) reflection on scientific knowledge (Mignolo, 1999)

Introduction

Previous chapters examine how in the conduct of their mission to convert and dominate the world's populations European Christians colonized *space* (the globe), and *time* (history). This chapter focuses on exposing Western Christianity's agenda of colonizing the *mind* (knowing/knowledge) as key to its efforts to impose its version of "one-true-godism" on all humankind based on its hyperbolic claim it offers the only real pathway for "salvation." It does so to illustrate how the early Christian antiblack ideology that emerged in the first centuries of the Common Era continued uninterrupted in Europe into the early modern era where it informs "modern" thought as represented in the epistemic frameworks of rationalism, empiricism, and western science. It thus identifies Christian scholars operating out of the Christian Intellectual Tradition (CIT) as supplying the context and content for the development of so-called "modern" thought and its scientized form of whiteness/antiblackness ideology. In other words, it evidences how the apparatus of

“modern” western epistemology does not represent a break from Christianity’s theological ideology, as often is claimed in western academia, but merely continues it in a revised epistemic schema represented as “modern” and hence radically “new” or even revolutionary.

Christian scholars recognized early in their cult’s history the need to construct a unique intellectual tradition to oppose and combat Paganism. Early Christian recognition of this tradition and its rapid growth is evidenced by Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History*, written in Greek and Latin and published circa 324 CE, and Jerome’s *De viris illustribus*, completed in 392-393 CE. Each text, as previously noted, provides an “intellectual inventory of early Christianity” that delineates and celebrates the cult’s literary culture (SanPietro, 2017, p. 231). Additionally, both writers elucidate its purpose and identify its founders and key scholars. After the establishment and imposition of Christian orthodoxy in the fourth century, the CIT coalesced and cohered, and Christian scholars commenced proselytizing the “official” core tenets of the faith. Their monopolization and domination of all forms of education in Western Europe put the empire’s future in their hands. To illustrate and evidence this process this chapter investigates and analyzes three critical issues: (1) the western conception and construction of knowledge (epistemology); (2) the “construction of “ignorance”—a key epistemic feature in the development of scientific racism and eurocentrism; and (3) how the Christian Intellectual Tradition (CIT), the primary venue for western education up to and including the early modern era, weaponized and deployed the concept of “modernity” and “modern” thought to Christianize the world under the guise of westernization.

Previous chapters identify and delineate the precise cognitive mechanisms whereby whiteness/antiblackness ideology becomes a core component of the CIT. The structural analysis of western epistemology performed here exposes how the *Colonializing Discourses of Christian Dominionism* derived from the CIT supplied the ideational framework for the construction of the standard western imperialist discourses of the early modern era. This Christian dominionist propaganda justified the enslavement and oppression of non-European “Others” in the guise of westernization to misrepresent it as a “modernizing” mission and economic campaign. Its core message falsely promotes the idea the West brought itself out of the “dark ages” of superstition into a new era illuminated by the light of science which it alone invented by means of its unique empiricist and rationalist methods of knowledge production (Ascione, 2014; Bagchi, 1996; Dussel, 2000; Gillespie, 2008; Keel, 2018).

Again, by structurally analyzing the “modern” western intellectual tradition from a decolonialist perspective this study reveals the ideological and structural origins of “modern” western thought and thinking within what it identifies as the Christian Intellectual Tradition (CIT). It thus aims to show the continuity of early Christian antiblack ideology in “modern” thought within the newly devised epistemic frameworks of rationalism, empiricism, and western sciences. This form of analysis should be commonplace in academia given the well documented history of Christian education in the West. As noted, after the banishment of Paganism Christian the Church provided the only “legitimate” education available in Western Europe from late antiquity to the “modern” era (Cameron, 1994; Johnson, 2012; Nixey, 2017; Rohmann, 2016). Hence the CIT comprised the only scholarly tradition and knowledge base in Europe from which “modern” western

thought could be conceived and constructed. This means the inventor of western sciences were in fact “Christian scientists” who did not discard their faith when they used rationalist and empiricist research methods (Gillespie, 2008; Harrison, 2015; Josephson-Storm, 2017; Keel, 2018).

Documenting the contributions of Western Christian intellectuals and scholarship to the invention of the “modern” world advances this study’s decolonialist objectives because: “‘*Modernity*’ [is] *Europe’s claim to hegemony*, the terrain in which she naturalised her claims of superiority over the rest of the world” [italics added] (Bagchi, 1996, p. 1). Hence as the singular product of eurocentric ideology modernity legitimizes and supports Western European assertions of bio-cultural superiority. This quintessentially “modern” idea represents the ideational progression and outcome of Western Christianity’s believer/non-believer asymmetrical binary and its spiritual pretense of being the only “true faith.” Western thought therefore aims to monopolize and propagandize “modernity” as exclusively “European” to advance Christian dominionism and its agenda in the guise of modernization:

So, Europe had to define herself against possible contamination by 'the other' in order to emerge as the dominant culture. This process is similar to the one that I have designated in another context as the 'self-ethnocisation' process that marks the assumption of power by the hegemonic group. A special claim to civilisation leading to a monopoly of understanding of all possible explanations-both social and physical-marks the claim of Europe to a civilisation rule vis-à-vis the rest of the world. One of the major symptoms of this emergence of Europe as a space for cultural as well as economic domination was the phenomenon of 'modernity'. In many ways it was the moment of Europe's self-realization as the regulatory social order that achieved a kind of fruition. *This was the telos in which Europe acquired her normative claim over the rest of the world* [italics added] (Bagchi, 1996, p. 2).

The fact modernity and “modern” western colonialism appear on the world stage simultaneously is no accident of history. Hence the focus here on the West’s claims of

“scientific” knowledge-making to show how Christian intellectuals updated and re-packaged Christian antiblackness as “modern,” scientific secular thought in their quest to colonize and dominate the world. Previous chapters addressed the formation of a Latin Christian (European) social identity with Christendom as the seedbed and launching ground for New World colonialism. The discussion below examines the basic epistemic tools and practices used by western thinkers to expand the boundaries of Christendom to create and impose a new international social reality based on the bible. It ends with an analytical discussion of the West’s proclivity for ignorance-making to support its “modern” mythology of white bio-cultural superiority.

EPISTEMOLOGY

The conventional epistemology of blackness argues that “blacks” are fundamentally, inherently, biologically both infantile and bestial. They are to be cared for and subjected to tutelage, or simply controlled. The source of control has been racism, the ideological component of a system of knowledge constructed on race; it is the system’s defense mechanism. It is also used to expand the powers of this system of knowledge (Keita, 2000)

Epistemology, simply defined, denotes the processes of conceptualizing knowledge and determining “under what conditions it is possible to have it” (Eflin, 2003, p. 48). Despite the concept’s lengthy historical development, the term did not enter the philosophy lexicon until the mid-nineteenth century when the Scottish philosopher James Ferrier constructed it from the Greek by combining *epistēmē* (“science, knowledge”) with *-logía* (“discourse”) thus making epistemology a *discourse of knowledge or science* (Ferrier, 1856). In common usage epistemology denotes a theory designed to answer a fundamental question and problem of human existence: *what is knowledge and how do we know what we know?*

Theories and practices conceived in the West to address these critical questions rely in part on three key concepts—*truth*, *belief*, *knowledge*—the definitions and meanings of which too often are taken for granted in academic and popular discourses. The sociologist Charles Kurzman offers the following succinct explanation of these critical terms:

Truth refers to “that which is out there,” reality, which exists independently of any people. *True* describes an aspect of that reality. To add the word “absolute(ly)” to either term would be redundant. *Belief* is a statement of attitude to which people commit themselves. *To believe* is to commit oneself to a belief. *Knowledge* is a special kind of belief that people believe is true. *To know* is to commit oneself to a belief and to commit oneself to the separate belief that the first belief describes an aspect of reality. Thus there are two aspects to knowledge; I will call them the commitment-factor and the truth-factor [author’s italics] (1994, p. 268).

The following discussions elucidate the cognitive processes Kurzman outlines above to illustrate how abstract notions of whiteness/antiblackness became socially known and real in Western societies as every day common sense or as specialized and technical forms of scholarly and scientific knowledge. In addition to delineating the basic components and mechanisms of epistemology, Kurzman also insists that knowledge-making requires more than the basic psychological perception and classification of a belief or idea; it requires a commitment to said belief. But what does *commitment* involve? What exactly are believers expected to do to convert beliefs into truths?

The philosophy professor Robert Audi notes: “knowledge would not be possible without *belief justification* (or something very much like it)” [emphasis added] (2003). Commitment therefore requires a form of justification. Knowledge-making in the West requires ideas and concepts to be socially justified to become socially accepted truth and reality. This means their recognition, acceptance, and routinization as *facts* depends on commonly shared social practices and experiences. Facts and truth, as discussed below, also require the endorsements and enactments of powerful social actors (clergy, scientists,

physicians, educators, politicians, artists). Hence there is a performative aspect of knowledge-making, a material praxis, a phenomenological enactment, a process of socialization, normalization, and physical embodiment. This process enables and facilitates the social construction—I am “White” you are not—by which elite social actors used their privilege and power to establish the rules that govern society as purportedly based on objective representations of fact, truth, knowledge. White supremacy and antiblackness thus represent in the West the social enactment of the social commitment to a “belief” in the “truth” of African inferiority (Keita, 2000). Said belief, it is argued here, was posited, instantiated, and embodied in a Western Christian theo-political dogma and doctrine founded in part on an *imaginary* and *metaphorical* blackness at the beginning of the cult’s history.

Epistemology thus theoretically explains how humans as social actors perceive and distinguish purported facts from opinions to establish a basis and authority for social knowledge (truth) and the dissemination and socialization of that knowledge in the form of commonly shared beliefs, values, and behaviors (Audi, 2003). The justified beliefs and societal behaviors and interactions resulting from these processes provide the cognitive frameworks (embodied discourses and discursive practices) that form and inform the panoply of rules, regulations, and boundaries that ultimately define and determine a society’s cultural identity, polity, and ethos (van Dijk, 2014). These epistemic mechanisms thus explain how concepts of race, gender, class, and other social taxonomies and configurations are structured and made to appear normative and natural. This process depends almost entirely on social actors policing and maintaining the stability, authority,

integrity, power, and control of what ultimately becomes socialized and accepted as shared knowledge and values (van Dijk, 1993).

Although epistemology furnishes a useful theoretical framework within which to comprehend the fundamental and critical problems of establishing what is knowledge, what is known, and how people know it, given the socially constructed reality in which all humans reside, is it not logical to ask: do people ever really *know a thing* or only *think* they do? Recently, cognitive scientists have questioned, from an evolutionary perspective, whether human sense perceptions truly convey an objective reality: “We have finite capacities of perception and memory. But we are embedded in an infinite network of conscious agents whose complexities exceed our finite capacities” (Hoffman, 2019, p. 187). Accordingly, some scholars argue human sense perceptions construct and transmit a virtual reality to human brains, They base this theory on the fact space, time, and objects—the reality of which are taken for granted—ultimately consist of illusions that lack independent existence. Hence they represent and convey the outcomes of cognitive processes that reconstructed them from sensory data to match what people *think* they are perceiving with a close approximation (Hoffman, 2019). Indeed, a compensatory cognitive process of some sort works to reduce the complexity of the human mental/sensorial interface and perception of the world and thus make existence and survival manageable. The idea of blackness as socially constructed in the West exemplifies this compensatory process in that it homogeneously *blackens* African people—who appear to human senses as representing all variations of human skin color—and reduces this complexity to a simple equation: African = Black.

From the perspective of the new research in cognition the fact self-identified “White” people view Africans as “Black” people (regardless of their outward physical appearance or mode of self-identification) underscores the need for new methods to study the cognitive processes used to construct a social reality based on antiblackness or what the philosopher Lewis Gordon refers to as an “antiblack world” (1999). A detailed discussion of these new scientific findings is beyond the scope of this study. Instead, the recognition and acknowledgement of this cognitive conundrum returns us to the main questions that concerns this study: *How do people know who is Black? How do people know who is White? How do Whites know they are superior to Blacks?* The history of “modern” Western philosophy indicates Europeans used two distinct epistemic methods to arrive at the same set of antiblack findings (knowledge) and discourses: *rationalism* and *empiricism*.

Western scholars track the origins of western epistemology to Plato and Aristotle in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE and identify them as the authors of the two competing theories of knowledge in the West: *rationalism* and *empiricism*. Some however argue this division is artificial and anachronistic when applied to the two ancient *philosophes* and their theories (Balla, 2007). Nevertheless, their long trajectory of development and competition are of singular importance in understanding the emergence of the discipline of “modern” Western philosophy and how antiblackness became a central feature of western thought. According to the philosophy professor Jesse Prinz:

The history of Western philosophy can be viewed as a debate between rationalists and empiricists. Rationalists emphasize innate concepts, the power of a priori reasoning, and the unreliability of perception. Empiricists regard perception as the source of our concepts and the primary means of attaining knowledge. Since Plato and Aristotle, the pendulum has been swinging back and forth between these positions. The high point in this debate occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries, when continental rationalists, such as Descartes and Leibniz, revamped rationalism, and British empiricists, such as Locke and Hume, worked out the empiricist alternative (2005, p. 680).

The discussion of the premises and practices of rationalism and empiricism that follows delineates their key roles in the modernization and dissemination of antiblack discourses and discursive practices in the West. It also investigates antiblackness in the context of a eurocentric epistemology that systematically suppresses, supplants, and destroys the knowledges and knowledge-making practices of non-Europeans worldwide.

Rationalism

Metaphysics — the white mythology which resembles and reflects the culture of the West: the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own logos, that is the mythos of his idiom, for the universal form of that he must still wish to call Reason (Derrida & Moore, 1974)

Reason-rationalism are related terms often used interchangeably to denote both the purportedly unique ability of humans to establish and verify facts, knowledge, truth, and the cognitive means used to achieve those objectives. The concept of Rationalism—which Euro-American scholars trace to Plato—contends: “knowledge is a result of a reasoning process and that our sensory experience plays no role. ... [it] can be obtained only from rational reasoning grounded in axioms, like in mathematics, and it should be distinguished from opinion which is a product of our senses” (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018, p. 2). Rationalism thus asserts *Reason* as the arbiter of all knowledge and that humans arrive at knowing through abstraction and deduction, meaning without depending upon direct sensory or environmental input. Many scholars credit the seventeenth-century French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) with establishing both the “modern” concept of

rationalism and with it the “modern” discipline of western philosophy (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018; Newman, 2019).

With its re-introduction by Descartes in the seventeenth century, reason-rationalism became something of a fetish in Christian intellectual circles as key scholars embraced, reified, and thus treated it as the only legitimate intellectual (scientific) method to determine and produce knowledge (Josephson-Storm, 2017; Porter, 2001). This scholarly embrace, however, went to European heads in more ways than one. “Previously to Descartes,” the sociologist Ramon Grosfoguel argues, “no tradition of thought claimed to produce an unsituated knowledge that is God-like or equivalent to God” (2015, p. 27). Descartes’ work thus gave birth to the notion in Europe that European epistemology was vastly superior to that of other world cultures and even that of the ancient Greeks. Subsequently, in addition to their claim Christianity constituted the only “true” religion and avenue to human salvation, following Descartes, Christian intellectuals made the equally powerful yet specious claim rationalism furnished the basis for a “universal” epistemology which constituted the only legitimate means to establish “scientific” knowledge and truth (Castro-Gomez, 2005; Grosfoguel, 2007, 2013). The coupling of the concept of Christianity’s universality with that of a purportedly infallible western epistemology created a toxic and deadly mixture of philosophy and theology the dissemination of which promoted and justified notions of European intellectual, cultural, and spiritual superiority worldwide.

Descartes’s epistemology famously came to be known as Cartesian dualism in his honor. Even though in retrospect some scholars have come to view his theory of *mind-body* as closer to Aristotle’s than Plato’s, the fact remains Cartesian dualism in its earliest

iterations relies heavily on Descartes's conception of "Man" as possessing a mechanical body operated by an ethereal mind he analogized as functioning in a kind of Ghost-in-Machine relationship (Alanen, 1989). His notion the rational mind exists as an autonomous, disembodied, and self-conscious "thing" that functions independently of its physical/material existence met resistance from some of his contemporaries but nonetheless became immensely influential in western thought. His famous description of himself as a "thinking thing" (*res cogitans*), coupled with his world-renowned maxim "*cogito ergo sum*" (I think therefore I am), encapsulated those beliefs as detailed in his *Discourse on Method* (1637) and *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641). In these foundational works and others, Descartes placed "Western Man" in a god-like relationship to *knowing*, a reified arrangement that appeared commensurate with the new role of Europeans as world conquerors and colonizers. His theorizing ultimately led to a monumental shift in the Western conception of "Man" which the sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel describes as follows:

He replaces God, as the foundation of knowledge in the Theo-politics of knowledge of the European Middle Ages, with (Western) Man as the foundation of knowledge in European Modern times. All the attributes of God are now extrapolated to (Western) Man. Universal Truth beyond time and space, privilege access to the laws of the Universe, and the capacity to produce scientific knowledge and theory is now placed in the mind of Western Man. The Cartesian 'ego-cogito' ('I think, therefore I am') is the foundation of modern Western sciences. By producing a dualism between mind and body and between mind and nature, Descartes was able to claim non-situated, universal, God-eyed view knowledge (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 214).

Grosfoguel's structural analysis identifies and diagnoses the characteristics of what can be labeled the European "god-complex"—the psychological belief in Western ("White") superiority that informed and determined European imperialist actions worldwide. The Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gomez labeled this notion of Western Man's

“universal, God-eyed view knowledge” the “*zero point epistemology*.” He describes Descartes contributions to this process as follows:

En la primera de sus *Meditaciones Metafísicas*, Descartes expone que la certeza en el conocimiento científico sólo es posible si el observador se deshace previamente de todas las opiniones ancladas en el sentido común. Hay que eliminar todas las fuentes posibles de incertidumbre, ya que la causa principal de los errores en la ciencia proviene de la excesiva familiaridad que tiene el observador con su medio ambiente social y cultural.² Por eso, Descartes recomienda que las “viejas y ordinarias” opiniones de la vida cotidiana deben ser suspendidas, con el fin de encontrar un punto sólido de partida desde el cual sea posible construir de nuevo todo el edificio del conocimiento. Este punto absoluto de partida, en donde el observador hace *tabula rasa* de todos los conocimientos aprendidos previamente, es lo que en este trabajo llamaremos la *hybris del punto cero*.

In the first of his *Metaphysical Meditations*, Descartes states that certainty in scientific knowledge is only possible if the observer previously gets rid of all opinions anchored in common sense. We must eliminate all possible sources of uncertainty, since the main cause of errors in science comes from the excessive familiarity that the observer has with his social and cultural environment. Therefore, Descartes recommends that the “old and ordinary” opinions of everyday life must be suspended, to find a solid starting point from which it is possible to build the entire knowledge building again. This absolute starting point, where the observer makes a *blank slate* of all previously learned knowledge, is what in this work we will call *the zero point hubris* [author’s italics] (2005, p. 1).

The word “hubris” appears as “un sinónimo de arrogancia y desmesura [“a synonym for arrogance and excessiveness”] to characterize the egotistic function and pretentious nature of the *zero point* (2005, p. 19). Rationalist theory, as per Descartes, authorizes an ethereal notion of knowledge-making that treats it as a completely abstract process that can be compartmentalized and removed from external environmental influences and the physiological stimuli of the human senses. This Cartesian conception of the *mind-body* relationship in fact rests on a belief the mind is of a completely different substance than the body. In practice, however, Descartes’s views serve not only to separate mind and body, mind and nature, body and soul, and body and nature, they also justify the bio-political separation of Western Europeans from non-Europeans (especially Africans) to legitimize

their subjugation and exploitation (Castro-Gomez, 2005; Mignolo, 1999). Accordingly, as the West moved into this rationalist mode of thought in the early colonial era, Europeans deemed rationalism a cultural characteristic that distinguished them from everyone else by providing yet one more indicium of their superiority.

Descartes's belief that scholars could rid themselves of all opinions, cultural influences, and even common sense, and conduct research from a *zero point* of pure objectivity, placed the ego (the "I am") in a hermetically sealed isolation chamber to do its work. On its face this notion spectacularly fails to account for the fact all beings are influenced by their *locus of enunciation*—a term that refers specifically to human situatedness in time, space, and culture (Mignolo, 2002, 2012). The complex nature and interactions of internal and external socio-psychological-physiological stimuli that inform and condition people's experiences according to their space/time locations thus preclude them from achieving the abstract state of pure reason and objectivity Descartes asserts as a prerequisite for knowing.

Of equal import from this study's perspective, the hubristic claim of total objectivity in the pursuit of knowledge in the West also conveniently absolves European thinkers of any moral responsibility for defining "Others" as non-human. In the case of antiblack discursive practices, eighteenth-century Christian intellectuals like Immanuel Kant, Carl Linnaeus, and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach could assert with confidence and certitude they "discovered"—through the conduct of pure and objective research, formed and informed only by "facts," and unsullied and uncompromised by any biases of the researchers—a pre-existent, natural, racial taxonomy and hierarchy that placed "Whites" on top and "Blacks" on the bottom of humanity. Hence in the process of establishing the

intellectual foundations for modern European philosophy, Descartes and other European thinkers—Bacon (1561-1626), Hobbes (1588-1679), Locke (1632-1704), Spinoza (1632-1677), Leibniz (1646-1716), etc.—also established the foundations for the philosophy of white supremacy and its discursive practices (Eze, 1997; Hannaford, 1996; Park, 2013; Ward & Lott, 2002).

Beginning in the seventeenth century, Cartesian dualism contributed to the process of *modernizing* the construction of whiteness and “White” identity in the West by replacing older explanations of skin color that relied on Christian theology and the bible with new claims that could be presented as the objective findings of western scientists and science operating out of the new disciplines of biology and anthropology (Keel, 2018). Moreover, the simple act of claiming reason-rationalism as an exclusive attribute of European and Euro-American “White” people enabled and encouraged the labeling of Amerindians and Africans as lacking or deficient in rational thought and therefore suitable only for perpetual subservience and servitude to the West:

Descartes held that each of us was two things: an angel and an animal, as it were, a pure soul and a bestial body. Colonialism and the nascent “science” of race simply externalized this dualism, so that some people (educated Europeans, primarily) were supposed to be pure minds—and hence suited to rule—while others (the people that Europeans were encountering all over the world, and on whom they were imposing their dominance) were supposed to be mere bodies. It is ironic, however, that ruling requires massive use of physical force, implying that white supremacism does anything but transcend the physical plane (Sartwell, 2019 para 5).

Descartes’s rationalism made the mind-body, white body/non-white body dualisms appear logical, reasonable, factual, and true in European minds, as did empiricism, which performed the same epistemic role in conceptualizing and normalizing the ideology and discourses of whiteness and white superiority. Despite its flaws and fallacies, however, this

Cartesian *zero point epistemology*—which furnishes “a point of view that does not assume itself as a point of view”—continues to determine both the philosophy and practice of knowledge-making in the West:

The importance of Descartes for Westernized epistemology can be seen in as far as, after 370 years, Westernized universities still hold the Cartesian legacy as a criterion of validity for science and knowledge production. Even those who are critical of Cartesian philosophy still use it as a criterion for what differentiates science from non-science. The ‘subject-object split, ‘objectivity’ understood as ‘neutrality’, the myth of an EGO that produces ‘unbiased’ knowledge unconditioned by its body or space location, the idea of knowledge as produced through an internal monologue without links to any other human beings and universality understood as beyond any particularity, are still the criteria for valid knowledge and science used in the disciplines of the Westernized university (Grosfoguel, 2015, p. 27)

With epistemology centered in the West by the West according to its own criteria and prerogatives, what chance did the knowledge-making processes and knowledges of non-western societies have of resisting the violent and relentless onslaught of Europe’s episteme? Historical evidence shows the colonized did not simply lose their lands to western conquerors; they also lost their minds (Mignolo, 1999, 2002). While it may appear a hyperbolic statement, the fact remains non-Europeans who were colonized and forced to convert to Christianity essentially damaged or lost their ability to “think” within the wisdom traditions of their own cultures. Instead of being the proud heirs, preservers, and conveyers of centuries of accumulated ancestral wisdom to future generations, the colonized Amerindians and Africans in the New World were systematically separated from their traditional beliefs and belief systems by invaders and enslavers who savagely campaigned to deracinate and replace them with the purported “universal religion,” history, knowledge, and culture of the West (Mignolo, 2021). As shown below, the leading Euro-American *philosophes* of the era provided the intellectual foundations for the West’s

imperialist agenda. Their epistemological beliefs and practices thus served to make colonialism and white supremacy appear as the historically inevitable and normative outcomes of Western logic, reason, and empiricism.

Empiricism

Empiricism, the epistemological theory Aristotle purportedly developed in opposition to Plato's rationalism, did not receive its *modern* name until the seventeenth century. *Empiricism* means *experience* in Greek in the sense of *practical experience* and is synonymous with *experiment* as a method for acquiring knowledge. It posits the idea of the mind as a *tabula rasa* (blank slate) and that the only knowledge attainable is *a posteriori* knowledge, meaning knowledge based in and derived from direct experience and observation (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018). Despite fewer of Aristotle's texts having survived over the ages compared to Plato's, his work proved equally if not more influential in the development of Western philosophy. Although his original vision of empiricism does not necessarily comport with how it came to be defined over time, his version profoundly influenced the advancement of scientific research and experimentation through its insistence on the use of evidence-based research methods to observe, test, and quantify phenomena rather than relying on methods of analysis based primarily on reason, intuition, or revelation (Brunschwig & Lloyd, 2000).

Following Aristotle, the principle argument empiricists level against rationalists is "ideas and concepts cannot be separated from physical objects and sensory information," which means "knowledge does not exist *a priori* in an innate and deterministic form," but instead is "created through our sensory interface with the real world, and it is processed

finally by our mind” (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018, pp. 3-4). This alternative and contrasting view of the mechanics of thinking informed the empiricist critiques of Cartesian dualism in Descartes’s day and in the centuries that followed. The comment below from the philosophy professor Guy Longworth delineates the main areas of contention in the rational-empirical dispute:

Three major traditional points of dispute between empiricists and rationalists centre on the following three characteristic rationalist theses: (1) knowledge of a particular subject matter is underwritten by intuition (or rational insight) and deductive reasoning, rather than by experience of that subject matter; (2) knowledge of a particular subject matter is innate (very roughly, determined by nature rather than, for example, by the particular course of experience); and (3) the concepts or ideas that constitute our abilities to think about a particular subject matter are innate. Rationalists about knowledge (etc.) about a particular subject matter characteristically endorse at least one of (1)–(3) with respect to that subject matter. Empiricists about knowledge (etc.) of a particular subject matter characteristically reject (1)–(3) with respect to that subject matter (2009, pp. 68-69).

The tendency in the West to view and treat rationalism and empiricism as discrete categories of epistemology, however, obscures the fact the two methods often connect and overlap in routine usage. In fact, a survey and analysis of historical and contemporary epistemic practices would reveal numerous examples of their hybridization. As Longworth explains:

For instance, one might hold that a particular belief is innate – and so be a psychological rationalist with respect to the belief – and also hold that in order to be justified or warranted the innate belief must be supplied with experiential support – and so be an epistemological empiricist with respect to the belief. Alternatively, one might hold that a particular belief is only acquired on the basis of experience, but that the justification or warrant for the belief derives from reason. In that case, one would be a psychological empiricist and an epistemological rationalist (2009, p. 69).

That some scholars operate simultaneously out of both traditions not only undermines the integrity of the two categories, but it also impacts the historical schemas used to classify and assign Western thinkers to one group or the other. Traditionally, this arrangement has

resulted in Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz being lumped together as pragmatic Continental Rationalists and juxtaposed against the opposing team of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume as pragmatic British Empiricists (Markie, 2017). This overly simplified categorization, however, ignores the complexity and nuances of Western epistemology and its historical development. In any case, from this study's standpoint a debate over whether the epistemology of antiblackness is based on intuition or experience matters not one whit. The difference between an antiblack rationalism and an antiblack empiricism is simply one of method and process rather than context and content. Both methodologies produce and deploy the same antiblack discourses in the West with the same tragic consequences for peoples of African descent. Indeed, to claim one approach as more scientific or dispositive than the other entirely misses the point given the fact whiteness/antiblackness originate conceptually within the Western Christian imaginary. However, rather than delving deeper into their differences, the discussion shifts here to examine the evidence of their epistemic support for antiblack ideology and the advancement Christian colonialism/dominionism. In other words, it is essential at this point to illustrate how leading European philosophers formulated the "modern" theories of individual rights and liberal democracy that owe their existence in part to the conceptualization of *blackness* and "Black" identity as the antithesis of freedom.

Accordingly, this study finds settler-colonialism and slavery determined the nature of freedom in colonial Virginia and the formation United States far more than the lofty and hypocritical rhetoric of Western Christian intellectuals championing human rights and the dignity of man in their bloody scramble to dominate the globe. Edmund Morgan (1975) identified this paradox of slavery and freedom nearly fifty years ago and made it the central

theme in his groundbreaking study of colonial Virginia. Here, we show how empiricist theories that contributed to the *modernization* of Western societies also led directly to the advancement (modernization) of systems of chattel bondage. Evidence of this process can be observed in the antiblack polity and ethos of colonial Virginia—the largest single slaveholding entity throughout the history of slavery in North America—which defined and determined the founding of the United States as a white supremacist nation-state and slaveocracy. To illustrate this critical social history, this study turns its attention to John Locke, an empiricist who deeply influenced the theo-political ideology of colonial English North America and by extension the constitutional confederation of the United States.

John Locke

Many scholars credit the English philosopher John Locke for establishing the “modern” foundations of empiricism. William Uzgalis, a leading authority on Locke, views his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1680) as “one of the first great defenses of modern empiricism and concerns itself with determining the limits of human understanding in respect to a wide spectrum of topics. It thus tells us in some detail what one can legitimately claim to know and what one cannot” (2018, para 1). The historian David Armitage describes Locke as the “grandfather of liberalism,” but also identifies him as an important advocate of imperialism, the slave trade, and the appropriation of Amerindian lands (2012, p. 1). From this study’s decolonialist perspective and its critique of neo-liberalism the combined attributes of “liberalism” and “imperialism” identified in Lockean philosophy are not inherently contradictory.

In addition to his massive and lasting contributions to empiricism, Locke, along with Thomas Hobbs, Montesquieu, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, produced groundbreaking works in political philosophy that proved to be immensely influential in the American and French revolutions and the creation of the United States. Locke's influence on his contemporaries and the *philosophes* that followed extended well beyond England's scholarly community (Goldberg, 1993). Indeed, his concepts of natural human rights as consisting of life, liberty, and property, as outlined in his *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), led key founders of the US—Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Adams—to conceptualize US republicanism using his vision of representative democracy as a touchstone:

Locke's political philosophy supported the rise of democratic institutions and basic principles of universal human rights and the character of just governments, while he was also a strong advocate for colonialism and early forms of entrepreneurial capitalism, including the formation of a colony based on slave labor (Richardson, 2011, p. 101).

In his *Two Treatises* Locke managed to hold and promote two fundamentally contradictory positions on slavery and freedom by drawing a juridical distinction between what he argued constituted *legitimate slavery* (war captives *justly* put to permanent servitude) as opposed to *illegitimate slavery* (a deprivation of *natural* human rights when used to enslave people solely for exploitation). His failure or refusal to recognize the English enslavement of Africans as unjust according to his own definition of illegitimate slavery may have been linked to his investment in 1660 in the Royal African Company (RAC)—England's official merchant association for trade in Africa including enslaved Africans. In 1669, Locke lent his considerable talents to drafting the *Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina* to delineate and codify, for purposes of English settlement, the laws for colonizing and administering

the territory located between Spanish Florida in the south and Virginia to the north (Farr, 1986, 2008; Hinshelwood, 2013; Lewis, 2003; Michael, 1990; Richardson, 2011). One key passage from the *Constitutions*—"Every freeman of Carolina shall have absolute power and authority over his negro slaves, of what opinion or religion soever"—accorded the English the right to keep "Black" Christians in perpetual bondage with impunity even though enslaving and owning fellow Christians had become an anathema in England centuries earlier (Farr, 1986, pp. 265-266).

Despite the apparent contradictions in his views of colonized and enslaved "Others," in the 1690s the missionary and reform-minded Locke used his position on the Board of Trade in England with its oversight of English colonies to call for the Protestant Christianization of Amerindians and Africans in colonial Virginia (Turner, 2011). In 1697, in furtherance of that effort, Locke either wrote or solicited from James Blair, a prominent Virginia planter visiting London that year, an essay titled "*Some of the Chief Grievances of the Present Constitution of Virginia, with an Essay Towards the Remedies Thereof*" (Ashcraft, 1969). Designed to lobby the powerful members of the Board of Trade to intervene in the colony's affairs, the unpublished paper criticized Virginia's administration as weak and unjust; advocated equal justice for all citizens; recommended increasing the emigration of clergy to the colony to tend to its spiritual needs; and insisted "that all Negroes should be brought to church on Sunday, their children baptized as Christians, and Indian children should also be instructed in the Christian faith" (Ashcraft, 1969, p. 758).

Locke's call to convert enslaved Africans seems to have served little purpose other than perhaps to assuage the conflictual feelings he and others of his ilk may have had about African bondage. It also provides yet another example of his hypocrisy in that his advocacy

of religious tolerance and the separation of church and state, for which he became noted, did not apply to non-Europeans for whom, in his mind, Christianity furnished an important method of control and discipline. His proposition therefore made little or no difference to conditions in the colony because three decades earlier, on September 23, 1667, the ruling colonial elite, most of whom were deeply suspicious and even fearful of the consequences of converting enslaved Africans to Christianity, passed an act declaring baptism did not automatically free an enslaved person nor obligate the enslaver to manumit her or him (Hening, 1819a). Elite Virginia planters apparently agreed with the Paul and the other founders of Christianity who sanctioned the legitimacy of slavery within Christian society. Consequently, converted Africans in Virginia and elsewhere in England's New World colonies were forced to serve their enslavers until death before they could receive the purported eternal benefits offered to believers in the Christian afterlife.

Locke and his contemporaries collectively comprise the intellectual founders of the western political philosophy of the "modern" nation-state and its racial/racist (ethnic and nationalist) characteristics and features. The series of intellectual/philosophical arguments they introduced to promote social and political reform in Europe initially served to confront and contest the West's long history of internal conflicts—including the economic exploitation and social oppression of the so-called serf or peasant classes by its ruling elite. As the historian Brendan Sims notes: "Europeans did not live in democracies, but their elites were in an important sense 'free'. Moreover, there was an increasing desire for political freedom throughout late-medieval Europe, even if this was more aspiration than reality the further down the social scale one went" (2013, p. 2). This outpouring of intellectual activism and social reform advocacy, and its emergence in the late medieval

era—conventionally the period from 1250 to 1500—led later scholars to view it as evidence of societal change of such historical magnitude and consistency as to demarcate the social transition of Europe from *medievalism* to *modernity*. This study, however, agrees with the critics (particularly contemporary medievalists) who question the way modernity typically is defined by ignoring features and characteristics of medieval thought and behavior that meet the definition of being “modern” (Heng, 2018; Rabaka, 2003; Ramey, 2014). In other words, the colonialist/dominionist ideology and knowledge of late medieval era Europe already exhibited the characteristics deemed to meet the criteria of being “modern” in ideation and purposes.

The fact seventeenth-century empiricists and rationalists and the generations that followed continued to disagree about epistemic methodology, however, did not prove an impediment to the development of a self-serving consensus western knowledge was universal. That consensus thus obviated the need for Europeans to consider the beliefs, values, and knowledges of non-Europeans or grant them any parity or equivalency with Europe’s. In formulating an exclusively European-centered view of epistemology—a view that enabled them to grant themselves a primary role in determining socio-political and economic affairs across the globe—Europeans found it expedient to ignore any contradictions or inconvenient truths that might undermine their claims of intellectual and spiritual superiority and the god-given right to rule the planet. Hence the importance at this juncture to pause and unpack what it means to *ignore* the knowledge and history of “Others.” Deliberate ignorance clearly is constitutive and indicative of the intellectual worldview and contexts within which the theory/praxis of white supremacy developed and consequently must be addressed and explicated.

Ignore and *ignorance* are cognates. *Ignore*, which is derived from the Latin word *ignorare* originally meant “not to know; to be ignorant of; mistake; misunderstand” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1971b). This primary definition later was modified in English by adding the connotations of “take no notice” or “disregard.” The takeaway here is for the West to empower and project its episteme worldwide it must define knowledge in a way that deliberately ignores its ignorance or that treats and incorporates its ignorance as justified beliefs, facts, and truth, particularly as applied to non-Europeans. Commencing in the seventeenth century, western scholars produced and published countless books and articles purporting to furnish the western knowledge that justifies white supremacy. Beginning with the first study to classify human beings into “racial” groupings based on observable physical characteristics, Francois Bernier’s *Nouvelle division entre la terre, par les différentes espèces ou races d'hommes qui l'habitent* [New division between the earth, by the different species or races of men who inhabit it] (1684), an unbroken historiographic line can be drawn to Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*, where he asserts with absolute certainty the obvious superior beauty of “Whites” made them preferable to “Blacks”—“as uniformly as is the preference of the Oranootan for the black woman over its own species” (1829 p. 145); and then to *Types Of Mankind*, published by Josiah Nott and George Glidden, where the authors claim “the negro achieves his greatest perfection, physical and moral, and also greatest longevity, in a state of slavery” (1854); and finally to *The Bell Curve* (1996), Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray’s preposterous and grotesque attempt to explain social inequality on the basis of purported racial differences in cognition based on the pseudo-science of standardized IQ tests rather than recognize and acknowledge systemic racism as the principle engine of educational disparities. Each of

these exemplars of “white ignorance” (a term discussed below) became widely known and even celebrated throughout Euro-America.

In the centuries since Bernier, the West has posited and defended notions of antiblackness from a scientific basis and perspective as factual and irrefutable. The western canon therefore is replete and overdetermined by texts that preserve and perpetuate ignorance about Africa and Africans in the guise of western scientific knowledge. The term *epistemology of ignorance*, which reappeared in recent years, explicitly defines this practice. It seems at first glance to be an oxymoron. However, this study views and treats it as central to the process of knowledge-making in general, but as specifically relevant to the social construction of antiblackness and its discourses.

Epistemology of Ignorance

When our ignorance is nothing more than the absence of true belief and/or the presence of false belief, learning should be easy: we should just unmask false beliefs and inculcate true ones. However, in the case of active ignorance, learning is resisted and blocked in a number of different ways: because of a lack of interest in knowing or understanding better, because of a vested interest in not knowing or understanding, because of distortions and preconceptions that get in the way of seeing things in a different way, and so forth (Medina, 2018, p. 250).

A major challenge to studying ‘non-knowledge’ that needs to be taken into account is the question of that reproduction of that non-knowledge. In different ways and to different degrees, the issue of reproduction certainly lies at the heart of the social sciences and humanities, for example when dealing with the reproductive dynamics of power relationships, practices of cultural transmission between generations, and the reproduction of just ignorance rather than just knowledge alone (Dilley & Kirsch, 2017, pp. 21-22)

Investigating and analyzing the purported evidentiary bases for the social invention of whiteness and blackness reveals the cognitive flaws and limitations of epistemic practices in the West and points to a central problem in the social construction and transmission of knowledge—the *problem of ignorance*. Scholarly and popular beliefs view ignorance as

the absence or lack of knowledge, as a void that knowledge attempts to fill (Proctor & Schiebinger, 2008). The propensity to view ignorance and knowledge in these terms impedes the ability to recognize the two are mutually constitutive and therefore inextricably linked. The social anthropologist Roy Dilley states this point as follows: “If knowledge is transmitted, communicated, disseminated, or exchanged through social relations, it is given form and process by the potentiality of ignorance, of not-knowing, either as an absence in and of itself, or as a willed and intentional stance towards the world” (Dilley, 2010, p. S177).

The view that knowing and not knowing are not mutually exclusive but mutually constitutive incorporates the additional critical factor of ignorance-production in the process of knowledge-making and its construction and regulation of society. Most important, Dilley’s contention that “not knowing” can be a “willed and intentional stance towards the world” agrees with the analysis of whiteness/antiblackness conducted here. The intentionality of the pseudo-science of race(ism) is precisely why this study treats whiteness/antiblackness as an *epistemology of ignorance*. As the philosophy professor Jose Media states:

Taking seriously the power dynamics within epistemic practices involves unmasking ‘epistemologies of ignorance’ that protect the voices, meanings, and perspectives of some by silencing the voices, meanings, and perspectives of others. ... Although *epistemologies of ignorance* have been discussed by that name only recently (Mills 1997; Sullivan and Tuana 2007), they have always been a key theme of race theory, and they have figured prominently in the philosophies of race of classic authors such as Sojourner Truth, Anna J. Cooper, W.E.B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, and Frantz Fanon, to name a few [author’s italics] (2018, p. 247).

While the term can refer to the benign aspects of the absence of knowledge—meaning simple ignorance of phenomena, events, or facts due to lack of data, interaction, perception, recognition, or experience—here the focus is on the deliberate manufacture and

dissemination of ignorance in the socialization of Christian dominionism and its white supremacist ideology in the guise of Western colonialism. Accordingly, ignorance-making constitutes the main object of epistemic practices in the West designed and deployed to its maintain its oppressive regimes and rule. Hence the socialization of racial slavery and the establishment of the apartheid system of Jim Crow laws did not occur without the constant repetition and dissemination of the falsehoods of white superiority/black inferiority conceived during colonialism. The mythology of white supremacy used to invent “White” people and reify *whiteness*, by inventing “Black” people and denigrating *blackness*, has demonstrated its resiliency and ability to resist Africana demands for social justice. As fears of abolition grew in the South in the decades leading up the Civil War, scientific racism came to the rescue of enslavers and their supporters by adding an empiricist-rationalist verisimilitude to the heavily reworked fantasies of “Black” sub-humanity that had been circulating in the West for centuries. Recent studies in fact confirm how powerful social actors including physicians, scientists, lawyers, legislators, educators, and priests, deliberately manufacture ignorance and disseminate it as misinformation/disinformation to support oppressive social philosophies and agendas including racism, sexism, capitalism, and Christian dogma (Dilley, 2010; Mills, 2013; Mueller, 2018; Proctor & Schiebinger, 2008; Sullivan & Tuana, 2007; Young, 1990).

Using the lens of decoloniality to investigate these complex social issues and events exposes the critical problems and limitations of Western epistemic practices. As previously stated, the same procedures used to make and verify knowledge—procedures that lend epistemology the appearance of being an infallible truth-making machine—have been shown to be equally capable of producing and using ignorance to influence and inform the

social construction of reality. James Ferrier identified the problem of ignorance-making which he dubbed *agnoiology* in his original exegesis of epistemology (1856). Agnoiology, however, did not receive the same scholarly reception and attention that epistemology garnered at the time (Keefe, 2007). Perhaps its neglect was due in part to Ferrier narrowly defining it to mean an “absence or lack of knowledge”—a conceptualization that missed the crucial point that ignorance could be deliberately manufactured to serve a societal interest or purpose (Proctor, 2008).

In 1995 the historian of science Robert Proctor and his colleague the linguist Iain Boal revised and updated Ferrier’s term/concept. They constructed the neologism *agnotology* from the Greek by combining *agnōsis*, (“not knowing”) with *-logia* (“discourse”) (Proctor, 2008). The spelling change differentiated both their term and its definition from Ferrier’s. From *agnoiology* “the doctrine of things of which we are necessarily ignorant,” Proctor and Boal conceived *agnotology*: “the historicity and artifactuality of non-knowing and the non-known—and the potential fruitfulness of studying such things” (Proctor, 2008, p. 27). This reconceptualizing of ignorance to unveil its use as a cognitive power tool of social regulation and control provides a new means to theorize and describe the violent epistemic practices of Western Christians in constructing the social realities of colonial and postcolonial life.

Even with Proctor and Boal’s contributions, however, a need exists to drill down deeper into ignorance to identify its specific role in formulating antiblack racism. Recently the philosopher Charles Mills used the term “white ignorance” to isolate and distinguish its particular epistemic form and content “from general patterns of ignorance prevalent among people who are white” that have nothing to do with race (2007, p. 20). Analysis of

white ignorance thus focuses exclusively on the social constructedness, manifestations, and consequences of antiblack and white supremacist ideology. According to Mills, this analysis involves the historicizing of white ignorance. Historicizing it—as this study does in its genealogical analysis of the roots of antiblackness in Western Christianity—helps to distinguish the temporal and geopolitical contexts of its development and use. It also evidences the social construction of blackness, its historical contingency, and the fact it is not a product of human biology and evolution. Mills expresses the point thusly: “the mechanisms for generating and sustaining white ignorance on the macro level is social-structural rather than physico-biological, though it will of course operate through the physico-biological” (2007, p. 20).

If “race” is not biological but represents instead an idea Western Europeans invented to justify Amerindian genocide and African enslavement, then it follows the entire premise of Western Christian white supremacist ideology rests on false knowledge and an epistemology of ignorance. Mills’ analysis thus supports this study’s historical argument that self-identified “Whites” gave ignorance a key role in the conception of the nation’s polity and ethos from which it continues to dictate and dominate internal and external social relations of the United States. Moreover, the inconvenient fact the entire society rests on a *social-structural* (Mills’ term) foundation of white superiority/black inferiority indicates white ignorance is not limited to “White” people nor is it intended to be.

Ignorance is power. When wielded by powerful social actors to achieve a specific social outcome, which in this case refers to the preservation and perpetuation of white supremacy, it becomes its own form of knowledge and *truth* appearing as both permanent and real. Although not every member of a society will embrace a singular set of beliefs and

behaviors, their normalization and acceptance may be augmented and amplified nonetheless through the efforts and influence of powerful social actors. The societal pervasiveness, consistency, and constancy of such beliefs, however, makes it inevitable that many non-white victims of white ignorance will drink the white supremacist kool aid and become complicit in their own oppression. The following comment on this point from Mills is worth quoting here at length:

Consider an enslaved black in the United States who has accepted the beliefs that (i) Africans are devil-worshipping savages, and Western enslavement had the virtue of bringing them to Christianity and civilization; (ii) the desire to run away from slavery is an indication of mental disease, *drapetomania*; and (iii) if they are emancipated, blacks as a race will quickly die out, since they will no longer be able to benefit from the care of their kindly slaveowners. (These are all—believe it or not—actual historical examples, not made up by me.) We would have no hesitation in saying that such sincerely-held but delusional white beliefs, clear-cut examples of “white ignorance,” would if endorsed by blacks be straightforwardly examples of black “white ignorance.” And as such, they would clearly be epistemically and materially disastrous for blacks, a great injustice in their obstruction of a veridical understanding of slavery as an institution and the appropriate normative and political attitude towards it.... We distinguish white ignorance as confined just to whites and white ignorance as shared, at least in some respects, by people of color. In other words, ideological socialization by another name [author’s italics] (Mills, 2013, p. 41).

When the basis for knowledge production is ignorance—and from this perspective race(ism) denotes and exemplifies scientific and historical ignorance—social actors will assimilate, assert, and empower that ignorance as *truth* to serve their purposes. Such acts often are motivated by the promotion and conduct of socioeconomic policies purportedly conceived to benefit certain social sectors (agriculture, industry, government, law, labor) or society, in general. Proctor and Boal coined their neologism *agnotology* while conducting research on how Big Tobacco spread doubt and “created ignorance” about cancer “via advertising, duplicitous press releases, funding of decoy research, establishment of scientific front organizations, manipulation of legislative agendas,

organization of ‘friendly research’ for publication in popular magazines, and myriad additional projects from the dark arts of agnotology” (2008, p. 17). Each of those methods has been deployed in the long history of manufacturing and disseminating antiblack discourses for public consumption. Instead of the “dark arts” they cite, however, this study examines the “white arts” of white ignorance that best illustrate its convergence into real social policies and practices used to perform the “ideological socialization”—as described by Mills above—needed to create a slave society and Christian nation.

Conclusion

From the advent of the so-called “discovery” of the New World in the late fifteenth century to the emergence of Descartes and Locke in the seventeenth century, western thinkers conceptualized and organized western thought around new ideas about humanity, freedom, and science. This activity began to coalesce by the mid-seventeenth century according to modern European and Euro-American scholars who view European intellectual movements of the period as comprising a collective spirit and identity that came to be known as the *European Enlightenment* or the *Age of Reason* (Porter, 2000). Accordingly, despite methodological differences the Enlightenment brought rationalists and empiricist together in espousing European intellectual hegemony. The Enlightenment thus represents a kind of centering and canonizing of late medieval/early modern Christian thought despite its purportedly heterogenous viewpoints. Most important for this study, Enlightenment thought proved decisive in the establishment of the United States:

Despite the efforts that have been made to discount the influence of the "glittering generalities" of the European Enlightenment on eighteenth-century Americans, their influence remains, and is profusely illustrated in the political literature. It is

not simply that the great virtuosi of the American Enlightenment—Franklin, Adams, Jefferson— cited the classic Enlightenment texts and fought for the legal recognition of natural rights and for the elimination of institutions and practices associated with the *ancien regime*. They did so; but they were not alone. The ideas and writings of the leading secular thinkers of the European Enlightenment— reformers and social critics like Voltaire, Rousseau, and Beccaria as well as conservative analysts like Montesquieu— were quoted everywhere in the colonies, by everyone who claimed a broad awareness (Bailyn, 1967, p. 32).

The discussion above gave an overview of the cognitive mechanisms used to conceptualize and establish antiblack discourses as definitively “modern” scientific knowledge. This study now examines the organization and dissemination of antiblackness as episteme and discourse through the most important venue of “modern” thought in the West: the European Enlightenment.

CHAPTER NINE

The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment gave rise to a new set of moral sensibilities that reduced some of the physical barbarity within slavery and ended the slave trade, and it also advanced ideas about freedom and free labor that helped to dismantle the institution of slavery altogether. Yet, at the same time, there was also a ruthless rationalism to the Enlightenment and a pragmatism and expediency that helped foster industrialization, factory discipline, and, in the plantation Americas, more exhausting plantation work regimes in which planters strove to reduce the workers into depersonalized and interchangeable units of production. This was the dark side of the Enlightenment (Roberts, 2013, p. 6).

The Enlightenment composes the music, fills it with the most beautiful harmonies of a grand symphony to the glory of Reason, Man, the Sovereignty of the individual and universal Philanthropy. This score is being beautifully performed until suddenly a black man erupts in the middle of the concert. What at this point becomes of Man, Sovereignty, Reason Philanthropy? They disappear into thin air. And the beautiful music pierces your eardrums with the gratings of sarcasm (Sala-Molins, 2006, p. 8).

Introduction

The *Enlightenment* or *Age of Reason* refers to the period from roughly the mid-seventeenth century to the end of the so-called “long eighteenth century” (1685-1815) when the rise and application of new theories of knowledge within the Christian Intellectual Tradition sparked dramatic changes in Western European identity, culture, society, politics, law, economics, and education (Porter, 2000, 2001; Zakai, 2006). Western scholars broadly define the Enlightenment as a movement that emphasized science and logic over tradition and belief. The historian Avihu Zakai explains it thusly:

Instead of accepting traditional religious worldviews at face value or uncritically adopting the values of established authority, Enlightenment thinkers elevated the role of the mind and emphasized the power of reason, thus leading to the abolition of customarily accepted moral and religious absolutes (2006, p. 80).

Some of its prominent figures and many of its later historians like Zakai have characterized and represented it as the triumph of science over “religion” and the concomitant victories of reason over revelation, empiricism over faith, progress over stagnation, democracy over authoritarianism, capitalism over the commons, and the West over the rest of the world (Eze, 1997; Josephson-Storm, 2017; Porter, 2001). This “heroic” account of the Enlightenment phase should not be accepted uncritically. As discussed below, it should be regarded as a critical phase of the Christian Intellectual Tradition because most leading Enlightenment thinkers were Christian scholars committed to bringing science and reason into theology and biblical exegesis rather than undermining or overthrowing the authority of the Church. With these caveats in mind the fact remains the Enlightenment constitutes the principal scholarly venue for the development, classification, specialization, and dissemination of “modern” knowledge, philosophy, and science in the West (Curran, 2011; Delbourgo, 2012; Eze, 1997; Harrison, 2002; Porter, 2001; Roberts, 2013; Zakai, 2006). Consequently, in the centuries that followed the so-called *Age of Reason* came to be regarded as an “axial age” based on the appearance of new modes of analytical thought and research disciplines that purportedly brought Europe out of the darkness of medievalism into the light of modernity. (Porter, 2000).

This efflorescence of speculative thought that gave birth to the concepts of liberalism, individual rights, and “religious” tolerance developed mainly in response to Europe’s long history of internal warfare. Christian wars against Jews, Muslims, so-called heretics and Pagans within its borders, and the sectarian war ignited by the Protestant Reformation in 1517, created the conditions for the dawning of a reform-minded movement within Christianity to foster individual autonomy (the recognition of personhood and basic

human rights), freedom of thought, and religious tolerance as antidotes to sectarian conflicts:

Enlightenment authors were convinced that, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, religion had immersed European societies in war, instability and persecution. This conviction led to what J.G.A. Pocock has described as ‘a series of programmes for reducing the power of either churches or congregations to disturb the peace of civil society by challenging its authority’. The Enlightenment, at least with regard to religious matters, is precisely that set of programmes. Most of them were not aimed at putting an end to religion, but rather aspired to reform churches and beliefs so that they ceased to be an obstacle to political stability, social harmony, economic growth and intellectual development (Domínguez, 2017, p. 275).

Enlightenment thinkers thus promulgated and promoted new theories of human rights and “religious” tolerance specifically to reform Western Christianity. Despite a clearly delineated reformist agenda, many historians of the Enlightenment argue nonetheless: “The ‘enlightened age’ witnessed the replacement of religion by reason as the main agent for providing ‘objective truths’ about the world in which human life is set” (Zakai, 2006, p. 81). However, as noted, Enlightenment thinkers never abandoned the central tenets of Christian belief nor the bible as the sources of their faith. Instead, they viewed “reason” as a tool for advancing (*modernizing*) Christian thought and knowledge in concert with the major sociopolitical transformations occurring across Europe in the age of western colonialism and the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation. This situation was particularly true in England:

In England most writers, following John Locke (1632-1704), did not substitute reason for Scripture, but called for a more reasonable approach to Scripture. On the continent, rationality was advocated as a means of establishing authoritative systems of thought based on reason, leading humanity toward progress out of what was termed a long period of irrationality, superstition, tyranny, and barbarism (Zakai, 2006, p. 81).

The idea of “modernity” in Western intellectual thought thus rests mainly on the false notion the Enlightenment caused and represented the triumph of science and secularism over faith, supernaturalism, witchcraft, and superstition. This “replacement thesis,” as it came to be known, purportedly denoted the monumental achievement of Christian intellectuals in bringing Europe out of the darkness of the Middle Ages into the light of a new (modern) era (Harrison, 2015; Josephson-Storm, 2017; Keel, 2018). Accordingly, secularism is celebrated as both the cause and the hallmark of modernity. The historian of religion, Mark C. Taylor, puts it thusly: “Modernization and secularization, according to this argument, are inseparable: as societies modernize, they become more secular. Moreover, this process, many argued, is inevitable and irreversible” (2007, p. 131).

The inevitability and irreversibility of secularism as posited in some western intellectual circles evidences a fundamental misunderstanding of the origins and original meaning of secularization: “What neither secularist nor religionist realize is secularity is a *religious phenomenon*—indeed, religion as it has developed in the West has always harbored secularity, and secularity covertly continues a religious agenda. In other words, secularity and religion are co-dependent” [italics added] (Taylor, 2007, p. 132). Efforts therefore to view secularization and modernity as direct evidence of Christianity’s decline in the West fail to recognize how early scientists appropriated and built on the Christian Intellectual Tradition. They did so even in formulating the notions of biological determinism that underscore the concept of race:

A new story can be told about the relationship between Christianity and modern science if we think of secularization not in terms of a rupture from the past but instead as a transference of religious forms into nonreligious spaces of thought and practice. This broadening would involve shifting our attention to the questions that scientific thinkers inherit and the tools used to answer them. We can then assess how biologists interested in race have been either constrained or freed to theorize

about human diversity through an elaborate wealth of ideas, beliefs, and questions drawn from the Christian roots of Western intellectual history (Keel, 2018, pp. 14-15)

The fact that secularism transfers “religious” beliefs into “nonreligious spaces” identifies a major problem with how the concept is perceived and used today. Much of the misconception about what Enlightenment figures were aiming to achieve mainly occurs due to the later scholars ignoring or minimizing their publicly stated motivations. Even a cursory review of the backgrounds and publications of just a few notable figures who founded scientific disciplines in Europe—Newton, Descartes, Linnaeus, Leeuwenhoek, Kant, Blumenbach, Leibnitz—reveals how Christianity as well as beliefs in alchemy and supernaturalism (magic) contextualized and informed their philosophies of science and the groundbreaking studies they produced (Josephson-Storm, 2017; Keel, 2018).

Christian dogma furnished a key set of beliefs about blackness and African people that informed and enabled the invention of scientific race(ism) and the racial hierarchy used to define and dictate social relations in the West today. With Enlightenment theories and thought the Christian construction of the “Other” thus entered a new scientific phase that gave the West new idioms, discourses, and discursive practices with which to promote and justify colonialism, chattel bondage, Christian dominion, and white supremacy. In making human *blackness* a subject of scientific research European scholars simply added a thin veneer of empiricism and reason to their modern myths of whiteness and white superiority to create the illusion of facticity, knowledge, and truth (Keel, 2018). Enlightenment scholars also invented several scientific disciplines focused on finding evidence to substantiate the West’s negative suppositions and hypotheses about non-

Europeans and to study them further to gather strategic information for their imperialist agendas. As the humanities scholar David Theo Goldberg notes:

The emergence of independent scientific domains of anthropology and biology in the Enlightenment defined a classificatory order of racial groupings—subspecies of *Homo Sapiens*—along correlated physical and cultural matrices. Enlightenment thinkers were concerned to map the physical and cultural transformation from prehistorical savagery in the state of nature to their present state of civilization of which they took themselves to be the highest representatives (1993, p. 29).

The Enlightenment thus marks a pivotal moment in the development of the Western Christian intellectual framework used to establish the concept of “race(ism)” as scientific fact, knowledge, and truth. (Eze, 1997; Goldberg, 1993; Hannaford, 1996; Park, 2013). It also reified European humanity in this same process as exemplified in the conception of the “White European Christian Man” as the epitome and prototype of “Humankind.” However, unlike the Middle Ages, which later historians defined chronicled in retrospect, European scholars of the eighteenth century recognized the dramatic cultural shifts taking place in their day and their precise roles in those processes. For example, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), a leading Enlightenment figure and founder of western philosophy, describes the process of becoming enlightened as a matter of personal courage and self-reflection in a brief essay written in 1784 on the question: “What is Enlightenment?”

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. Sapere Aude! [dare to know] "Have courage to use your own understanding!"--that is the motto of enlightenment (Kant, 1996, para 1).

Kant, like many of his contemporaries, viewed the Enlightenment as Europe’s coming of age as a civilization. But the main takeaway from this quote is his exhortation to his generic “man” (read: “White European Man”) to exercise his freedom to think as an individual.

Kant's understanding of personal freedom and autonomy proved immensely influential in the West and remains so today. He grounded his concept of it on the idea a person possesses the ability to govern *himself* and *his* actions by reason (Enlightenment era thinkers generally did not view women as capable of rational thought). The alternative, as he viewed it, was to be controlled and thus "enslaved" by impulses and desires much like animals in nature (Kant, 1996). Carrying this argument to its "logical" conclusion, Europeans decided human populations whom they claimed lacked the essential attribute of rationalism were neither free nor fully human but required supervision and control for their own benefit and the social good (Jagmohan, 2015; Mills, 1997; Park, 2013; Sartwell, 2019).

Kant like others of his ilk also proffered an historical explanation for "Black" inferiority that is as unequivocally and quintessentially racist as it is ahistorical, as this quote from his *Reflexion 1520* illustrates: "our ancient human history goes back with reliability only to the race of the Whites. Egyptians, Persians, Thracians, Greeks, Celts, Scythians, (not Indians, Negroes)" (cited in Park, 2013, p. 95). Kant excludes Africans from human history (excepting Egyptians who he deems "white") and consequently from the history of philosophy thereby denying them any traditions of deep thought or indeed intellectualism in general (Judy, 1991; Larrimore, 2008; Mogashoa, 2009; Neugebauer, 1990). However, not merely satisfied with eliminating the African past, Kant forecloses any possibility of an African future: "All races will be extinguished ... only not that of the Whites" (cited in Bernasconi, 2002, p. 159).

Kant's genocidal screed appears more than two centuries after the advent of the transatlantic slave trade. Texts like his from the Age of Reason thus show European ideas and beliefs about Africans, despite their lengthy contact with them in the Americas,

differed little from the purported “Dark Ages” when monstrous beings dominated the European imagination. David Hume, a leading figure of the Scottish Enlightenment and an avid correspondent with Kant, exemplifies the white supremacist rationalist/empiricist “logic” of European and Euro-American thinkers in his day with this frequently cited footnote from his 1748 essay *Of National Characters*:

I am apt to suspect the negroes and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation (cited in Eze, 1997, p. 33).

Thomas Jefferson, the father of scientific racism in the US, echoed Hume’s sentiments forty years later as follows:

I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to whites in the endowments both of body and mind. It is not against experience to suppose, that different species of the same genus, or varieties of the same species, may possess different qualifications (Jefferson, 1829 p. 150).

By Hume and Jefferson’s days the nature of antiblack discourses changed only in the sense of incorporating newly revised and redefined terms that reflected the emergence and growing significance of science in the epistemology of the West. Terms like “species,” “genus,” and “varieties” had existed in European languages for centuries but suddenly acquired new meanings in the hands of Enlightenment-era natural philosophers (precursors of “scientists”) using the tools of empiricism and rationalism to establish antiblackness on an irrefutable scientific basis (Josephson-Storm, 2017; Keel, 2018). Regardless of the tradition they operated within, western intellectuals claimed to produce and possess a deep reservoir of facts, knowledge, and truth about Africa and African people. Their methods differed but their premises and presuppositions about whiteness and white superiority did

not, a fact that led them to continue denigrating Africans and negating Africa's role in human history.

Both Hume and Jefferson qualified their dehumanizing comments about Africans as their "suspicions." Yet each spoke with a sense of authority the facts did not support. Jefferson, whose livelihood, and lifestyle depended entirely on the over 600 Africans he enslaved and exploited during his lifetime, went out of his way to diminish, and dismiss the accomplishments of Africana poet Phyllis Wheatley, writer and composer Ignatius Sancho, and other Africana intellectuals whose demonstrated genius contradicted the white supremacy canon of "facts" and "knowledge" about "Black" innate inferiority (Jefferson, 1829). Hume lacked Jefferson's intimate experience with Africans and never observed plantation slavery in the Americas. However, white supremacist and antiblack ideology gave him and Jefferson permission to indulge in the obsessive European and Euro-American custom of making sweeping indictments of the African character irrespective of their evident ignorance of the subject. This "White" ignorance prevailed in the West despite the massive presence of Africans in the Americas because Euro-Americans preferred the reassurances of their antiblack stereotypes as confirmation of their imagined bio-cultural superiority. Nevertheless, contradictions permeated their claims and undermined them at every turn. For example, the formidable physical geography and environmental obstacles posed by the African continent exposed and amplified the limitations of European power, knowledge, and purported bio-cultural superiority in that much of the continent's interior remained *terra incognita* to Europeans until the end of the nineteenth century:

In West Africa a trade as vigorous as that maintained by Europeans with any part of the non-European world was carried on along the Guinea Coast; but, except where the Senegal and the Gambia provided avenues into the interior, no European—at least since the days when the secretive Portuguese had sent their embassies to

Mali and to Timbuktu-had ever travelled more than a few miles inland. The growth of European knowledge of Asia and the Americas showed up by contrast their *ignorance of Africa* [emphasis added] (Hallett, 1963, p. 191).

Jefferson's subjective and anecdotal assertions about the purported inherent nature of African deviance from "white" normativity shows western "knowledge" of Africans remained a toxic and deadly mixture of myth, imagination, deliberate lies, and willful ignorance more than two centuries after the inauguration of the transatlantic trade. Accordingly, the West's antiblack discourses clearly served the primary purpose of disseminating and reifying "white" ignorance about Africans to promote and maintain public support for chattel bondage as the primary mode of labor and commodity production in colonial and antebellum America. Unquestionably, the epistemic light of Enlightenment thinkers inspired Euro-American policies and practices of liberalism, democracy, freedom of thought, and the separation of church and state (Bristow, 2017). Yet the same Enlightenment thinkers who elevated the theories of Descartes and Locke to new levels of prominence in the eighteenth century—Cesare Beccaria, David Hume, Thomas Jefferson, Immanuel Kant, Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adam Smith, Voltaire, to name a few—also modernized the antiblack discourses integral to Western Christianity's history and identity to bring them into the new era of Western global hegemony. Transferring them from the theological realm into the new realm of *scientific race(ism)* gave antiblackness a new discursive identity and second life in the eighteenth century precisely at the crucial moment abolitionism started to gain momentum. (Eze, 1997; Goldberg, 1993; Hannaford, 1996; Park, 2013).

This study theorizes whiteness/antiblackness to understand how slavery and freedom co-existed and became normalized in the polity and ethos of the US, and how it

has persisted in the form of an afterlife of slavery (American Apartheid). This discussion aims to uncover the contexts, contents, and mechanics of Enlightenment thought that enabled the West to rationalize and legalize the exclusion of Africans from the socialized categories it viewed and reified as “naturally” free: *man, human, person*. Whether proponents or opponents of slavery, most western intellectuals generally accepted its underlying justificatory premises of “Black” inferiority. Still, the efforts of Christian scholars and theologians to reform Europe internally, particularly in terms of redefining individual rights, sparked countless debates and disagreements over its policies and practices of colonialism and slavery. While several prominent Enlightenment figures like Diderot, Helvetius, d’Holbach, Spinoza, and Condorcet voiced strong opposition to both, others like Locke, Jefferson, Hume, and Kant elevated western hypocrisy to new levels with their contradictory views about the rights of Europeans to treat and hold Africans as property. To account for these and other internal ideological disputes and differences some scholars divide the Enlightenment into two traditions—Radical and Moderate—and argue the Radicals fostered the ideas of republicanism and individual freedoms, while the Moderates focused on defending property rights and the power of those with property (Israel, 2014).

The division of Enlightenment thinkers into basic binary political categories of liberal and conservative reflects the movement’s heterogeneity and the fact its scholars did not always share the same objectives (Porter, 2001). Historical evidence shows the inherent contradictions in Enlightenment thought and the associated debates played themselves out in England’s first settlement in what Edmund Morgan describes as “the ordeal of colonial Virginia” (1975). The subtitle of Morgan’s book refers specifically to the challenges US

scholars face in efforts to explain how “a people could have developed the dedication to human liberty exhibited by the leaders of the American Revolution and at the same time have developed and maintained a system of labor that denied human liberty and dignity every hour of the day” (1975, pp. 4-5). Morgan identifies colonial Virginia as key to this puzzle: “Virginia was the largest of the new United States, in territory, in population, in influence—and in slaveholding.... If it is possible to understand the American paradox, the marriage of slavery and freedom, Virginia is surely the place to begin” (1975, pp. 5-6). Following Morgan, this study views colonial Virginia as the seedbed of the slaveocracy in the US and the key to understanding the development of the nation’s antiblack polity and ethos.

Criticism of the Enlightenment and its legacies from a postmodernist perspective have increased in recent decades. A salient example appears in Michel Foucault’s (1984) essay *What is Enlightenment* where he contends the logic of Enlightenment thought dictated control and domination of society rather than liberation. Citing Foucault’s criticism, Roy Porter notes: “In some quarters it has become almost *de rigueur* to paint the Enlightenment black” (2000, p. xx). Porter’s use of metaphorical blackness to make his point is a noteworthy choice in his effort to push back against the categorical criticism of the Enlightenment and its historical outcomes. The following pithy remark from Eric Hobsbawm also does the same: “These days the Enlightenment can be dismissed as anything from superficial and intellectually naïve to a conspiracy of dead white men in periwigs to provide the intellectual foundations for Western imperialism” (cited in Porter, 2000, p. xxi).

This study does not question the fact Enlightenment thought introduced new concepts of representative government and individual rights that changed the lives of millions of Euro-Americans. Some Enlightenment thinkers also raised and contested the issues of slavery in ways that empowered the international abolition movement. Nevertheless, Enlightenment efforts to remediate the inhumane practices of racial slavery proved to be a two-edged sword. Deeply influenced by Enlightenment ideas about moral reform as well as economic efficiency and improving productivity, English planters in the New World began to advocate and practice what is termed *amelioration*. Amelioration is shorthand for more humane treatment. Its aim was better care of enslaved Africans and other “livestock” primarily to enhance production and increase profits. The direct consequences for enslaved workers, however, proved anything but ameliorative as the historian Justin Roberts notes:

Planters driven by the Enlightenment commitment to progress and inspired by Newtonian universalism and Baconian empiricism, developed new management systems geared toward extracting more work from enslaved workers. The Enlightenment gave rise to a new set of moral sensibilities that reduced some of the physical barbarity within slavery and ended the slave trade, and it also advanced ideas about freedom and free labor that helped to dismantle the institution of slavery altogether. Yet, at the same time, there was also a ruthless rationalism to the Enlightenment and a pragmatism and expediency that helped foster industrialization, factory discipline, and, in the plantation Americas, more exhausting work regimes in which planters strove to reduce the workers into depersonalized and interchangeable units of production. This was the dark side of the Enlightenment (2013, p. 6).

Virginia planters like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, in effect, established the principles and practices of scientific management in the 1700s that historians incorrectly attribute to the railroad industry in the 1830s (Aufhauser, 1973; Cooke, 2003; Crane, 2013; Rosenthal, 2018). Even before Washington and Jefferson’s innovations (Washington’s use of weekly labor statistics and Jefferson’s nail factory efficiency studies) planters in the

seventeenth century had come to regard their plantations as complex machines that required a systems approach in their organization and management (Cooke, 2003; Roberts, 2013). Accordingly, they applied Enlightenment-inspired principles and concepts of empirical observation and scientific experimentation to increase production. They also introduced and devised new methods of accounting and bookkeeping, and most significantly, they developed labor management practices based on efficiency principles as indicated by the increasing use of clocks to compel time discipline and measure productivity (Ellis, 2013; Hodin, 2006; Roberts, 2013; Wiencek, 2012). Consequently, when enslavers adopted so-called ameliorative practices based on Enlightenment principles, the labor regime of enslaved Africans generally became even more onerous and constrictive (Roberts, 2013).

As noted, in terms of antiblackness it did not matter if Enlightenment scholars used rationalist or empiricist methods in the conduct of their research. Their flawed premises invariably led them to reach the same negative and dehumanizing conclusions about Africans, findings they asserted as fact and truth with the same sense of certitude and authority. This calculated denigration of “Others” served to elevate the European “Self” to justify European rule. It also gave birth to eurocentrism by reifying Western Europe (Christendom) as the epitome of world civilization, which by attribution made Europeans the divinely-ordained “civilizers” of the world. Representing their faith and episteme as *sui generis* and universal enable them to disguise its provincialism as they cannibalized, dismissed, and brutally effaced non-western knowledges and the intellectual traditions of the colonized. After disrupting and devaluing traditions that had endured for centuries they then imposed their “enlightened” beliefs, values, and knowledge/ignorance on non-

European societies in the guise of *planting* civilization (a metaphor of profound biblical significance as previously shown).

The Enlightenment thus convened an intellectual venue for the dissemination of eurocentrism as a hegemonic discourse of European intellectual and spiritual primacy in human development and history. It facilitated deracinating and supplanting the local knowledges, histories, and spiritual traditions of colonized spaces while it simultaneously dehumanized the colonized. However, the focus on the West's socioeconomic policies in the Americas—the massive extraction of gold, jewels, and other commodities for European consumption—obscures the fact colonialism/dominionism also facilitated the massive transfer of local knowledges and technologies from across the globe into Europe (Goody, 2006; Hobson, 2004). Rather than ameliorate the conditions of the colonized, their constant access to and acquisition of the intellectual and material treasures of the world further compelled Europeans to enchain non-European “Others” for permanent exploitation.

This discussion of the European Enlightenment concludes in the section that follows below with a brief discussion of how the intellectual movement, operating out of a eurocentric framework informed by Christian theo-politics and grounded in antiblack ideology, culminated in the West's narcissistic and self-aggrandizing conception of “Man.”

The Enlightenment and the Concept of the Human

As noted, elite social actors constitute a powerful minority within a given society and thus perform a disproportionate role in the social construction of reality due to their status, power, and privilege. Hence when pulling back the curtain to expose the conceptual and ideological “center” of the “Euro” in eurocentrism around which the global system of

Western epistemic hegemony revolves, it should not surprise anyone to discover the entire edifice of western epistemology rests on the Christian cult(ural) belief in *European Man* as the prototype and exemplar of humankind. Accordingly, European Man embodies and thus epitomizes human physical, intellectual, and spiritual evolution, and achievement. Self-identified as the pinnacle of humanity, “He” alone occupies and monopolizes the various thematic permutations that emerge from the eurocentric framing of the concept of “humankind” as denoted in the cognates *Christian Man*, *White Man*, *Western Man*, *Modern Man*, *Universal Man*. Each of these iterations ultimately coheres in the West’s conception and construction of the *Hu-Man*.

The notion of the human and humanity as exclusively European, as quintessentially western, and fundamentally “White” distinguishes and separates European and Euro-Americans from “Others” as not just profoundly different but irrefutably superior. The West thus portrays Europeans as the avatars of human spirituality, intellectualism, technology, and culture thereby assimilating and subordinating the concept of *Man* (humankind) to their own reified image. The asymmetrical social interactions with non-Europeans and non-Christians caused directly by western colonialism thereby catalyzed and enabled the complete bio-social and psychological transformation of *European Man* into *White Man*.

The idea of European Man’s human primacy and purported centrality in the development of human knowledge remains a pervasive, persuasive, and dominant paradigm of world history. Its explanatory power and desirability rests on making European global capitalism and epistemic hegemony, appear to be the natural and predictable outcomes of the realization and fulfillment of human progress in Europe under

the auspices of Western Christian theo-politics and the Christian Intellectual Tradition. This concept is naturalized, made normative, and represented graphically in the form of natural history panoramas that purportedly illustrate human development in Africa from pre-human ancestors to modern humankind. However, these widely disseminated illustrations depict and present pre-human evolution as “African” (read: *Black*), but upon arriving at the current end-stage of ancestral development, the point at which *modern* humanity emerges, the image of a “White” European Man appears. Human beings developed in Africa for millions of years before they populated the globe, but the anthropological panoramas proclaim they did not become fully human until they physically left the African continent and arrived in Europe. This typical anthropological schema thus reinforces the notion humans aren’t truly “human” unless they are *White, European, and male*.

The eurocentric conception of human development operates according to an ethnocentric criteria of inclusion and exclusion that is reductive in the extreme because in addition to excluding non-Europeans from equal membership in society, it also excludes European and Euro-American women according to the prerogatives of its heteropatriarchal orientation and socialization (Mies, 2014). From a social cognition perspective: “Considering another person as fully human *requires appreciating the other’s mind* (intents, thoughts, feelings)” [italics added] (Fiske, 2009, p. 32). This requirement underscores the consequences of the Enlightenment conception of reason as a faculty exclusively attributed to European cognition and historical development and posited as a deficit in women, non-Europeans, and especially in Africans. From this perspective, this distinctly heteropatriarchal ideological conception results from the hubris of the *zero point*

ideology (mentioned above), as conceptualized and explicated by Castro-Gomez (2005) in his analysis of Descartes' Cartesian proclamation: "I think therefore I am." Descartes hubristic claim that human knowledge begins with a blank slate (zero point) devoid of prior perception ultimately privileged European Man in the production and centering of knowledge in the West as follows:

Descartes placed the ego at the foundation of knowledge in a position previously reserved for the "Christian God." All of the attributes of this "Christian God" came to be located in the "subject," the ego. In order to be able to claim the possibility of a knowledge beyond time and space, from the eyes of God, it was fundamental to dissociate the subject from all bodies and territories; that is, to empty the subject of all spatial or temporal determinations. Hence this dualism between the subject and any spatial and temporal dimensions was a fundamental constitutive axis of Cartesianism. It was this dualism, which would allow Descartes to situate the subject in a "non-place" and a "non-time," thereby making it possible to claim to speak beyond all the spatio-temporal limits of the cartography of global power. To be able to place the individual subject at the foundation of all knowledge, the internal monologue of the subject without any dialogical relation with other human beings allows him to claim access to truth in its *sui generis* form, that is, as self-generated, insulated from social relations with other human beings (Grosfoguel, 2012, p. 88).

By abstractly situating the knowing subject "beyond space and time" Descartes gave European thinkers the ability to dismiss non-western knowledges and histories as localized and provincial and thus lacking universal appeal, value, or application. In doing so he also created the cognitive space out of which Europeans developed a "god complex." In other words, they posited their capacity to reason and the value of their knowledge as vastly superior to that of colonized and enslaved "Others." Latin American scholar Enrique Dussel characterizes this narcissistic aspect of Cartesian dualism as follows: "La expresión de Descartes del ego cogito en el 1636 será el resultado ontológico del proceso que estamos describiendo: el origen absoluto de un discurso solipsista." ["Descartes' expression of 'I think' in 1636 will be the ontological result of the process we are describing: the absolute

origin of a solipsist discourse”] (Dussel, 1994, p. 66). The “solipsistic discourse” to which Dussel refers posits the “Self”—specifically the European male self as embodied in the all-seeing, all-knowing “I” (ego)—as all that matters or exists because it is the only “Self” that is truly human. Based on the region in which Cartesian dualism originated—which conforms to the geocultural boundaries of Roman empire in the West—Dussel also contends the phrase “I think” updates and perpetuates the imperial exclamation “I conquer” and thereby functions as a clarion call and directive to claim exclusive authority over knowledge and knowledge-making worldwide (1994). The clear takeaway from this analysis can be summarized as follows: if the definition of humanity is restricted to Europeans (and specifically to European men) then Enlightenment-era notions of human rights and their current formulation and expressions apply only to them. Thomas Jefferson wrote:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness (Jefferson, 1776, 2nd para).

Jefferson’s embrace of Enlightenment principles that define and promote the purported god-given equality of men as the foundation upon which to establish a democratic form of government is fully displayed in the Declaration of Independence that famously announced the commencement of the “American” rebellion against British colonial rule. However, as previously noted, Jefferson also wrote:

I advance it . . . as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the

endowments both of body and mind . . . This unfortunate difference of colour, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people (1829).

The second quote from Jefferson explains why the “revolutionary” Enlightenment principles in the Declaration of Independence that invoke “the equality of men” remain the unfilled promises of the US republic. Western Christian intellectuals never intended for Enlightenment principles to be applied to non-Christian, “non-white” men, or to women of any hue. Those deemed sub-human and irrational (the latter of which applied even to “White” women) lacked the basic cognitive and physical characteristics and qualities for inclusion in category of humankind. The confluence of historical events, theo-politics, and whiteness/antiblackness ideology in the Christian Intellectual Tradition lead directly to this finding. The dissemination of this theo-political dogma through the eurocentric hegemonic episteme and its framing of European thought as the epitome of empiricism and rationalism thus refers in theory and practice exclusively to *White-Christian-European-Men*.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion examined the structure, content, and global dissemination of the deadly arsenal of epistemic and discursive weapons Western Christians deploys to achieve their dominionist agenda of establishing “White” Christian hegemony worldwide. It did so to identify those aspects of “modern” western scholarship and knowledge-making—as represented by the hegemonic eurocentric episteme—that are the unique creations of the Christian Intellectual Tradition (CIT) with its roots in the third and fourth centuries CE. Using a structural analysis and decolonialist perspective it also exposes the falsity of the West’s claims of being secular, of having separated church and state and

eliminated magical thinking and superstition from its ethos and polity. This effort underscores the importance of structurally analyzing whiteness/antiblackness within the contexts of its seldom-acknowledged theo-political locus of origination. It thus concludes research studies that typically approach this complex topic solely through the lens of biological race(ism)—the pseudo-scientific conception of which does not appear until the eighteenth century—ultimately fail to locate the seedbed of the whiteness/antiblackness asymmetrical binary within its originating theological doctrine.

It its finding Western Christian orthodox ideology embodies and enacts the colonialist/dominionist discourses that stratify and oppress non-Europeans worldwide, this study breaks new ground. It also achieves its primary discursive and didactic goals by illustrating how early Christians' belief in one-god-ism its need for Othering non-believers for purposes and self-distancing led to their novel construction of the Self/Other dichotomy to self-distance their cult from every other existence belief system to posit it and its believers as inherent superior to all "Others." Although cognitive ground is bound to shift with the passage of time, Christians nevertheless updated and redeployed their white/antiblack idioms in the guise of Enlightenment "scientific" thought in the early modern era, actions that led directly to the establishment of white supremacy. Western Christians initiated this agenda and its associated dehumanizing dominionist campaign to consign their victims to a permanent status of *spiritual inequality* if they refused to convert. Imposing Western Christian values, temporality, semantics, dogma, and epistemology on colonized and enslaved "Others" thus enabled the West to keep colonial social relations in a state of perpetual asymmetry (based on purported European superiority) even after millions of colonized Amerindians and enslaved Africans voluntarily or involuntarily

chose to become Christians. The foregoing discussions thus expose how the cognitive machinery of Western European epistemology (western intellectualism)—which has been violently imposed on global thought and thinking for centuries—embodies and disseminates Western Christianity’s *Colonizing Discourses of Christian Dominionism* and its culturally genocidal *Great Commission* to conquer, convert, and thereby control all humankind. As noted, Christians pursue this biblical mission to trigger the second coming of their god-savior to save them.

CONCLUSION

“The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the minds of the oppressed”—Steven Bantu Biko

“Free your mind and your ass will follow”—title and lyrics of a song recorded in 1970 by George Clinton and the Funkadelics.

This study began its complex journey into the labyrinthine genealogy of whiteness/antiblackness by locating and explicating its research theories, practices, and objectives within the Africana Intellectual Tradition (AIT). As broadly defined here, the AIT began in the 1700s with the appearance of the first generation of Africana writers and literary works in the Atlantic world. Since its emergence its key objective has been the liberation of Africana peoples from the “master’s house” of chattel bondage, eurocentrism, and antiblack racism. Hence this study’s origins and conduct within the AIT framework marks it as an intentional act of intellectual warfare. Its decolonialist theory/praxis thus comprises the arsenal of analytical and discursive weapons it uses to expose the white supremacist logic and epistemic hegemony of the West and its roots in the theo-politics and dogma of Western Christianity. Much of this analysis is grounded in the work of Frantz Fanon, the Africana psychiatrist and pioneer of anti-colonialist studies, and a host of decoloniality scholars associated with the Global South including Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Enrique Dussel, Walter D. Mignolo, Catherine E. Walsh, Ramón Grosfoguel, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Santiago Castro-Gomez, and Dipesh Chakrabarty.

Fanon’s work proves invaluable in any effort to conduct a structural analysis of whiteness/antiblackness because he identifies and attributes the use of physical and psychological violence on the colonized to the racist beliefs of European colonizers. He

maintains colonizers dehumanize their victims to define and dominate their existential reality and sap their wills to resist. He concludes this psychology of oppression creates the necessity of armed revolution because no other possibilities exist for the dehumanized (colonized/enslaved) to become human except through violent confrontations to overthrow their inhumane colonizers. Yet, when the oppressed decide to “man up”—to become literal “men” as determined by hetero-patriarchal standards of the West—colonial violence immediately escalates in the form of targeted assassinations, mass incarceration, and torture. Fanon points to this reality as proof violence is the only language the colonizers understand. Hence for the colonized/enslaved violence becomes cathartic, transformative, and emancipatory because it enables them to reclaim their humanity:

Thus the native discovers that his life, his breath, his beating heart are the same as those of the settler. He finds out that the settler’s skin is not of any more value than a native’s skin; and it must be said that this discovery shakes the world in a very necessary manner...for if, in fact, my life is worth as much as the settler’s, his glance no longer shrivels me up nor freezes me, and his voice no longer turns me into stone (1963, p. 45).

This study wages intellectual warfare on the hegemonic discourses of western epistemology that impose and socialize whiteness/antiblackness worldwide. Its didactic import and value derive from exposing the origins of western colonialism within the theopolitics of Western Christian and its evangelical crusade to convert and control the world. To this end this study aimed to achieve three major objectives: (1) to expose Western Christian myth and allegory as the originating source of whiteness/antiblackness; (2) to break the enchantment of white mythology and its hegemonic episteme and thereby enable the recovery and reconstitution of non-western ways of knowing and knowledge; and (3) to advocate for “post-modern” theories/praxes of *knowing* (epistemology) and *being* (ontology) that intellectually emancipate Africana peoples and others from the pseudo-

secular ideology of western modernity that enchains them to social identities and histories imposed by their oppressors.

The nine chapters that structure this narrative thus provide a working genealogy of whiteness/antiblackness that exposes its conceptual roots, cognitive structures, and sociohistorical consequences. Collectively, they address a standard set of research questions (who, what, when, where, and why) to determine “how” Africans become pejoratively *black* and the objects of enslavement and exploitation in the West. They also evidence this study’s interdisciplinary approach in the conduct of its research and analysis. Interdisciplinarity is a hallmark of Pan African scholarship and has been since its inception. This dissertation therefore humbly follows in the footsteps of generations of Africana scholars who have turned academic silos into bridges to serve their liberationist agendas. The discussion that follows highlights key points and takeaways from this complex narrative and concludes with a call to refocus the goals and objectives of the Africana Intellectual Tradition toward developing new decolonial strategies that ultimately enable Africana peoples to jettison black/blackness and define themselves on their own terms.

Chapter One convenes and commences this study’s structural analysis in the ancient Mediterranean where it identifies the Greek writer Homer’s invention and use of the term “Ethiopian” (sunburnt) as denoting the idiomatic birth of human blackness in world history. This chapter and others that follow examine etymologies and scholarly translation practices due to the eurocentric proclivities in classical studies, as per Bernal, Drake, James, Keita, and others, to colonize ancient history. The analysis of the nickname “sunburnt” (Ethiops) and the Greek term μέλας (black or blue) exposes how classical historians have distorted,

embellished, or even invented their own facts when claiming to find an abundance of dispositive evidence of antiblackness in Greek literature, drama, and plastic arts.

Chapter One also breaks new ground in its structural analysis of Greek thought by completely dismantling the Self/Other dichotomy as conceived and defined in the West. It decolonizes this theory using evidence provided by Edith Hall, Erich Gruen, Jan Assmann, and others to expose the falsity of the eurocentric notion the ancient Greeks conceived and constructed a standard Greek “Self” (social identity) in opposition to a Barbarian “Other.” This analysis also deconstructs the western conception of the Self/Other dichotomy to expose and analyze its eurocentric fallacies and flaws. Western scholars generally posit the Self/Other dichotomy originated as an evolutionary tool of human cognitive development and social identity formation. This contention perversely defends the power differentials in the construction of a “White Self” versus a “Black Other” by making it appear “natural” and hence normative. This study refutes that notion by identifying the origins of this extreme form of “Othering” as a method of early Christians for defining their cult in opposition to Paganism. In their zeal to eradicate Pagans and their beliefs through voluntary or forced conversion, Christians disrupted and eventually ruptured the universal practice of “cultural translatability” that determined international relations in the pre-Christian world for unknown millennia. “Cultural translatability” or the “translatability of cultures,” as the system has been recently labeled, enabled diverse societies to recognize, accept, and treat each other as members of the same human family. It furnished a common means and practice for them to communicate across cult(ural) boundaries and establish diplomatic, commercial, and other relations. The existence of standard modes of cultural translation in the ancient world thus disproves the widespread belief in the West of the Self/Other

construct as transhistorical, universal, and typical of ancient interactions. This study critically and decisively locates its enactment and socialization in Western Christianity in opposition to Paganism. By the early modern era its functions included identifying and demarcating purported visible and imagined bio-cultural characteristics of non-Europeans to label them as inferior “Others.” This finding thus opens an important new area of research for scholars from diverse disciplines to shed new light on the interactions of ancient societies.

Chapter Two continues the analysis of color terms as ethnic identifiers. Its primary aim is to locate the seedbed of the whiteness/antiblackness concept and its authors. Accordingly, it identifies colonized Alexandria, Egypt as the birthplace of antiblack discourses, which it later links (Chapter Four) directly to the scholars responsible for its development and dissemination as a form of Christian catechism. An important focus of this analysis is identifying how Christianity evolved within a Greco-Roman colonial complex deeply determined by Hellenism. The discussion also systematically ruled out the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans in Alexandria or elsewhere as providing the antiblack rhetoric early Christians used to dehumanize African peoples.

Chapter Three picks up the search for the original sources of antiblack discourses by examining Jewish scriptures and beliefs. Having earlier eliminated the colonizers—which in the case of Jews includes Egyptians as well as Greeks and Romans—the Jewish people came next because early Christianity began life as a Jewish sect. However, before determining the role of the Hebrew Bible, if any, in the construction of the African as “Other,” it first examined Jewish monotheism and its conception of *believers/nonbelievers*. Significantly, it thereby located the origins of the Self/Other dichotomy in the

believer/nonbeliever monotheist asymmetrical binary, which it argues constitutes the first instance of an essentialized/reified construction of social identity it has found. It therefore finds one-true-god-ism (monotheism) furnishes the original and most consequential template in world history for “Othering” (dehumanizing) human populations.

The ideology and practice of “Othering” originally emerged to distinguish cult members (the chosen) from outsiders (the godless). However, its inventors conceptually overlaid the initial construct with a host of related asymmetrical binaries: good/evil, true/false, white/black—all of which were defined according to the strict inclusion/exclusion criteria of one-god-ism. The white/black dichotomy now constitutes the primary mode of “self-fashioning” and indeed the most salient marker of social identity and status in the West today. Hence the value of the work in Chapter Three to deconstruct this monotheist formulation to demonstrate the ontological denigration of the “Other” is not incidental but central to the western conception of “Self” and its theories/praxes of global conquest and rule. Additionally, the exposure of the ideational structure of this process explains both the cognitive steps used to invent “white” people and how the fiction of whiteness as “natural” became normative. It also leads this study to conclude the monotheisms (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) are by far the most destructive ideologies in the history of humankind.

Although this investigation tracks the origins of the Self/Other dichotomy to Jewish beliefs, this study contends the ancient Jews never possessed the political power (beyond their own borders) needed to impose and normalize this form of extreme social distancing except in the abstract. Pagans may have been designated the first and only essentialized “Others” in antiquity according to the precepts of Hebrew monotheism; nevertheless, the

concept existed only in theory in Jewish minds because they lacked the power to realize it in social practice. Despite the fact their covenant with their one-true-god Yahweh gave them no choice but to view the world through the lens of the *believer/nonbeliever* construct and its extreme form of self-distancing they nonetheless continued to engage in the common practices of intercultural translation. Their history, whether as tribe or nation, indicates they only enforced their beliefs on Canaanites (Pagan) “Others” within their homeland. Often the conquered victims of foreign rulers, their precarious socio-political situations thus differed in key respects from that of the Christian cult, which ultimately grew until it became the dominant cult(ural) power in the Mediterranean world by *spiritually* colonizing the Roman empire in the late fourth century.

The second objective in Chapter Three involved determining if Western Christianity acquired any key components of its noted antiblack rhetoric and discourses directly from the Hebrew Bible aka *Old Testament*. The extensive review of Jewish scriptures that followed determined it furnished the critical template for the development of Christianity and the New Testament but did not directly supply any of the antiblack rhetoric that later became a central feature of Christian catechism and hermeneutics. It specifically found the African presence in the bible was not characterized or marked by blackness or antiblackness. The ancient Hebrews used the term Cushite with no connotation of skin color to label the same African people Homer nicknamed Ethiopian based on their phenotypic appearance. Nevertheless, this study finds Christian writers selected from themes, idioms, and myths in the Hebrew Bible to construct an etiology of blackness and slavery and define African peoples as exemplars of evil cursed by god. Their postbiblical exegeses of biblical texts demonstrate a wide range of interpretations of

scriptures which gave them new meanings (like inventing Ham's blackness). Chapter Three thus provides a much needed corrective for Africana scholars who use eurocentric mistranslations of postbiblical texts to claim antiblack discourses originated within Jewish literary traditions.

Chapter Four continues the thematic examination of biblical texts. Part of its narrative focuses on how a novel Jewish sect in the first century became a Jewish-Christian sect that soon thereafter emerged as the Christian cult. It shows Christian theologians developed their faith from a concatenation of Greek philosophy, Paganism, and Jewish monotheism and distilled into the Nicene Creed and its orthodox doctrine over a period of roughly three centuries. It thus shows how the faith was institutionally "invented" rather than supernaturally "revealed" as its founders claim. It also shows Christians appropriated Jewish concepts of sin and evil, and their personification as Satan, to formulate Christian doctrine. When they subsequently devised metaphors that blackened Africans for the specific purpose of illustrating and convey their doctrine of sin and salvation, they in effect associated dark skin color with the vilest and most debasing ideas imaginable to them. Hence that discussion paved the way for Chapter Five's investigation and analysis of the cognitive mechanisms used to construct Christianity's doctrine of sin and salvation.

Chapter Five first outlines and explains the reception of Greek allegoric methods by the Jewish scholar Philo of Alexandria in Alexandria and their adoption by the first generation of Christian scholars and exegetes in the city. Citing examples from the earliest Christian texts that evince the pejorative use of μέλας (black or blue)—the *Epistle of Barnabas* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*—it illustrates how the unknown authors introduced exegetical ideas that set the stage for the next generation of theologians to blacked actual

Ethiopians metaphorically. It specifically identifies Origen of Alexandria, as the author who took the definitive step of moving from abstract to literal blackness using dark skin as his metaphor for sin and evil. Perhaps the most prolific and influential of the early Christian theologians, Origen's methods became standard in Christian instruction as did his voluminous writings until he was accused of heresy several centuries after his death. Most significantly, the extended metaphors he devised as part of his biblical exegeses proved catastrophic for African peoples in the millennia that followed. With Origen this study arrived at the person most directly responsible for the pejorative blackening African peoples. His use of dehumanizing idioms like "the inky stain of wickedness" to describe "black" skin proved of lasting value in the West for justifying the lifetime and hereditary enslavement of Africans. Finally, Chapter Five also cited recent cognitive studies that show the centrality of metaphors in human cognition. This new research has immense implications for the mental emancipation of African peoples and thus warrants intensive investigation and analysis.

Chapter Six identifies what is perhaps the greatest historical paradox in antiquity: the fact Christianity was born in a colonial milieu dominated by Greek culture and Roman law only to colonize the Roman empire within a few centuries after its birth. It finds the combination of Christianity's takeover of Rome and its version of one-god-ism accelerated its drive to conquer and colonize the world to achieve its Great Commission to Christianize all humankind or eradicate non-believers. It thus focuses on how the Latin Church codified and institutionalized its faith and campaigned first within Europe to eliminate opposing beliefs (Judaism, Paganism) and solidify its rule. It shows the ideological drumbeat to which Christian soldiers marched across the sub-continent was driven by two scriptural

mandates: Dominionism (“be fruitful and multiply) and the Great Commission to convert the world’s population to Christianity to bring about the second coming Jesus and establish god’s kingdom on earth. The same ideology drove them overseas in the early modern era pursuit of the same objectives.

Chapter Six’s analysis of the violent principles and practices of Christian evangelism enables this study to redefine western colonialism as a continuation of the internal Christian Crusades that begin fifth century CE. It shows how the Latin Church established a Christian holy land in Europe (Christendom), which became the focal point for inculcating the idea of a unified “Europe” and “European” identity as defined by Latin Christianity. This coveted notion of cult(ural) homogeneity defined and determined the values, policies and practices that informed western colonialism during the invasion and conquest of the Americas. Thus the “birth of “Christendom” supplied a common form of Christian identity that transcended nationality and gave birth to the concept of eurocentrism and its hegemonic discourses that elevated European Christians, their, faith, knowledge, history above all other societies in the world.

Chapter Six redefines colonialist discourses according to the stated Christianizing goals of Europe’s explorers and invader-settlers. The dominionist nature of western colonialism is evidenced and documented by the Papal authorized “Doctrine of Discovery” in addition to the reams of Christianizing rhetoric written by Cristóbal Colón who paved the way for the Christian holocaust that followed in his wake. Based on this evidence no doubts should remain as to the theo-political motives underlying western imperialism. To reframe western colonialism from a decolonialist perspective therefore this study devised the term the *Colonizing Discourses of Christian Dominionism* to denote their true content

and purpose. Common idioms from the era like “planting” a colony, for example, although typically perceived as benign descriptors, originate verbatim in the dominionist language in the bible (Liew & Segovia, 2018; Pennycook, 2002; Prior, 1999). Finally, Chapter Six, which shows the dominance and definitive role of Christian thought and thinking in European cult(ure) and identity opens the door to reexamining the western intellectual tradition that emerges in the early modern era to expose how it too is formed and informed by Christian theo-politics, education, and ideology.

Chapter Seven illustrates how application of the Colonizing Discourses of Christian Dominionism determined and impacted the polity and ethos of the English colonies in North America and later the United States. It delineates the differences in the laws of slavery used by Protestant English colonizers versus their Iberian rivals in Latin America they nevertheless applied the same Christian logic to colonization and achieved the same oppressive outcomes of socioeconomic and epistemic hegemony. The chapter also exposes the notion the US is a secular society to be a massive fraud perpetrated by its founders. It shows the separation of church and state has never been a legal reality in the nation despite its ratification in the US Constitution. Actions to undermine it occur mainly at the state level with the acquiescence of federal courts as laws banning prostitution, drugs, homosexuality, abortion, etc. are constantly proposed and enacted. This chapter thus identifies the ongoing dominionist crusade is operating on two fronts: (1) in the form of an ongoing and successful political coup in the US, and (2) as a well-funded, massive overseas campaign (often conducted with US taxpayer funds) to convert non-Christians and to compete with Muslims pursuing the same agenda.

Chapter Eight continues this study's effort to redefine the western academic and intellectual tradition within the context of its Western Christian ideological and didactic origins. It shows the continuity of early Christian antiblack ideology in the new discourses of science and scientific race(ism) that appear in the early modern era. It traces these developments to key European scholars who revolutionized theories of knowledge and knowledge-making (epistemology) in efforts to "modernize" biblical study and hermeneutics. It addresses how empiricism and rationalism constitute different epistemology methods and approach but result in the same dehumanizing outcome when applied to classifying Africans and other non-European "Others." This chapter drills down into these epistemic methods ultimately serves to construct the notion of the "White" European Christian Man as the prototype and exemplar of humankind and Europe as the same for human civilization and progress. It also shows the importance of understanding the "epistemology of ignorance" as a powerful tool for social elites to manufacture consensus by disseminating false or erroneous information to achieve socioeconomic goals or as a method of social control. The notions of the "one drop rule," blood fractions, and other white supremacist rhetoric based on the white myth of race are perfectly illustrative of misinformation/disinformation in socially engineering desired outcomes or conditions.

Chapter Nine wraps up this study efforts to reframe the advent of "modern" western intellectualism within its originating Christian contexts to debunk the notion the movement known as the Enlightenment transformed the West and created the "modern" world by supplanting magical thinking, superstition, and supernaturalism with rationalism, empiricism, logic, and science. This idea looks great on paper and reams have been written about the Enlightenment bring the world out of the darkness of the Middle Ages into an

entirely new era in which the rights of man, individual freedoms, and the separation of church from state become paramount. However, as the chapter illustrates, the key architects of this “secular” revolution (even those founders of scientific disciplines) were Christian scholars operating for the most part with clearly stated objectives of using scientific methods to improve biblical studies and place the “truth” of Christianity on a sound foundation of scientific evidence-based knowledge. Rather than enlightening Europeans and Euro-Americans about the dehumanizing nature of their colonialist/dominionist enterprise and its massive costs in human lives, it simply supplied them with the idea of “modernizing” the holocaust and its dehumanizing practices rather than eliminating it altogether. In other words, Enlightenment scholars like Jefferson and Washington in the US worked to make hereditary human bondage far more productive and efficient to sustain it. Finally, the several chapters that discuss the Christian Intellectual Tradition indicate it remains powerful in the West because it still provides the basic framework of western education and shapes much of its content.

An Appendix follows the Works Cited list. It deconstructs and decolonizes the concept of “religion.” Like the idea of “race” and racial groups, this study finds “religion”—as conceived and defined in the eighteenth century—constitutes a massive fraud imposed on the world for the primary comparative purposes of establishing Christianity as *sui generis*, transhistorical, universal, and as the only true faith that has ever existed in the history of humankind. The Appendix thus offers a detailed and exhaustive analysis that provides irrefutable evidence indicating Christian scholars invented the concept of “religion” to foster the notion such belief systems were innate in all societies. They did so primarily to demonstrate other beliefs and the beliefs of “Other” are erroneous,

flawed, false, lack essential features such as holy books, or a priesthood, again for the purpose of reifying Christianity and justifying its dominionist mission to eradicate the competition.

What is novel in this study's conduct and conclusions therefore is its pioneering exposé of the roots and infrastructure of eurocentrism and white supremacy in Western Christian belief. Its reframing and redefining of western colonialism since the 1500s as the "modernized" version of the colonialist/dominionist agenda of Christian orthodoxy (the Nicene Creed) contributes directly to the AIT's liberationist agenda by shifting the focus of the struggle against white supremacy from *biological racism* to the structural *antiblackness* of Western Christian dogma. Racism and antiblackness pose identical problems but possess distinctly different genealogies that coalesce in the early modern era with the invention of scientific racism. Hence the importance of exposing how white supremacist ideology developed in "western religion" well before the advent of "western science." By redirecting the Africana liberation struggle from its confrontation with biological race(ism) to the roots of the problem—the antiblack allegorical and catechistic discourses of Western Christianity—this study identifies and delineates the exact source and repository of antiblackness in western thought. It thus pinpoints the precise discursive targets to conduct intellectual warfare to emancipate Africana peoples and "Others," including Euro-Americans and Europeans, from the dominionist ideology its antiblack doctrine.

Resistance/Re-existence

In the conduct of its investigation this project expanded the definitional scope, contents, and value of the African Intellectual Tradition. It accomplished that task in part by reframing and incorporating individual and collective acts of Africana resistance against race(ism) and oppression as definitive and thus invaluable forms of *critical theory*. Hence it destabilizes (decolonizes) critical theory's current meaning by re-conceptualizing all acts aimed at Africana liberation, especially violent resistance, as both comprising and instantiating a theory/praxis of *social critique*. Accordingly, it identifies the countless maroon societies founded across the Americas as havens from New World slaveocracies as Africana social science laboratories and think tanks. This Africana genius and ingenuity led to the founding of the first multiethnic societies in the world untied against white supremacy and western exploitation. The conceptualization of a collective Africana consciousness to enlist and unify diverse African ethnicities in the global fight for freedom is without precedent in world history. This history needs further study and analysis because the anti-imperialist and anti-racist *social critique* of pioneering Africana activist-scholars successfully altered the trajectory of New World history by redirecting it from chattel bondage to social justice. They thus overcame the dehumanizing psychological and physical violence used to enchain and keep them enchained in the West. Hence the necessity of recognizing and crediting individual and collective Africana liberatory *social actions* as authentic forms and expressions of *social critique*.

This study also contributes to the AIT's mission by identifying a controversial, yet essential step needed to eliminate the psychological and spiritual captivity of Africana peoples to white mythology and white supremacy. It calls for the collective reimagining

and reconceptualizing of so-called “Black” social identity. It argues peoples of Africana descent in the West must summarily and categorically reject and replace “Black” as a self-descriptor for purposes of healing and to find common ground across the diaspora. While the label “Black” may possess a limited value to designate the diasporan “political” struggle against white supremacy, this study argues its use as a referent for Africana peoples is counterfactual, counter-revolutionary, and an act of self-sabotage. Moreover, its usage already is severely limited. While popular in the diaspora (primarily the UK and the US), continental Africans have never accepted and used the denigrating term (Tsri, 2016b).

Imposed on Africans to brand them as sub-human, the historically negative meanings associated with “Black” (negro) have endured in western languages, especially English, for centuries. Nevertheless, African American activist-scholars in the early 1960s initiated a Black Consciousness Movement in the US that endorsed and promoted it as a revolutionary form of self-identification. In retrospect, efforts to reverse the word’s liabilities by proclaiming “Black is Beautiful” did nothing to diminish let alone negate the host of negative connotations it reflexively and stereotypically invokes. Its toxic cognates are so deeply embedded in western consciousness Africana people might as well publicly refer to themselves as *filthy, foul, evil, wretched, unclean*, et cetera—the indelible meanings “Black” has held for millennia in the West. The well-intended rescue efforts of “Black” activists in the 1960s did not lack historical precedent. In 1929 African American activist-scholars, led by W.E.B. Du Bois, wasted valuable time and energy lobbying the US media to capitalize the word *negro* (black) (Grant & Grant, 1975). They succeeded only for it to be abandoned in the 1960s by a new generation of activists as noted above. In a current example of history repeating itself, a campaign now is underway to capitalize the word

“black” (Izadi, 2020). From this study’s perspective such energy would be better spent exposing “whiteness” and “White” people as a pigment of the western imagination.

This study finds imaginary human blackness in early Christianity furnished the idea for the invention of imaginary human whiteness as the basic western definition and criteria of being human. Indeed, the two fundamental principles of white supremacy, (1) Be White, and (2) Don’t be Black confirm *antiblackness* is the catalyst, predicate, and opposite of whiteness not *blackness*. If Africana people collectively abandon and reject “Black” as a self-identifier their actions would help to isolate and consign the notions of whiteness and “White” people to the confines of its own metaphoric-allegoric ghetto. The rejection and abandonment of “Black,” however, does not preclude the possibility of so-called “Whites” targeting “African” or its cognate “Africana” in the same negative ways for identical purposes. However, a critical difference exists between the two terms. Neither African nor Africana will ever bear the historical baggage of the negative and pejorative label “Black” when applied to human populations. Most importantly, like African American, “African” denotes the actual choice of the people whose history it identifies.

This study contends Africana people will continue to be compromised from within by choosing and acquiescing to being labeled “Black” and thereby socially embodying and performing externally imposed dehumanized notions of “Black” identity. In short: to survive and defeat antiblackness, African people must stop trying to act and be a crayon color. As Fanon brilliantly observed in his landmark study *A Dying Colonialism*: “It is the white man who creates the Negro. But it is the Negro who creates Negritude” (1967, p. 47). The creation of Negro-Colored-Black identity out of the detritus of western antiblackness has been catastrophic for the freedom struggle. From both cultural and

cognitive-linguistic standpoints, black/blackness in any formulation is utterly beyond redemption because it has been negatively hard-wired into global consciousness during centuries of western colonialism/dominionism. Consequently, the first cognitive step to break the mental enchantment (indoctrination) of whiteness/antiblackness requires people of African descent to reject black/blackness for self and social identification.

Admittedly, for various reasons this recommended action may prove unpopular with many in the Africana community, particularly in the US. Revolutionary change is never easy. Nevertheless, this shift in nomenclature, as inconsequential as it may seem to some, initiates a complete break from the cognitive domination of a metaphor imposed on Africana peoples to denigrate them in perpetuity. Rather than continue the same patterns and practices of *resistance* to white supremacy used for centuries with limited results, Africana peoples worldwide should reconceptualize the liberation struggle starting with devising new ways to *re-exist* and affirm *re-existence* beyond the dehumanizing framework of coloniality and its white supremacist logic. According to Afro-Colombian sociologist Antonio Caicedo, re-existence means defining ontological/existential reality in a manner that reinvents people's daily lives. In formulating his argument he also notes the ongoing violence that erupts when the colonized confront and contest the power of colonialist structures:

Concibo la re-existencia como los dispositivos que las comunidades crean y desarrollan para inventarse cotidianamente la vida y poder de esta manera confrontar la realidad establecida por el proyecto hegemónico que desde la colonia hasta nuestros días ha inferiorizado, silenciado y visibilizado negativamente la existencia de las comunidades afrodescendientes. La re-existencia apunta a descentrar las lógicas establecidas para buscar en las profundidades de las culturas —en este caso indígenas y afrodescendientes— las claves de formas organizativas, de producción, alimentarias, rituales y estéticas que permitan dignificar la vida y re-inventarla para permanecer transformándose. La re-existencia apunta a lo que el líder comunitario, cooperativo y sindical Héctor Daniel Useche Berón “Pájaro”,

asesinado en 1986 en el Municipio de Bugalagrande en el centro del Valle del Cauca, Colombia, alguna vez planteó: “¿Qué nos vamos a inventar hoy para seguir viviendo?”

I conceive of re-existence as the devices that communities create and develop to invent life on a daily basis and thus be able to confront the reality established by the hegemonic project that from the colony to the present day has inferiorized, silenced and made negatively visible the existence of Afro-descendant communities. The re-existence aims to decentralize the established logics to search in the depths of cultures—in this case indigenous and Afro-descendants—the keys to organizational forms, production, food, rituals and aesthetics that allow to life to be dignified and reinvented to remain transformed. The re-existence points to what the community, cooperative and union leader Héctor Daniel Useche Berón “Pájaro”, assassinated in 1986 in the Municipality of Bugalagrande in the center of Valle del Cauca, Colombia, once raised: “How are we going to invent ourselves today to continue living?” (cited in Albán, 2013, pp. 455-456).

Re-invention, as described by Caicedo, destabilizes, and subverts the “hegemonic project” of the West by enabling people to live on their own terms rather than simply exist as oppressed “Others” within the matrix of coloniality and its dehumanizing ethos. This process of re-invention and re-affirmation and the psychosocial “devices” used to implement and normalize it should be based on Africana ancestral origins, legacies, and traditions. Hence the major challenge ahead is to re-imagine Africana identities as both local and trans-local, and as continental and diasporan, while drawing from and using the power of their extraordinary diversity to craft and supply the cultural translation tools needed to construct a collective decolonial emancipatory consciousness.

This research project investigated and analyzed the genealogy of whiteness/antiblackness specifically to unread and unthink the hegemonic conventions of westernized social identities. It did so with the deliberate intent of decolonizing thought and thinking in the West to open cognitive spaces for a post-modern, post-human modality to emerge. For Africana peoples this effort marks a critical first step toward healing the self-hatred that alienates them from each other, from their ancestors and ancestral

traditions, and from other racialized and marginalized groups. Indeed, for Africana people this process is also a move toward post-humanism in the sense of rejecting the zero-point epistemology of the West that reifies European humanity by designating non-Europeans as sub-human degenerates. From this perspective, the current concept of the human fails humanity on every critical level, hence the need to bring “posthumanism” into the AIT framework:

Posthuman critical theory unfolds at the intersection between post-humanism on one hand and post-anthropocentrism on the other. The former proposes the philosophical critique of the Western Humanist ideal of ‘Man’ as the allegedly universal measure of all things, whereas the latter rests on the rejection of species hierarchy and human exceptionalism. They are equally relevant discourses, but they refer to different theoretical and philosophical genealogies and engender different political stances. Their convergence in posthuman critical thought produces a chain of theoretical, social, and political effects that is more than the sum of its parts and points to a qualitative leap in new conceptual directions (Baidotti, 2018, p. 339).

This study rejects the western conception of “Man” and its cognate *Hu-Man* because the exemplar it cites as the “measure of all things” is the Western European Christian “White” male. Additionally, the widespread belief in anthropocentrism, as mentioned above, is viewed here as originating directly from the Christian interpretation of Genesis 1: 26-31, in the Old Testament:

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

According to Christian dogma, god gives Adam (i.e., humans) dominion over the earth and all living things. This anthropocentric ideology runs counter to the spiritual traditions of Africana people, which fit within the broad rubric and paradigm of Paganism as defined earlier. Rejecting anthropocentrism enables Africana peoples and others to reclaim spiritual beliefs and traditions that center human beings and being human in the natural world.

Rejecting “black” as a self-descriptor thus constitutes a first critical step toward learning what it means to be human beyond the dehumanizing confines of imposed “racial” identities. It thus enables Africana people to heal the self-hatred that divides and alienates them from each other, from ancestors and ancestral traditions, and from other racialized and marginalized groups. This criticism specifically targets the twentieth century embrace of “Black” identity based in part on the fact a billion continental Africans reject “Black” identity (Tsri, 2016a, 2016b).

The urgent need for change is further evidenced by the recent use of “Black” identity to create and foster divisions among Africana people. The recent emergence of a group in the US that calls itself ADOS (American Descendants of Slavery) offers perhaps the most salient example (Nkonde et al., 2021). ADOS claims its primary objective is to secure reparations for slavery from the US government, but only for so-called native-born “Blacks.” The group expresses its overt hostility to Africana immigrants in a deluge of hate-filled screeds posted to social media. Nothing speaks more of their perverse agenda than the fact they base their identities and trace their lineage only to US slavery. They define themselves as “Black” and choose “blackness” over Africanity to sever any possible bio-cultural connections to the African diaspora. While spewing their divisive rhetoric, they also disseminate vast amounts of disinformation through social media the majority of which aims to discourage African Americans from voting. Recently, it has come to light the founders of ADOS are paid agents of nativist right wing groups with clear white supremacist agendas (Nkonde et al., 2021).

The Africana liberation struggle therefore must change its tactics to confront and combat the neo-colonialist era that began in the 1960s that relies on eurocentric epistemic

hegemony, scientized racism, and western languages to maintain power worldwide. This study contends unreading and unknowing the West by developing post-modern, post-human concepts of knowing (epistemology) and being (ontology) with the specific aim of conceptualizing a genuine decolonialist identity and consciousness is revolutionary and emancipatory. The dissertation thus concludes here with its full-throated endorsement of the famous dictum from the great Africana philosopher and composer George Clinton: *“Free your mind and your ass will follow.”*

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APPENDIX

DISMANTLING, DECOLONIZING, AND NEGATING “RELIGION”

It is customary nowadays to hold that there is in human life and society something distinctive called ‘religion’; and that this phenomenon is found on earth at present in a variety of minor forms, chiefly among outlying or eccentric peoples, and in a half-dozen or so major forms. Each of these major forms is also called ‘a religion’, and each one has a name: Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and so on (Smith, 1963, p. 15).

Religion is not simply an objective descriptor of certain kinds of practices that show up in every time and place. It is a term that constructs and is constructed by different kinds of political configurations (Cavanaugh, 2009, p. 58).

Introduction

A popular African proverb contends: “a lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is still putting on its shoes.” The nearly ubiquitous notion that something called “religion” is innate in all human beings and therefore universal in human societies is a fiction concocted, disseminated, and popularized worldwide for four centuries by western theologians and intellectuals. It took a series of groundbreaking studies by scholars working in diverse academic disciplines over the past six decades before the “truth” finally put on its shoes and stood up. That truth reveals Western Christian theologians deliberately re-constructed the concept of “religion” in the early sixteenth century in reaction to internal theo-political debates and conflicts in the Latin Church. It also shows western intellectuals deliberately expanded its definition in the seventeenth century to use it as a rubric to identify and denote all spiritual beliefs and traditions of humankind past and present. In this exact timeframe, after more than a millennium of being neglected or ignored in

European thought, it thus acquired the principal meaning it bears today. Hence this chapter examines the etymology of “religion” to achieve three discursive objectives: (1) to document its parochial origins in Western Christian theology; (2) to delineate its eurocentric framework and white supremacist ideology; and (3) to expose its dissemination through western academia and its “modernized/secularized” Christian Intellectual Tradition as embodying and exemplifying the standard pattern and practices of colonialist/dominionist indoctrination.

The growing body of new critical studies central to this effort and its findings irrefutably establish the concept of “religion” (as understood today) did not even exist until the seventeenth century (Nongbri, 2013; Smith, 1963; Stroumsa, 2010). Instead of being a “universal” psychosocial and transcultural phenomenon of human existence—which western scholars claim they “discovered” during the age of colonial conquests—it was “imagined” (socially constructed) as the result of a theological schism within the Latin Church. As shown below, it subsequently became a dominionist weapon wielded propagandistically to destabilize and indoctrinate non-Christian, non-European cultures. This well-documented, evidence-based finding represents a growing consensus in academia while at the same time it constitutes a controversy of biblical proportions the existence of which has entirely eluded the public. How then did academia arrive at this juncture? How did a concept of such dubious meaning and value become so deeply embedded in human consciousness worldwide? And why is its exposure and interrogation relevant to this study? The discussions that follow respond to those critical questions and others.

Deconstructing and Dismantling Religion

The revisionist research that dismantled the concept of “religion” began in the early 1960s after historian Wilfred Cantwell Smith (writing within the Christian Intellectual Tradition) published what many specialists regard as the classic study of “religion” as a “modern” invention (Smith, 1963). Since Smith, similar studies with different perspectives and objectives have reached the same remarkable conclusion: “religion” is not a *sui generis*, universal, transhistorical, transcultural, or innate feature or characteristic of humankind (Cavanaugh, 2009; Dubuisson, 2003; Josephson-Storm, 2017; McCutcheon, 1997; Nongbri, 2013; Smith, 1998; Smith, 1963; Stroumsa, 2010). The historian Brent Nongbri, for example, expresses this critical finding thusly: “religion is not a universally-applicable first-order concept that matches a native discursive field in every culture across time and throughout history” (2013, p. 158). Jonathan Z. Smith (1998) offers a similar critique that specifically locates it in the context of its colonialist/imperialist framework and operations:

“Religion” is not a native category. It is not a first person term of self-characterization. It is a category imposed from the outside on some aspect of native culture. It is the other, in these instances, *colonialists, who are solely responsible for the content of the term* [emphasis added] (p. 269).

It took the application of critical theory methods to the study of “religion” in recent decades to expose the concept’s historical contingency and cultural specificity and establish the emerging scholarly consensus summarized here:

Scholars of religion now know that “religion” is not a universal part of human nature, but is a culturally-specific category that initially took shape in Western Christendom at the end of the seventeenth century and then was radically transformed through a globalization process over the course of the long nineteenth century, producing both “world religions” and discourses around “religion” as an autonomous domain of human experience (Josephson-Storm, 2017, p. 14).

Scholars therefore can add the invention of “religion” to eurocentric ideology as key products of Christendom. Of the various types of evidence supporting this claim, one finding in particular completely settles any doubts or debates about the concept’s recent origins: *not a single non-European, non-Christian society anywhere in the world possessed the idea of “religion” or had a word for it prior to its conception in Western Europe in the early modern era* (Cavanaugh, 2009; Dubuisson, 2003; Nongbri, 2013; Smith, 1963).

This astonishing dispositive finding, however, should not be construed as refuting or denying the existential reality of various belief traditions in non-Western societies. On the contrary, the point intended for takeaway here is the identification and classification of non-Christian “symbolic” concepts and practices as “religions” occurred solely through the actions and consensus of Western Christian intellectuals who used a eurocentric Christian framework to define and classify the beliefs of “Others” according to their own colonialist/dominionist presuppositions. This study thus contends the “religion” concept constitutes yet another colonialist discourse that came of age in the age of Western Christian Enlightenment and bears the critical epistemic flaws and limitations of European-centered thinking and thought. Accordingly, the critical timing of its conception and dissemination by Western Christian intellectuals during Europe’s colonialist expansion and global trafficking in enslaved Africans makes it imperative to include its analysis in this investigation of the theological/ideological origins of whiteness/antiblackness. Western Christianity, it should be noted, operated without the availability or necessity of a concept of “religion” for most of its history. The concept of “religion,” on the other hand, cannot and does not exist without Christianity as shown below. By identifying their relationship

as a genetic one with Western Christianity as the sole parent of “religion,” this study aims to expose how they have jointly supported the colonialist/imperialist and antiblack agenda of the West since the late seventeenth century.

Early iterations of the term that approximate common understandings of the concept today appear most notably in the fifteenth century in the work of Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499)—distinguished for providing the first full translations of Plato and Plotinus in Europe—and in the sixteenth century writings of Protestant reformer John Calvin. (Cavanaugh, 2009; Nongbri, 2013; Smith, 1963). However, recent studies show internal conflicts and doctrinal disputes, following the Protestant Reformation in 1517, proved critical to the concept’s development, modernization, and subsequent reception (Harrison, 2002; Nongbri, 2013; Stroumsa, 2010). They identify the late seventeenth century as the timeframe in which the current (modern) definition finally coalesced as a result of various scholars of the European Enlightenment, including Descartes, Locke, and Kant, applying analytical principles of empiricism and rationalism to “modernize” Christian doctrine (Josephson-Storm, 2017; Nongbri, 2013; Smith, 1963; Stroumsa, 2010). Although Western Europe constituted the geographic center of this intellectual activity, the development of new epistemologies in the West—including scientific disciplines and notions about “religion”—depended on massive amounts of information collected through global exploration and colonization (Grafton, 1992). Brought back or sent back by sailors, soldiers, settlers, merchants, and missionaries, the flood of travelers’ tales and invader-settler accounts of the beliefs and behaviors of newly “discovered” peoples enabled and convinced Western Christian intellectuals to claim customs and practices they deemed

“religions,” or adjectively described as “religious,” existed worldwide (Dubuisson, 2003; Nongbri, 2013; Smith, 1998; Smith, 1963).

The recent practice of historicizing “religion” to uncover the theo-political and sociohistorical contexts of its early modern invention enables scholars to define the term by negation, by what it is not—*i.e.*, autonomous, universal, transhistorical, et cetera. Defining by negation in this instance also requires investigating and exposing what “religion” really *does* in social contexts. What does it do? This study contends the concept of “religion” imposes a Western Christian theo-political framework on the “symbolic” beliefs and practices of non-Western societies to define and analogize them for the primary purpose of labeling them as innately inferior, erroneous, and false in comparison to Western Christianity. In other words, identifying and classifying the beliefs of “Others” as religions for comparative purposes serves the propagandistic efforts to make Western Christianity the only “true religion” in existence, and that has ever existed. The eurocentric classification of purported non-Christian “beliefs” as “religions” thus established a theo-political hierarchy that categorized and ranked them according to the precise standards and criteria of Western Christian ideology. That hierarchy ultimately served to justify the conquest and subjugation of non-Western societies according to the notion the “religions” of non-Christians were not only inherently inferior and false, but also undermined and obstructed the goal of extending Western Christian dominion worldwide.

However, even before the invention of “religion” in the West, Christian conquistadores, beginning with Cristobal Colon, wielded their Christian faith as a blunt instrument of conquest and colonization. Upon his first encounter with Amerindians, Colon proclaimed they lacked anything resembling a “religion” and thus warranted immediate

subjugation and conversion. Their extermination also remained an option if they refused to submit to their European “masters” and accept their faith in the bargain (Columbus, 1969; Seed, 1995). In recent decades the concept serves to justify the animus directed against Islamic states by the so-called secularized West based on its characterizations of Muslim “religion” as inherently violent, anti-secular, and hence anti-modern (Cavanaugh, 2009).

Dictionary Definition

We will return to this discussion of what “religion” does momentarily. Here it is necessary to provide a summary of its original meaning in antiquity and its “modern” reformulation centuries later. Before examining its origins and evolution, however, it is important first to consider the word’s current standard definition. This entry for “religion” appears in the *Collins English Dictionary* (2012):

1. belief in, worship of, or obedience to a supernatural power or powers considered to be divine or to have control of human destiny.
2. any formal or institutionalized expression of such belief: *the Christian religion*.
3. the attitude and feeling of one who believes in a transcendent controlling power or powers.

The first entry conveys the term’s primary meaning in standard American English. As detailed below, this usage followed a convoluted path from its earliest appearance in classical Latin in the first century BCE to arrive at its current connotations. The second entry uses the phrase “the Christian religion” as its prototype of “belief.” This unambiguously eurocentric definition inadvertently accommodates this study’s view of Western Christianity as the *only* existent “religion” (according to its own definition and criteria), as explained below. The third entry and its explicit references to individual “attitudes” and “feelings” refers to the interiorization of “religion” and its personal

experience, as distinct from its mediation by the Church and its institutional specialists (priests). These ideas have their roots in Christian monasticism and also can be variously traced to the Protestant Reformation, and Enlightenment scholars in the seventeenth century (Johnson, 2012). Taken together these entries comprise the standard meaning of the concept today as commonly understood in both the ivory tower and public square.

To explicate the term/concept fully, this study addresses the two dominant conceptions of it: (1) it denotes a kind of a *genus* with multiple *species* (the idea of a generic and all-encompassing category of “natural religion” that engenders multiple separate, distinct, and yet derivative variations and varieties known as “religions”); and (2) it denotes a private and personal experience of faith which commonly is exemplified and expressed within a community of “believers.” This discussion begins by examining the Latin word *religio*, which along with *religionem* constitutes the source of the English word *religion*.

Latin Etymology and Early Christian Usage of *Religio*

Religio enters the written record of classical Latin as a multifaceted, multipurposed term prior to the appearance of Christianity in the ancient world (Nongbri, 2013). For ancient Romans it denoted notions of civic responsibilities and activities, and frequently served as a referent for the performance of both civil and cult observances and rituals. In sum, it indicated the idea of conscientiousness and a sense of duty to ancestors, family, community, cult, and state. (Nongbri, 2013; Smith, 1963). This common understanding and employment of *religio* in classical Latin thus indicates actions and behaviors that today would be regarded as “religious” in some instances and “secular” in others. Accordingly, Latin writers did not restrict its usage to the idea of the “sacred” (whether as doctrine,

institution, or prescribed practices) nor employ it even remotely to distinguish and separate it from concepts, entities, and activities otherwise considered “profane” (secular), as in current practice. As shown below, more than a millennium passed before Western Christians redefined the term to pave the way for its modern adoption and usage.

Before its modern reinvention, as Smith and others have observed, the term “religion” seldom appeared in reference to Latin Christian beliefs and practices, and in the few instances in which it was used its appropriateness for Christian discourse did not go unquestioned. In the early fifth century, Augustine of Hippo—whom many scholars regard as the greatest Christian intellectual of the early Latin Church, and who even wrote a book titled, *De vera religione* (“Of True Worship”)—designated *religio* unsuitable because of its many connotations:

Hence the term does not secure us against ambiguity when used in discussing the worship paid to God [*cultu deitatis*]. We cannot say confidently that *religio* means only the worship of God, since we should thus clearly be violating usage by abolishing one meaning of the word, namely the observance of duties in human relationships (cited in Nongbri, 2013, p. 31).

Smith contends that after Augustine the use of *religio* nearly vanished in the Catholic Middle Ages. The term’s current ubiquity and popularity, however, misleads people into believing it always has enjoyed a certain coherence and prominence in western discourses. This misconception applies equally to the commonly used contemporary expression: “Christianity.” As Smith indicates, the now omnipresent and conventional term did not make its first appearance until the mid-sixteenth century:

The standard medieval phrase for what Christians today would call ‘Christianity’ was *fides Christiana* (‘Christian faith’). The difference is subtle, but profound.... It is only well after the Reformation that the term ‘Christianity’ becomes current, and only during the Enlightenment that it becomes standard (Smith, 1963, p. 74).

Smith tracked the use of “Christianity” and its variants by analyzing 639 book titles he arranged by publication dates to document how usage changed from “Christian faith” to “Christian religion” to “Christianity” and the pace of those changes from the fifteenth to the twentieth century. He concluded: “By the end of the eighteenth century the term ‘Christianity’ had come to be used primarily and almost without question as the name of a *systematized religion*” [italics added] (1963, p. 76). He explains the impact of what he views as the concept’s reification in the West as follows:

... Christianity had become the name of an overt, observable institution, with a geographical location or distribution, a temporal evolution, a massive involvement in social, economic, military, linguistic, and other human complications. The word now designated something with a history, with the overtones and undertones of something with a history, from sheer fluidity and change on the one hand to the ramifications of human waywardness and sinfulness and creativity on the other. (1963, p. 78).

Studies following Smith also verify the word *religio* rarely appeared in Western Christian texts during a period that encompasses approximately fifteen centuries, or two thirds of its history. Its near absence from Latin translations of the Bible offers yet additional proof of its recent recommissioning. William T. Cavanaugh explicates this point as follows:

Religio was a relatively minor concept for the early Christians, in part because it does not correspond to any single concept that the biblical writers considered significant. In St. Jerome’s Vulgate New Testament—the established translation for over a thousand years of Christendom—*religio* appears only six times, as a translation for several Greek terms. In the King James version of the New Testament, *religion* appears only five times, for three different words—and not always the same ones that Jerome rendered as *religio*. The word *religio* is found scattered through the Latin patristic writings, where it has a number of different meanings, including ritual practice, clerical office, worship (*religio dei*), and piety, or the subjective disposition of the worshipper toward God (2009, p. 62).

From his comprehensive survey of medieval texts, Smith determined the word “faith” dominated the era’s theological discourses at a time when *religio* appears to have acquired a new and more specialized meaning. He explains thusly:

The one sense of the term *religio* that is found fairly steadily through the Middle Ages is a development from the meaning ‘rite,’ namely the specialized designation of the monastic life as ‘*religio*.’ This is cited from the fifth century. Even the adjective was used to designate a member of one of the Orders: the ‘religious’ were distinguished from lay Christians. Similarly in the daughter languages: the first meaning of ‘religion’ in English, in the *Oxford Dictionary*, is ‘a state of life bound by monastic vows,’ testified by 1200 A.D (1963, p. 31).

Throughout the medieval period it appears *religio* consistently served as an ecclesiastical term for monastic Catholicism following a conventional practice whereby Benedictines, Carmelites, Franciscans, and others were designated and labeled *religious orders*. Moreover, in one of the many ironies associated with its etymology, this definition of *religio* also gave birth to the concept of *secularism*. Brent Nongbri explains how “secular” originated as a cognate of “religion” as follows:

In late medieval Latin (and even in early English) these words described different kinds of Christian clergy, with *religiosus* describing members of monastic orders and *secularis* describing Christian clergy not in a monastic order (the usage persists among Catholics to this day) (2013, p. 5).

The term *secularis* (“secular”) thus initially designated non-monastic Catholic clergy and bore no resemblance whatsoever to the idea of limiting ecclesiastical control of civic life—a connotation it acquired in the late seventeenth century. Secularism’s clearly documented etymology therefore raises the question: how did it come to denote the deracination of “religion” from the apparatus of state governance as an essential step in western “progress” and the establishment of the “modern” nation-state? From this perspective it did so by furnishing a basis for the social construction of the religion/secular dichotomy, a concept later configured in the construction of the separation of church and state—a key component of the political philosophy upon which the U.S. established its democratic policies and practices. This remarkable shift in the meaning of *secularis* and the subsequent construction of the religion/secular binary first required the conception of “religion” in a

form that more closely resembles its current usage. That critical step, it is argued here, occurred in the seventeenth century as Western Christian intellectuals defined *religio* as an autonomous, *sui generis*, universal phenomenon, distinct from every other aspect of human behavior and existence (Smith, 1963).

The next semantic leap in the term's evolution, one that moved it much closer to its contemporary usage, involved its pluralization. While it is abundantly clear Christians distinguished their "faith" from Pagans and Jews (groups that both predated and influenced the theo-political development of the Latin Church), and Muslims, after the rise of Islam in the seventh century CE, their negative and hostile views of those traditions rarely resulted in their categorization as separate "religions" during antiquity or in the medieval period. The one exception applies to Pagans and Paganism—pejorative terms invented by Christians to label non-Christians and their practices as idolatrous and hedonistic. In this case, one of the original pre-Christian, Latin connotations of *religiones*—which denotes the ritual observances of "cults"—served to typify the multiplicity of "beliefs" and practices collectively and pejoratively identified by Christians as Paganism (Nongbri, 2013; Smith, 1963).

In the cases of Judaism and Islam, medieval theologians and intellectuals generally viewed them not as distinct and separate "isms" (as they have been reified today), but as *Christian heresies*. They thus perceived and labeled them as deviations from the one "true faith" as conveyed by the Abrahamic-Mosaic monotheist literary tradition embodied in the Christian version of the Bible (Boyarin, 2004; Cohen, 2021; Johnson, 2012; Moorhead, 1981). Western Christian orthodoxy thus held the uncompromising position that Jews should have converted to the Christian faith after its emergence in the first century CE, and

Muslims erred six centuries later in accepting the Prophet Muhammad and Islam as the next iteration of the Abrahamic tradition (Stroumsa, 2010). Hence rather than constituting separate faiths, medieval Latin Christians theologians believed Judaism and Islam comprised and exemplified dangerous deviations from Latin orthodoxy, which led their heretical followers to subscribe and submit to false teachings and false prophets (Boyarin, 2004; Stroumsa, 2010). Smith explains this issue thusly:

The Christian Latin writers used the plural [*religiones*] to refer to what might be called in the singular the pagan religion (or, cults) of the Greco-Roman world ... I have not come across any instance where a Christian writer of that period uses a plural to designate his own and the outsiders' religious systems collectively or simultaneously.... No Church Father, so far as I have discovered, can conceptualize his situation in this way. To do so involves a notion that there exists a series of phenomena of essentially the same kind (1963, pp. 81-82).

Latin Christians thus viewed their faith as universal and therefore incomparable to other beliefs or the beliefs of “Others,” past or present. The pluralization of “religion” therefore resulted from a different set of sociohistorical circumstances, circumstances that enabled its expansion to encompass and refer to distinct and separate systems of belief without compromising the idea of Western Christianity as *sui generis*. Following Nongbri and others, this study maintains this process occurred through a protracted struggle within Western Christianity over its identity and theology. Consequently, the term’s first plural usage in a manner that approximates its current meaning came about because of the internecine violence that divided Christendom rather than conflicts with non-Christian believers and beliefs. Cavanaugh, Harrison, Nongbri, and others maintain the plural term “religions” originated primarily to designate the sectarian divisions which occurred solely within Western Christianity with the emergence of Protestantism.

Growing frustration in Western Europe with what “protestors” and “reformers” (the self-styled opponents of “papists” or Catholics) viewed as the corruption of the Latin Church ignited a rebellion in the sixteenth century known as the Protestant Reformation (Johnson, 2012; Nongbri, 2013). Within a century, the Reformation destroyed the fragile ecclesiastical bonds that had held Christendom together for nearly a thousand years. Although numerous issues divided Western Christians, as support for the Reformation grew the immensely controversial question of what constituted “true” versus “false” Christian beliefs emerged as the most volatile and divisive issue of the period. With each side castigating the other’s beliefs as counterfeit and fallacious, and therefore incapable of fulfilling Christianity’s dominionist mission, some theologians came to view the underlying doctrinal disputes as so profoundly irreconcilable that Roman Catholicism and the various emerging and competing Protestant sects should be regarded as distinct and separate “religions” (Nongbri, 2013). Thus the basic idea of “religions” in a plural sense served initially to distinguish and designate the Protestant sects (Lutherans, Calvinists, etc.) that emerged after 1517 from the Roman Catholic Church (Nongbri, 2013). Peter Harrison states this fact unequivocally: “*The whole comparative approach to religion was directly related to confessional disputes within Christianity.... these confessional conflicts were the single most important factor in the development of comparative religion*” [italics added] (2002, p. 3). Subsequently, as Smith points out, after the plural “religions” emerges:

... it becomes standard from the mid-seventeenth century, and common from the eighteenth—when one contemplates from the outside, and abstracts, depersonalizes, and reifies, the various systems of other people of which one does not oneself see the meaning or appreciate the point, let alone accept the validity (1963, p. 43).

These findings clearly show Western Europeans conceptualized “religion” exclusively in a Western Christian sociohistorical framework within which they presupposed and proclaimed its universality before purportedly confirming its existence elsewhere in the world (Cavanaugh, 2009; Nongbri, 2013; Smith, 1963). This eurocentric framing ultimately gave birth to the belief in the West that: “Religion is anything that looks sort of like modern Christianity” (Nongbri, 2008, p. 10). With their own faith as an infallible model and guide, Western Christians then “discovered” in the non-western societies they conquered and colonized what they claimed to be analogous belief systems with similarities to their own, but characteristically false, delusional, dysfunctional, and even evil. Hence, it is correct to say the *modern* concept of “religions” (plural) was invented before it was “discovered.”

Therefore, when Western intellectuals studied other cultures the standard elements or units used for comparative purposes—a creed, theology, holy book, canon law, church or institution, priesthood, or specialist class distinct from laypersons, standardized worship practices, and a set of spiritual precepts to guide the faithful to salvation—were all derived from Christianity. Again, as Harrison, Nongbri and others have established, Western Christians applied comparative theories and methods developed for Western Europe’s internal purposes to identifying, analyzing, and historicizing other beliefs and the beliefs of “Others” worldwide. As a result, the term “religions” came to denote a generic concept that encompassed diverse human belief systems and a means to rank them according to a strictly Western European intellectual and cultural framework and criteria.

Mistranslation as a Eurocentric Practice

The same psychosocial drives that compelled Western imperialists to seize vast territories, colonize millions of non-Europeans, and subject them to a culturally genocidal program of Westernization/Christianization (to conquer their hearts, minds, and souls), also drove them to colonize the past—specifically the history of the world prior to the advent of Christianity. As noted, they rewrote human history from a eurocentric perspective to control the present and dictate the future according to the perquisites and proclivities of the West:

If you pick up a translation of almost any ancient text of appreciable length, chances are you will find the term “religion” somewhere in the translation. There is also no shortage of books on the topic of this or that “ancient religion.” It is no wonder, then, that many people have the impression that the modern notion of religion is present in our ancient sources. Yet the more one delves into the writings of specialist historians on the topic of “ancient religions” the more it becomes clear that the whole idea is fraught with difficulty (Nongbri, 2013, p. 25).

Brent Nongbri’s comment points specifically to the history of Western scholars routinely translating *religio* (Latin) *thrēskeia* (Greek) and *din* (Arabic) in ancient and medieval texts into the English word *religion*—despite the fact none of those terms share the same meanings (Nongbri, 2013). This practice of (mis)translation became routinized and standardized during the past three centuries. It gained acceptance and became conventional as Euro-American specialists in various disciplines reconceptualized the belief systems of Rome, Greece, Egypt, Assyria, and other ancient societies within the Christian Intellectual Tradition and framework, thereby inventing a plethora of ancient “religions” in the process. Hence the purported “discovery” of “religions” worldwide in the seventeenth century which engendered the idea of “religion’s” universality proved irresistible to western intellectuals. If the concept of “religion” was transcultural, as they deluded themselves into

believing, then according to eurocentric logic it must be transhistorical too. Accordingly, they discursively time traveled to the era of classical antiquity and excavated, appropriated, and (mis)translated various terms. In other words, they reconceptualized and redefined term/concepts in ancient and foreign languages—from a Western Christian theological perspective—to identify and denote the purported presence of “religions” in ancient societies where none previously existed. (Nongbri, 2013; Smith, 1963).

Western scholars who originally translated the words noted above and others—*dharma* (Hindi), *dao* (Mandarin), *jiao* (Mandarin)—into the word *religion*, completely distorted those terms and the traditions they purportedly represented either by accident or design (Nongbri, 2013). Since Smith (1963), it has become more widely known in academia that non-Western cultures (whether in antiquity or contemporaneous with Western colonialism) did not isolate or compartmentalize concepts and behaviors the West has characterized as “religious” to distinguish or classify them for the purposes of establishing a distinct, unified system of beliefs (Dubuisson, 2003; Masuzawa, 2005; Nongbri, 2013). However, as previously noted, the intent here is not to suggest that non-Western societies did not possess names and concepts for spiritual powers, ritualistic practices, sacred spaces, et cetera. The point here is to illuminate its social history and reveal *religion* to be a contingent historical contrivance rather than the timeless, *i.e.*, transhistorical, existential reality of being human. This timeframe and its analysis thus confirms for this study what Jonathan Z. Smith (1998) pointed out above: Western European colonists did not “discover” “religions” in the societies they conquered around the world; they locally constructed and imposed them. They also did not “discover” ancient religions in ancient societies; they anachronistically invented them too. With this uniquely

eurocentric method of colonizing time now identified, let us now return to the etymological timeline and look at the final iteration of *religio* on the road to its modern incarnation.

The third and final entry for “religion” in the online dictionary referenced above defines it as the “attitude” and “feeling” of one who believes in a god or omnipotent power or powers. This final entry refers to the personal or phenomenological (in the Husserlian sense) nature of “belief”—the embodiment, lived experience, and emotive expression of “religion” so to speak—whether the individual worships within or without a church or institutional framework (Bornemark & Ruin, 2010). This notion of a personal experience of god appears early in Christian ideology and reaches a critical highpoint in the fourth century CE with the development of monasticism in Egypt (Johnson, 2012). For the Christian laity, however, worship in the Latin Church became a collective experience conducted and mediated by a priesthood using prescribed and sanctified rituals and ceremonies—including mass, confession, baptism, marriage, and funeral rites—to assert and maintain the established orthodox faith (Johnson, 2012).

During the so-called late Middle Ages, however, social conditions and relations in Europe changed dramatically due to a series of complex events that reconfigured the demographic and sociopolitical landscapes of the region and influenced Western Europeans to reconceive the ideas of person and personhood (individualism) and related notions of civil and human rights. The bubonic plague in the fourteenth century, which wiped out an estimated 30 to 60 percent of Europe’s population, and the Protestant Reformation in the fifteenth century—both of which brought attention to issues of individual liberty—radically altered the sociopolitical relationships of the three major classes in Europe: the king, the nobility (including priests), and the so-called peasants who

comprised the majority of the population (Bartlett, 1993). In the sixteenth century, the shock of the “discovery” of the New World, the immensely beneficial “vernacularization of knowledge” (Peter Burke’s term) made possible by the printing press, and the translation of texts from Latin to modern Western languages, all stand out as singular events that inspired Western Europeans to rediscover and reinvent themselves and the rest of the world (Anderson, 2016; Burke, 2016; Grafton, 1992).

In the seventeenth century, the Cartesian revolution led by Rene Descartes not only reified the individual and individual consciousness with its rationalist theory and practices, it did so by endowing human beings with attributes that previously had been the exclusive possession of the Christian god (Castro-Gomez, 2005). Later in the century John Locke added an empiricist gloss to this intellectual endeavor. He did so by connecting the idea of personhood with inner consciousness in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1694), and in his famous arguments for religious toleration that emphasized individual liberty as the basis for the relationship between an individual believer and god (Locke, 2012). These sociohistorical events and intellectual developments arguably achieved their ultimate realization in the twentieth century with the emergence of the popular Western Christian notion of having a “personal relationship with Jesus”—an expression that defines and characterizes contemporary evangelical Protestant and Catholic beliefs, and conforms precisely with the private and personal embodiment of “religion” as denoted in the third entry of our online dictionary definition cited above (Bennett-Carpenter, 2017).

The Invention of World Religions

The construction of the modern definition of “religion” in Western Europe for internal comparative purposes, also furnished the impetus and framework for the related invention of the term/concept *world religions* (Dubuisson, 2003; Masuzawa, 2005). As noted above, prior to the so-called modern era Western Europeans conventionally grouped the peoples of the world and their beliefs into four basic categories: Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Pagans. Masuzawa argues this system was replaced at the end of the nineteenth century with a new classificatory system of *world religions* constituted as follows:

‘World religions,’ or major religions of the world, almost invariably include Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism, and also typically count among their number Confucianism, Taoism, and Shinto (although these may be variously grouped together or conflated as Chinese, Japanese, or East Asian religions). Somewhat less typically but still very frequently included are Zoroastrianism (Parsee or Parsiism), Jainism, and Sikhism (2005, p. 2).

Despite the fact several so-called “major religions” do not even possess a concept of god, as understood in Europe and Euro-America, Western scholars nonetheless label them as such in following a practice deliberately designed to set the Christian West apart from other cultures and the cultures of “Others.” Masuzawa illuminates this point thusly:

What these systems do, regardless of the variation, is to distinguish the West from the rest, even though the distinction is usually effected in more complicated ways than the still frequently used, easy language of “East and West” suggests. The demarcation, in any event, is articulated from the point of view of the European West, which is in all known cases historically aligned or conflated, though not without some ambiguity, with *Christendom* [emphasis added] (2005, pp. 2-3).

The West also labels the “world religions” as “great religions of the world” to distinguish them from so-called “lesser traditions” that “tend to go by certain generic lower-case names (such as shamanism and animism), often with a particular place marker attached (e.g. Native American, Siberian, Aboriginal Australian)” (Masuzawa, 2005, pp. 3-4). These

lower ranked traditions—many of which rely on orality rather than written texts or “sacred scriptures”—characteristically tend to be the least understood and most maligned by Western Christians. As a general practice, western scholars label diverse African cosmologies as “African traditional religions” or “African indigenous religions” and group them mainly in the “lesser” category based purportedly on their extreme deviations from Western Christian norms and values (Adamo, 2011; Shaw, 1990; Ukhun & Imoagene, 2017). Defined and classified as deeply reliant on practices deemed superstitious, magical, fetishistic, and animistic by the West, they thus are seen as barely qualifying as “religions” in the standard sense of the term.

This view of Africans and African culture and thought as irredeemably deficient and inferior is central to the prevailing attitudes of antiblackness and associated discourses that dominate Western intellectual history. According to Kant, Hume, and Jefferson, Africans lacked the ability to reason, which Locke regarded as a prerequisite to salvation (Hinshelwood, 2013; Lewis, 2003). Hegel, on the other hand, said Africans lacked spirit, having not fully emerged out of the darkness of savagery (Hegel, 1899). The consensus of these leading Western Christian intellectuals is Christianity could not save Africans from their inherent blackness, but it perhaps could make them better “slaves.” Locke essentially lobbied for this position—the notion that if conversion did not save the souls of enslaved Africans (or colonized Amerindians) it would at least make them governable and, in theory, less inclined to resist western dominance and exploitation (Turner, 2011).

Christianity’s denigration and negation of the beliefs of “Others” is a prime example of what the concept of “religion” *does*, by definition, when imposed on non-Christian cultures by the West. In the specific case of African societies and peoples, the

concept reinforces white supremacist claims of immutable African inferiority—a situation that also applies to African Christians notwithstanding Western Christianity’s claims of universality. Steven Bantu Biko (1946-1977), the South African anti-apartheid activist, and founder of its Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) discusses Christianity’s impact in Africa. In doing so he does not question whether faith is true, but explicates in graphic detail its dehumanizing methods for converting non-believers:

They scared our people with stories of hell. They painted their God as a demanding God who wanted worship "or else" People had to discard their clothes and their customs in order to be accepted in this new religion. Knowing how religious the African people were, the missionaries stepped up their terrorist campaign on the emotions of the people with their detailed accounts of eternal burning, the gnashing of teeth and grinding of bone. *By some strange and twisted logic, they argued that theirs was a scientific religion and ours a superstition*—all this in spite of the biological discrepancy which is at the base of their religion. This cold and cruel religion was strange to the indigenous people and caused frequent strife between the converted and the "pagans", for the former, having imbibed the false values from White society, were taught to ridicule and despise those who defended the truism of their indigenous religion. *With the ultimate acceptance of the Western religion down went our cultural values* [italics added] (2019, pp. 6-7).

Biko also famously wrote in 1977, the year he was assassinated by South African police: “the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the minds of the oppressed” (1978). This study contends the primary means by which “oppressors” get their hands on the “minds of the oppressed” to colonize their thinking and thought is through Christianization. To be Christianized is to be colonized by the West. Nonetheless, for Africans and “Others,” conversion does not establish social equality or even spiritual parity. Historically, African Christians have not been seen or treated as truly equal in the “faith” by fellow European or Euro-American Christians. Instead they continue to be regarded as converts to the faith who require spiritual guidance despite the fact Christianity began in Africa and took root there centuries before it reached Western Europe (Oden,

2007). In the case of African Americans, for example, if Christian conversion truly made them equal members of the Christian community, then why is Sunday, the day Christians gather in churches across the nation for worship, the most segregated day of the week in the US?

Given Western Christianity's dogmatic intolerance—the genocidal history of which is well documented—why did Christian intellectuals in the modern era elevate non-European traditions to the level of academic study under the rubrics of “religions” and “world religions?” This study defines it as an intelligence-gathering and propaganda operation to aid Western imperialist in consolidating and maintaining control over colonized subjects and their societies. To achieve its objective, the West unleashed an army of dominionist soldiers (missionaries) and anthropologists to roam across the globe and gather critical cult(ural) intelligence needed to advance western domination (Chidester, 2014). From this decolonialist perspective, the basic purpose of “religion” is to divide and conquer. This finding is based on this study's analysis of what “religion” *does*. Consequently, it regards scholarly efforts in western academia to document and compare other traditions and the traditions of “Others” as simply shifting from the habitual and reflexive practices of execrating non-Christians and their “beliefs” to amassing a purportedly encyclopedic knowledge of said “beliefs” to *execrate* and thus destabilize them in a more deliberate, focused, and scholarly manner.

Although colonialism/dominionism by design imposed Western European Christian values over the colonized non-European, non-Christian “Other” in the form of white supremacist ideology, Western imperialists also identified, classified, and comparatively analyzed the cultural beliefs and systems they encountered worldwide to

promote western superiority. Despite the fictional nature of their assertions, they made such comparisons nonetheless to socialize non-Europeans to western values and ideologies. Hence fact the eurocentric the concepts of *world religions* and *lesser religions* originated as the West expanded and consolidated its colonial regimes across the globe should make all scholars skeptical of their conceptual apparatus, their knowledge claims, and how they are purposed and deployed. For Africana intellectuals in particular this critical stance is essential since the outcome of this comparative analysis consistently results in the classification of African beliefs as idolatry, demonism, witchcraft, animism, shamanism, superstition, et cetera—or, in other words, as definitively and characteristically inferior to Western Christianity. Dubuisson argues this effort to identify and distinguish purported deficiencies and deviances from the norms of Western Christianity proved decisive in the social construction of Western identity:

[...] religion not only appears as one of the typical creations of the West, among the most prestigious of them, but also becomes the West's fundamental creation and central reference point, the reference point around which it constructed, organized, and developed itself by erecting its own system of beliefs and representations. In short, it is that point of reference by which it has become, in and of itself, its own world—the referential center from which it has conceptualized the others—all the others, both those that it has dominated or conquered and those it has influenced (2003, p. 11).

How is it possible therefore to escape the false framing *religion* and its cognates impose on our analysis and understanding of world history? How can scholars dismantle the eurocentric “referential center” that dictates and dominates the global understanding of indigenous knowledge and belief systems? It appears a neutral neologism is needed to escape the tautology of analyzing and comparing non-European cultures using eurocentric term/concepts and criteria. Nearly sixty years ago William Cantwell Smith suggested replacing “religion” with the terms “tradition” and “faith” as alternatives (1963, pp. 194-

195). More recently, Daniel Dubuisson recommended the phrase “*cosmographic formations*” to serve as the preferred rubric under which to “assemble all those facts we call ‘religious’” (2003, p. 17). While Dubuisson’s term points us in the right direction, this study chooses instead to reduce his phrase to the single word *cosmographies* to denote the various ways human beings account for the origins of life and the cosmos. *Cosmographies* does not privilege the idea of religion as universal or any of its purported constituencies (credo, scripture, theology, cosmology, eschatology) as essential and structural in human consciousness and life. Nor is there any need to maintain and treat it as a distinct epistemic domain like “religion,” which the West created by applying its own Western Christian logic, history, and criteria to non-European cosmographies. Here, it is just a referent when needed to speak of any so-called symbolic beliefs, texts, rituals, ceremonies, regardless of origins, including Christianity, from a non-eurocentric perspective that un-privileges the West and the Western Christian intellectual tradition it thinly conceals. Here, we also treat the invention of the concepts of *world religions* and *lesser religions* as auxiliary theological discourses used to reach, teach, and preach the foregone conclusion Western Christianity constitutes the only “true religion” in the world when in fact it is the *only religion* according its own analytical and epistemological standards.

Conclusion

With the foregoing context in mind, it is now time to revisit and answer the critical question: *What is religion?* If “religion” is not universal, autonomous, *sui generis*, transhistorical, et cetera, then what is it? In brief: this study finds it is a modern theological ideological construct that defines Western Christianity in opposition and as

superior to all other belief systems and traditions, past and present. Defining it by negation, by what it is not, and focusing on what it *does* as opposed to what the West purports it to be and do, exposes the concept as a weapon of colonialism/dominionism. Not only did it serve as the primary justification for Western Christian enslavement of Africans—based on the notion the targeted victims lacked religion or the proper religion—the same reasoning was applied to normalize and legalize the oppression and exploitation of non-believers across the globe. This study therefore does not offer a working definition of the term beyond its relationship to Western colonialism/dominionism. Instead, it centers and analyzes it solely in terms of its usage as a key component of the Christian colonizer’s toolkit to impose the values of the West on the rest of the world. From this perspective any attempts to define it otherwise are subject to fall into the epistemological trap of reifying a sociohistorical construction as reality rather than exposing and examining the nature and history of its constructedness and socialization.

Western Christians proclaim their faith to be *sui generis* and universal and define “religion” as a common, innate, and essential feature of human existence. This study finds it is common only from the Christian perspective within which it was conceived and globally disseminated, validated, and socialized. Its conception by Western Christian intellectuals therefore locates and establishes it as an historical object of social ideation with a genealogy subject to analysis and documentation. Despite the fact western academia’s deployment of the concepts of “religion” and “world religions obscure and conceal their roots in the Christian Intellectual Tradition and their roles in the *Colonizing Discourses of Christian Dominionism*, a growing cohort of scholars continue to historicize and expose its invention and discursive uses and purpose. Their findings underscore the

importance of this study's effort to reframe and re-center the western intellectual tradition—as represented by rationalism, empiricism, and the European Enlightenment—as the “modernized” (pseudo-secularized) expression of the Christian Intellectual Tradition and its dominionist agenda. By fully illuminating the colonialist/dominionist ideology behind the concepts of religion/world religions as serving the same Western Christian dominionist/imperialist agenda, this study aims to expose, confront, and dismantle the basic building blocks of whiteness/antiblackness and global white supremacist ideology.

CURRICULUM VITAE

John Chenault

EDUCATION

- 1977 B.F.A. Interdisciplinary Majors in Music and Creative Writing,
Union Institute, Cincinnati, OH
- 2006 M.S. Library Science, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY
- 2007 M.A. Pan African Studies, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY
- 2021 Ph.D. Pan African Studies, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

- 1972-1973 Instructor
Afro-American Studies Department
University of Cincinnati
Cincinnati, OH
- 1977-1978 Adjunct Faculty
Beacon College
Washington, D.C.
- 1977-1979 Director of Special Services for Disadvantaged Students
Washington International College
Washington, D.C.
- 1979-1981 Executive Dean
Washington International College
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- 2004-2007 Lecturer
University Libraries
University of Louisville
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- 2007-2020 Adjunct Faculty
Pan African Studies Department
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- 2007-2009 Instructor
 University Libraries
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- 2009-2014 Assistant Professor
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- 2014-2020 Associate Professor
 University Libraries
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- 2021-Present Director of Anti-Racism Initiatives
 University of Louisville School of Medicine
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- 2021-Present Associate Professor of Medicine
 Undergraduate Medical Education
 University of Louisville School of Medicine

OTHER POSITIONS AND EMPLOYMENT

- 1969-Present Freelance Writer/Composer/Producer
- 1976-1977 Interlibrary Loan Clerk
 U.S. Library of Congress
 Washington, D.C.
- 1982 -1986 Manager
 K.T.'s Den (family-owned nightclub)
 Cincinnati, OH
- 1986-1988 Manager
 VIP Transportation
 Cincinnati, OH
- 1988-1996 Executive Director
 Sickle Cell Awareness Group
 Cincinnati, OH

- 1996-2001 Consultant
Young Enterprises (Arts Education)
Fayetteville, GA

- 1997-1999 Bookseller
Borders Books & Music
Atlanta, GA

- 1999-2000 Customer Service
Earthlink Internet Service Provider
Atlanta, GA

- 2000-2001 Collections Specialist
Rollins Corporation
Atlanta, GA

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

- 1995-Present American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP)
- 2004-2019 Medical Library Association
- 2004-2021 Midwest Medical Library Association
- 2021-Present Kentucky Association of Black in Higher Education (KABHE)
- 2021-Present National Association of Medical Minority Educators (NAMME)

HONORS AND AWARDS

- 2001-2003 University of Louisville Graduate Teaching Fellowship

- 2003-2006 University of Louisville Libraries Residency Scholarship

- 2012 Winner: “Library Article of the Year Award” from *Kentucky Libraries* for:
“Investigating and improving medical education and library resources at
the Tamale Teaching Hospital in Northern Ghana: A case report.”

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS AND ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

University of Louisville Libraries

- 2003-2021 Kornhauser Health Sciences Library Clinical & Reference Team

- 2005-2021 Kornhauser Management Group

- 2005-2009 Editorial Board Member of the University Libraries newsletter “*The Owl*”

2006	Search Committee for UofL Libraries Associate Dean position
2006-2009	University Libraries Diversity Task Force
2007	Kornhauser Coordinator of the UofL “Big Read” initiative
2007-2010	ULF Executive Committee
2008-2009	University Library Faculty (ULF) Executive Committee, Chair
2008-2021	Library Liaison to the Institutional and Animal Care Use Committee (IACUC)
2013-2016	Academic Technology Committee (HSC campus)
2014-2017	Web Management Team
2014-2020	Faculty Personnel Committee
2015	Chair, Continuing Education Sub-Committee for the Midwest Medical Library Association Annual Meeting held in Louisville
2015	Search Committee for Kornhauser Emerging Technology Librarian
2017	Chaired Search Committee for Technology Specialist position
2019	Search Committee for Kornhauser Clinical Librarian
2018	Search Committee for Kornhauser Technology Librarian

Service to the University

2002	Music Director for African American Theatre Program production of “Trane Beyond the Blues.”
2004	President’s Distinguished Faculty Awards Committee
2006	Voice Coach and Vocal Arranger for African American Theatre Program production of “In the Blood.”
2007-2011	Academic Program Review Committee
2011	SACS: Student Complaint Team (for Student Affairs and Services Sub-Committee)

- 2013 Medical Education Cultural Competency Committee
- 2013-2016 Academic Technology Committee (University-wide committee)
- 2015-2018 Chair: Faculty Concerns Committee, Commission on Diversity and Racial Equality (CODRE)
- 2015-2018 Commission on Diversity and Racial Equality (CODRE).

Service to the Community

- 2008-2009 Board member: Kentucky Equal Justice Center (KEJC), Lexington, KY.
- 2016-2020 Appointed by Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear to the State Board of Directors for the Kentucky Center for African American Heritage (KCAAH)
- 2016-Present Instructor/Developer of lectures and workshops for educational and event programming at the Kentucky Center for African American Heritage (KCAAH) and its regular educational and event programming
- 2020 Appointed by Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear to State Board of Directors for the Kentucky Center for African American Heritage (KCAAH)
- 2020 Elected to serve on the Foundation Board of the Kentucky Center for African American Heritage (KCAAH)

International Service

- 2008 Represented UofL Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and International Studies Programs, College of Arts and Sciences, at "Learning Africa:" 4th International Conference on ICT for Development, Education and Training in Dakar, Senegal, West Africa, May.
- 2009-2014 Provided research services, consultations, and workshops for Office of Diversity, Inclusion and International Studies Programs, College of Arts and Sciences in Dakar, Senegal, and Panama City, Panama.
- 2009 Provided Library Orientation and Endnote training workshops for students and faculty at Quality Leadership University, a UofL-affiliated institution in Panama City, Panama, December.
- 2010 Provided Library Orientation and Endnote training workshops for students and faculty at Quality Leadership University, a UofL-affiliated institution in Panama City, Panama, December.

- 2010 Represented Pan African Studies Department at the UNESCO International Conference on “Teaching African Diaspora History and Slavery and the Slave Trade,” Harriet Tubman Institute for Research on the Global Migrations of African People, York University, Toronto, Canada, November.
- 2011 Invited by CEO of the Tamale Medical Hospital, Tamale, Ghana, via the School of Public Health and Information Science (SPHIS), to conduct a series of workshops on medical database research and open source medical resources for medical students, nursing students, technology staff, faculty and physicians at the hospital and its affiliate, the University for Development Studies Medical School, July-August.
- 2012 Escorted nine (9) students from the Ali Institute on a study-abroad trip to Dakar and Saint Louis, Senegal. Assisted with tours of historical sites, visits to government offices and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), tours of medical clinics and hospitals, and meetings with community leaders and organizations, July.
- 2012 Submitted grant application to the Elsevier Foundation’s “Innovative Libraries in Developing Countries Program” requesting \$100,000 to establish the “Kindle E-Reader Mobile Medical Library Project” at the Tamale Teaching Hospital (TTH) and University of Development Studies (UDS) Medical School in Tamale, Ghana. The project was not selected for funding. June.
- 2012 Conducted workshop on “African Diaspora” for joint class of UofL students and students from the Universite Gaston Berger (UGB) in Saint Louis, Senegal. Met with university officials on behalf of the International Studies Program of the College of Arts and Sciences including the Rector of the University; Director of the Institute for Distance Studies; the Associate Dean of the Medical School, July.
- 2012 Conducted workshop on “PubMed and Other Open Source Databases” for Medical School faculty and librarians, Universite Gaston Berger Medical School, July.
- 2014 Taught Humanities 125 course for UofL affiliate institution, Quality Leadership University, in Panama, City Panama, July-August.

School of Medicine

2021-Present Director, Anti-Racism Task Force
2021-Present M1-M2 Course Director Committee
2021-Present M3- M4 Course Director Committee
2021-Present Integration Subcommittee
2021-Present Education Program Committee

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Kornhauser Library Workshops and Courses

2006-2020 PubMed and Database Research
2007-2020 Endnote Citation Management Software
2017 Journal Publication Selection and Submission Process

Pan African Studies Courses Offered to Students (Instructor/Developer)

2007-2009 PAS 200-50 Introduction to Pan African Studies
2009-2010 PAS 300-53 Resistance and Rebellion in the Slavery Era
2009-2020 PAS 329-50 Slavery and the Slave Trade
2009-2021 PAS 227-50 Survey of American Diversity
2010-2012 PAS 205-50 Race, Color and Consciousness
2010-2021 PAS 214-50 African American Music (cross-listed with MUH 214-50)

School of Medicine

Courses Offered to Faculty

2020 **Instructor/Developer:** "The Social Construction of Race and its Impact on Medicine and Biomedical Research," for the Health Sciences Campus (HSC) Faculty Development Program, September.
2020 **Instructor/Developer:** "Medicine and the Black Body" for the HSC Faculty Development Program, September.

Undergraduate Medical Education Course Lectures for Students

2020-2022 **Instructor/Developer:** "Medicine and the Black Body" for 2nd year students in "Introduction to Clinical Medicine 2 (ICM). The lecture introduces the historical competencies needed to move to a post racial modality in medical education, biomedical research, and clinical care.

- 2020-2022 **Instructor/Developer:** “Social Construction of Race” for 1st year medical students in ICM 1. The lecture introduces the structural competencies needed to move to a post racial modality in medical education, biomedical research, and clinical care.
- 2021-2022 **Co-Instructor/Developer:** “History of Medicine” in ICM 1. This lecture provides a broad overview of the history of medicine with a focus US history from the colonial era to the early twentieth century.
- 2021-2022 **Co-Instructor:** Society Medicine and Social Justice (elective).
- 2021-2022 **Instructor/Developer:** “Medicine and the Black Body” for ICM 1.

EDITORIAL WORK

Journal Reviewer

- 2014 The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science
- 2017 Race/Ethnicity: A publication of the Kirwan Institute
- 2018 Journal of Health Disparities Research and Practice

PRESENTATIONS

Lecture Presentations

International Invited Lecture Presentations

1. **Chenault, J.** “PubMed and Other Open Source Databases” for Grand Rounds, Tamale Medical Teaching Hospital, Tamale, Ghana, August 2011.
2. **Chenault, J.** “Medicine and the Black Body,” the opening plenary session for the Virtual International Conference of the Association of Standardized Patient Educators (ASPE). 2020.

National Invited Lecture Presentations

3. **Chenault, J.** “Motherhood, Slavery, and the Invention of Race,” Dr. Joseph H. McMillan National Conference on the Black Family in America, sponsored by the UofL Cultural Center, February 2016
4. **Chenault, J.** Webinar: “Social Construction of Race” hosted by the Association of Standardized Patient Educators (ASPE). October 2020.

5. Park, C., Bohnert, C., **Chenault, J.** “Navigating Uncharted Waters: Simulation in the age of Covid- 19” Webinar sponsored by Simulated and Integrated Learning (SAIL) at the University of Illinois College of Medicine, and the Standardize Patient Program at the University of Louisville. October 2020.
6. **Chenault, J.** “Fundamental Causes: How the Covid-19 Pandemic Further Exposes Systemic Racism and its Impact on Children and Adolescents,” 10th Annual Pediatric Behavioral and Mental Health Symposium, hosted by Norton Healthcare in Louisville, KY. September 2021.
7. **Chenault, J.** Keynote Presentation: “Medicine and the Black Body” Association of Psychologists in Academic Health Centers (APAHC) Virtual Annual Conference. March 2021.

Regional/Local Invited Lecture Presentations

8. **Chenault, J.** “From citation management to knowledge management: Developing and implementing innovative EndNote training and support services on the health sciences campus,” Midwest Medical Library Association Conference (MCMLA), Indianapolis Indiana. October 2011.
9. **Chenault, J.** “From citation management to knowledge management: Developing and implementing innovative EndNote training and support services on the health sciences campus” at KLA LIRT Library Instruction Retreat at Eastern Kentucky University, June 2013.
10. **Chenault, J.** “Medicine and the Black Body,” Kentucky Psychology Association Virtual Annual Meeting. 2021
11. **Chenault, J.** Grand Rounds: “Medicine and the Black Body,” Department of Psychiatry, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center/Geisel School of Medicine, Lebanon, NH. 2021.
12. **Chenault, J.** Grand Rounds: “Medicine and the Black Body” Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Psychology, Norton Healthcare, Louisville, KY. 2021
13. **Chenault, J.** “Medicine and the Black Body” hosted by the UofL School of Nursing (SON) at SON Annual Faculty Retreat. 2021
14. **Chenault, J.** “Medicine and the Black Body” Kentucky Association of Blacks in Higher Education Annual Meeting. 2021.

Other Invited Local Presentations

15. **Chenault, J.** Office of International, Diversity, and Outreach Programs: Network Luncheon at the University Club on the topic: “Critical Thinking and Art,” November 2010
16. Panelists: Best, L.E., **Chenault, J.** Garza, F., Jackson, T. “Lunch & Learn” seminar: “Racial Conflicts and the Impact on our Health,” sponsored by the (HSC) Office of Diversity and Inclusion, August 2015.
17. **Chenault, J.** “The Invention of Race & its Use and Misuse in Medicine & Biomedical Research” for the “Lunch & Learn” series sponsored by the Health Sciences Campus (HSC) Office of Diversity and Inclusion, UofL, March 2015.
18. **Chenault, J.** “Medicine and the Black Body” for the HSC Office of Diversity and Inclusion “Lunch and Learn” series on UofL’s Health Sciences Campus, February 2017.
19. **Chenault, J.** “Medicine and the Black Body” hosted by the Kentucky Center for African American Heritage (KCAAH), Louisville, KY, February 2021.
20. Panelist: “Intersection of Social Justice & Healthcare - A Dangerous Idea, Eugenics, Genetics & the American Dream” Kentucky Nurses Association. June 2021.
21. **Chenault, J.** “Medicine and the Black Body” for the Residency Chaplaincy Services for UofL Health. July 2021.
22. **Chenault, J.** “Medicine and the Black Body” for Pharmacy/Toxicology Department. October 2021.
23. **Chenault, J.** “Social Construction of Race” for Pharmacy/Toxicology Department. January 2022.

POSTERS (Regional/Local)

24. Atlas, M, **Chenault, J.**, & E Smigielski, “One Department—Many services: Kornhauser Library’s clinical librarianship experience with the University of Louisville’s School of Medicine’s Department of Pediatrics” Poster Presentation. Medical Library Association Midwest Chapter Annual Meeting (MCMLA), Columbus, Ohio .2009.

25. Hundley, C., Wilson, RW, Smimble, J and **Chenault, J.** Are Fringe Banks Impacting Our Health? Kentucky Public Health Association Annual Conference, Owensboro, KY. 2016.
26. Hundley, C., Wilson, RW, Smimble, J and **Chenault, J.** Are Fringe Banks Impacting Our Health? Kentucky Public Health Association, Research Louisville. 2016.

PEER-REVIEWED ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLES

1. **Chenault, J.** From citation management to knowledge management: developing and implementing innovative endnote training and support services on the health sciences campus. *Kentucky Libraries*, 2011. 75(1), 6-11.

Chenault, J. Investigating and improving medical education and library resources at the Tamale Teaching Hospital in Northern Ghana: A case report, Part 1. *Kentucky Libraries*. 2012. 76(2), 16-23.
2. **Chenault, J.** Investigating and improving medical education and library resources at the Tamale Teaching Hospital in Northern Ghana: A case report, Part 2. *Kentucky Libraries*. 2012. 76(3), 12-19.
3. **Chenault, J.** The myth of freedom on information in the United States. *Kentucky Libraries*. 2014. 78(2), 32-39.
4. Best, L.E., & **Chenault, J.** Racial classifications, biomarkers, and the challenges of health disparities research in the African Diaspora. 2014. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 7(1), 74-98.
5. Head, B., Schapmire, T., Earnshaw, L., **Chenault, J.**, Pfeifer, M., Sawning, S., & Shaw, M. A. Improving medical graduates' training in palliative care: advancing education and practice. *Advances in Medical Education and Practice*. 2016. 7, 1-14.
6. Karani, R., Varpio, L., May, W., Horsley, T., **Chenault, J.**, Miller, K. H., & O'Brien, B. Commentary: Racism and bias in health professions education: how educators, faculty developers, and researchers can make a difference. *Academic Medicine*. 2017. 92(11 Supplement), S1-s6. doi:10.1097/acm.0000000000001928
7. Hundley, C. L., Wilson, R. W., **Chenault, J.**, & Smimble, J. L. Is fringe banking a component of socially determined health? *American Journal of Health Studies*, 2017. 32(3), 149.

OTHER SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Newsletters

1. **Chenault, J.** "Blogging in the Library" *The Owl* (UofL). 2005. vol. 20, no. 8.
2. **Chenault, J.** "Who am I." *Celebrating Diversity*, a publication of the HSC Office of Diversity and Inclusion & the Commission on Diversity and Racial Equality (CODRE) University of Louisville. 2014.
3. **Chenault, J.** "The invention of race." *Celebrating Diversity*, a publication of the Health Sciences Campus (HSC) Office of Diversity and Inclusion & the Commission on Diversity and Racial Equality (CODRE), University of Louisville. 2015.

Book Chapter

1. Reynolds, Latisha, Caroline Daniels, **John Chenault**, and Toccara Porter. "The development of the University of Louisville Libraries' Residency Program." *The New Graduate Experience: Post-MLS Residency Programs and Early Career Librarianship*. Eds. Megan Zoe Perez and Cindy Ann Gruwell. 2011. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited. 47-59.

Books

1. **Chenault, J.** "Blue Blackness," (poems). 1969. Seven Hills, Cincinnati, OH
2. **Chenault, J.** "The Invisible Man Returns, selected poems. 1992. Ventana Media, Cincinnati, OH

Anthologies and Literary Journals

1. **Chenault, J.** "To Gwen Brooks." *To Gwen With Love: An Anthology Dedicated to Poet Gwendolyn Brooks*. Chicago: Johnson Publications. 1971. pp 17-19.
2. **Chenault, J.** "Two Poems." *Time Ta Greeze, An Anthology of Third World Literature*. San Francisco. 1975. Glide/Third World Communications Press: pp. 87-89.
3. **Chenault, J.** "The Wake." *BOP: Blacks on Paper*. 1976. Afro-American Studies Department, Providence: Brown U. p. 49.
4. **Chenault, J.** "Four Poems." *Confrontation: Journal of Third World Studies*. Afro-American Studies Program, Ohio U. Athens, OH. 1978. (Winter) 2.3: pp 64-66.

Selected Magazine Articles

1. **Chenault, J.** "Health and Wellness: Issues of survival in the twentieth century." Applause Magazine. Cincinnati, OH. 1991. (May): pp. 36-40.
2. **Chenault, J.** "The Black Madonna and Child: A history ignored." Applause Magazine. Cincinnati, OH. 1991. (Dec./Jan.): pp. 43- 45.
3. **Chenault, J.** "How to save your life." (Book review) Applause Magazine. Cincinnati, OH. 1991. (Dec./Jan.): p. 22.
4. **Chenault, J.** "Civil Rights in the nineties: Three interviews." Applause Magazine Cincinnati. OH. 1992. (Feb./Mar.): pp. 51-53, 90, 247.
5. **Chenault, J.** "A candid interview with Superintendent Michael Brandt." Applause Magazine. Cincinnati. OH. 1992. (Sept.): pp. 43-46.
6. **Chenault, J.** "Athol Fugard: The relentless voice of conscience." StageTwo. Cincinnati. OH. 1992. (Sept.): pp. 2-3.
7. **Chenault, J.** "Spike Lee's Malcolm X." (film review) Artrage Magazine. London. UK. 1992 (Dec.): pp. 32-33.
8. **Chenault, J.** "Where the Niger Meets the Congo: the Roots of Afro-Cuban Music." Artrage Magazine. London, UK. 1993. (July).
9. **Chenault, J.** "Lynching, Literature, and Rodney King." Artrage Magazine. London. UK 1993. (May): pp. 16-17.
10. **Chenault, J.** "Roots Branches and Fruits of the African Tree of Life." Artrage Magazine. London, UK. 1993. (Mar.): pp. 6-7.

Selected Compositions and Productions

1. **Chenault, J.** (librettist/composer) "Blood Rituals:" a two-act musical. Commissioned for the National Conference of Social Workers. Director. Charles Holmond. Performers: Black Arts Ensemble. Premiered, Cincinnati Playhouse, Cincinnati, OH. September 12, 1971.
2. **Chenault, J.** (screenplay) Young Men Grow Older: half-hour television drama. Director. Charles Holmond. Producer. Jerome Manigan. Nominated for Emmy Award for Community Television (1972). Received National Conference of Christian & Jews Brotherhood Award (1972). Premiered, WLW TV: AVCO Broadcasting, Cincinnati, OH. 17 December 17, 1972.

3. **Chenault, J.** (producer) "Paul Robeson: a two-act play." By Phillip Hayes Dean. Director Harold Scott. Performer, Avery Brooks. Midwest Premiere, Taft Theater, Cincinnati, OH. February 13-17, 1990.
4. **Chenault, J.** (librettist)"Ghost in Machine: a music drama for vocalist, narrator, orchestra." Commissioned for the 100th anniversary season of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra (CSO). Frank Proto (composer). Jesus Lopez-Cobos (conductor). Charles Holmond (director). Performed: Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Cleo Laine (vocalist), Paul Winfield (actor) Premiered, Music Hall, Cincinnati. OH. April 28, 1995.
5. **Chenault, J.** (librettist/director) "Yesterday's News: a satire for jazz band with actors and vocalist." Commissioned (1998), University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music (CCM). Frank Proto (composer/conductor). Performed CCM Jazz Band. Premiered, Corbett Auditorium, Cincinnati, OH. April 25, 1999.
6. **Chenault, J.** (librettist/director) "The Fools of Time," a jazz composition for band and vocalist. Commissioned (1999) by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts as part of the Louis Armstrong Legacy Series and the Kennedy Center's Millennium Season. Frank Proto (composer) John Dankworth (arranger/conductor). Performed Dame Cleo Laine (vocalist) and the John Dankworth Group. Premiered, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C. February 11, 2000.
7. **Chenault, J.** (librettist/director) "My Name is Citizen Soldier: a music drama for orchestra and narrator." Commissioned (1999) by the American Composers Forum: Continental Harmony - New Music for the Millennium Project, for the tenth anniversary season of the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, and to commemorate the opening of the National D-Day Museum. Frank Proto (composer), Klauspeter Seibel (conductor). Performed: Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, Paul Winfield (actor). Premiered, Orpheum Theater, New Orleans, LA. September 14, 2000.
8. **Chenault, J.** (librettist) "The Tuner: A Musical Prophecy in Seven Scenes for Vocalist, Actors and Musicians." Commissioned 2005 by the International Society of Bassists. Frank Proto (composer). Charles Holmond (director. Performers: Carmen Baltrop (vocalist), Reginald Willis (actor), Rick Van Matre (saxophones and clarinet), Frank Proto (double bass and piano), additional voices John Chenault. Premiered Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, June 11, 2006.

9. **Chenault, J.** (librettist), Proto, Frank (composer), Long, Timothy (conductor) Major, Leon (director), "Shadowboxer: An opera inspired by the life of Joe Louis," Commissioned by the Music School and Opera Studio of the University of Maryland (UM), College Park, at the Clarice Smith Center for Performing Arts, UM, College Park, Maryland, April 10, 2010.
10. **Chenault, J.** (librettist), Proto, Frank (composer), Long, Timothy (conductor), Major, Leon (director), Black-Sotir, Carolyn (producer), "Shadowboxer: An opera inspired by the life of Joe Louis," Center Stage Play Lab series productions at Morgan State University, Baltimore, Maryland, May 13 & 14, and at the Peabody Institute, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, May 15, 2016.
11. **Chenault, J.** (playwright) "Bloodline Rumba: a two-act play", produced by UofL Theatre Arts Department, directed by Nefertiti Burton, premiered February 3-6, 2016.

Audio Recording

1. **Chenault, J.** (poems). Hughes, L. (poems). "Afro-American Fragments." Proto, Frank (composer) Performed. Ensemble Sans Frontiere, featuring Charles Holmond (actor) John Blake (violinist). Distributed by Red Mark Records. Recorded, Ultrasuede Studios, Cincinnati, OH. Jan. 22, October. 17, November. 16, 1997.

Recent Media Appearances

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| 2013 | Chenault, J. Provided research assistance on the history of slavery in Louisville and gave interview for the WAVE-TV production "Progeny of the Passage," produced in conjunction with the "Spirits of the Passage" exhibit at the Frazier History Museum. Broadcast date: March 5. |
| 2017 | Hughes, K. Chenault, J. Radio Broadcast: "TheVille" 93.9 FM "Racial Disparities in Medicine," hosted by Mark Hebert, December 19. |