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African Americans' religious expression may be significantly related to social change and cultural shifts. African American Christians engaged in worship, praise, and practice, were probably immersed in a fluid interplay between religiosity and spirituality, within the context of a troublesome racial legacy. Writers often employ literature to deliver the experiences of people; therefore, it seems logical to examine the literary social elite when attempting to explore religion. This research concerns to what degree did religious and/or spiritual dialogue manifest in black literature from slavery to postmodernity. Foucault provides exemplary ways to interpret organic meaning-making within the context of life course experiences. Therefore, a Foucauldian approach was used to navigate the sensitive minefield that is black religion, expression, and spirituality. The findings suggest that from 1619 to 2006, religious and spiritual representations in literature seemed to reflect black's experiences with slavery, emancipation, civil rights and the black power movement, and postmodernity.

POSTMODERNITY AND THE HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGIOUS  
REPRESENTATIONS: A FOUCAULDIAN APPROACH

By

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### *Phenomenon to be explored*

This study explores the degree to which religiosity and spirituality are represented in African American literature as forms of religion during slavery, emancipation, civil rights and black power movements, and postmodernity. Religiosity concerns worship practices and/or ritualistic appraisals that may be void of individual belief. Spirituality represents secular concepts infused with religious concepts, adaptable to the social environment. African American literary discourse will be examined to determine whether prominent literary artists have focused more on religiosity or spirituality. Additionally, has variation in representation of religiosity and spirituality occurred within the context of social changes?

Michel Foucault argues that guidelines that help define social boundaries and truths are related to the social construction of meanings. According to Foucault, social history and/or human interaction restricts discourse, yielding chance appearances from a select group of literary agents who are afforded the privilege of limited power to express and influence ways of being (for purposes of this research, religiosity and spirituality). It logically follows that Foucault provides a viable vehicle to navigate through the social literary minefield that is religiosity and spirituality.

Foucault creates a story around discourse activities that pulsate with energy forming methods of understanding and creating reality through assigning meaning. History is always alive, according to Foucault, so there is no reason to exhume what has never been dead. It is always shifting and bending to fit the needs of the current generation; antiquated meaning or representation can become relevant again and conventional meaning can suddenly become invalid depending on significant historical events. Even supposed individuals become “activities” or “works in progress” as the alterations in history become their personal tailor, fitting them with different titles to wear, albeit temporarily. Sartre (1992) asserted that people do not own the rights to define themselves; labels are placed on them against their will. While humans do have the ability to influence others’ perception of them, the knowledge acquired through truth games in discourses—prior to the subjects’ opinions in the matter—has already taken on the task of defining each categorized person to the world through assigned representation. Allan (2006, p. 300) stated that “In the modern episteme mankind becomes the object of study, not as part of an aesthetic whole, but as a thing in its own right.” Foucault contended that the human sciences, given the task of defining people to themselves, sought to gain “the status of science” by creating the dialectical “man” and turning human subjects into objects for discourse (Allan, 2006, p. 300).

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, newly enslaved Africans were turned into two-dimensional characters, suitable for mindless work and subjugation. Consequently, the prolonged enslavement—ending during the 19<sup>th</sup> century—contributed to the representation of the Negro as a sign of inferiority. And because of their locality within

the Classical episteme, only their outer characteristics were needed to confirm the sign of their “Negroeness,” while their extensive unpaid labor and destitution was used to impregnate this sign with representations of inferiority. This two-dimensionality, according to Foucault (1994), would exhaust itself as the modern episteme began and slavery ended; the two-dimensional object of an externally assigned and ordered category would obtain depth through internal operation, becoming three-dimensional and able to serve a function rather than remain within a fixed place in society. But even with the advent of three-dimensionality, and the ability to move more freely within society after slavery; even with the ability to work for wages and upward mobility rather than remain stagnant within the bottom caste of American labor, Negroes were still defined through the external source of the dominant white social and scientific community. The introduction of the African American literary artist provided a counter-discourse to the modern idea of the three-dimensional human being that could be transcended and objectively studied by a predominantly white scientific discourse.

In his work, Foucault used the constructed meanings in past eras to reveal the prevalent discourses along with the important events that either changed them or added to them. In *Madness and Civilization*, through symbolism, he showed a proliferation of meaning transpiring after the earlier representations: day and night; brightness and shadows, are examples of the symbols used. According to Foucault (1988), there is a dazzlement that occurs when the imagination is given the reins of attention. “Dazzlement is night in broad daylight, the darkness that rules at the very heart of what is excessive in light’s radiance. Dazzled reason opens its eyes upon the sun and sees nothing” (1988, p.

108). This is the mark of unreason. Ironically, this surplus of representations or images, a confusion of pictures and whirlwind of meaning, was rewarded and appreciated during the Renaissance. However, with the inception of the Classical thinker, a clear line between night and day was required and excess images and meanings were invalidated (Foucault, 1988). Only certain representations were deemed acceptable through discourse, and individual experiences, if not validated by pre-established categories, were unjustifiable. Foucault understood the subversion of excess images by reasonable ones to be the result of the desire of Classical thinkers to obtain “flawless unity of knowledge” at the expense of unique, imagined, antiquated, or unreasonable images (Foucault, 1988, p. 109). Prior representations became antiquated by a new Classical order.

Foucault’s symbolism for excess meaning was also inspired by Surrealist painter Renee Magritte. A picture by Magritte (*The Treachery of Images*) included a painting of a pipe with the inscription: “This is not a pipe” below it (Foucault, 1983, p. 15). The confusion that such an image caused by negating the very representation assigned it informed Foucault’s (1983) book entitled: *This is Not a Pipe*. Foucault focused on how the visual representation had become entangled with the actual plastic entity, causing confusion in the observer who viewed complete continuity between the created image in a painting and what it purported to represent outside of itself. The painting was of a pipe, but it was a representation of what we understand a pipe to be, not an actual pipe. In his book, Foucault explored verbal representations that became entangled with the notion of actual things; however, through relative discourses, those representations increased exponentially and began to only signify themselves. As Foucault (1983, p. 30) explained:

“It is *not* a pipe. No more on the board than above it, the drawing of the pipe and the text presumed to name it find nowhere to meet and be superimposed.” The postmodern society appeared through the notion of a saturation of text: the observation of text gradually separated from what it claimed to represent yet still relied on, as a positive source of knowledge, to understand the world (Foucault, 1994).

To further reveal the separation of text from things, Foucault (1994) explored the wild behavior of literature throughout the modern episteme as a nagging albatross to the subjective, dialectical man, who used it to affirm his transcendence. But as easily as Surrealist painter Renee Magritte could print, “This is not a pipe,” below a picture, he could have also printed, “This *is* a pipe.” And aside from a few giggles at the redundancy of the text, would have been received all the same. Literature continually takes back its affirming nature—the boundless ability to experience, interpret, and signify—originating in the Renaissance, and refuses to act as the subordinate ordering medium of modernity. It is here that African American literary artists both reside in and depend on the rules of the modern episteme to order and explain their experiences. However, simultaneously, they allow use language itself to escape mockingly into unruly territory, forming a persistent counter-discourse. Consequently, within a modern episteme of transcendental order instead of Classical ordering; three-dimensionality instead of two-dimensionality; religious institutions instead of experiential mysticism; and physical freedom instead of slavery, black literature has inscribed in its texts the energy exchange and influence between discourse and counter-discourse. The inconsistency of modernity is evidenced through the language that refuses to be tamed.

Tension and contradiction of language is also present in discussions of African American religion pertaining to the correct representations for Christianity between conservative religiosity representations and secular-infused spirituality ones. E. Franklin Frazier (1963) stated that the lower class members in the African American community revolted against increasingly secularized black religion. Mainline Methodist and Baptist churches tend to adapt to the dominant culture, presenting a more worldly approach than fundamentalist sects which espouse interpretations from the bible and rely primarily on otherworldly teachings from Christian doctrines (Sherkat, 2001, 2002). For example, Martin Luther King, a mainstream civil rights leader and minister, adapted his religious representations according to social pressures by politicizing his religious message and gaining spiritual influence from Gandhi, a Hindu. However, some religious African Americans resent the mixing of politics and religious teachings. They feel nostalgia for the “old time religion” where Jesus was valued over material or worldly-based activities and other gods. A longing for a discourse pertaining to actual Christian scripture, rather than politics, caused some African Americans to leave mainline churches for more conservative or fundamentalist sects where religiosity communion was possible (Sherkat, 2001).

Religious representations can also be influenced by long-term traumatic experiences such as slavery. Slavery is a form of abuse. Bell hooks (2003) believed that slavery effected post-traumatic stress syndrome, a long-term trauma affecting responses, perhaps in the form of a body of beliefs developed specifically to meet trauma and overcome it. Religiosity, as the reliance on routine practice and strict adherence to

doctrine, interprets the present environment so that it complies with strict conservative notions of religion. Post-traumatic stress from an unpredictable and unstable experience with slavery and racism could lead to adherence to a strict religious belief system as the substitute for a stable environment. Spirituality provides a venue whereby people cope with social events, and altered representations reflect differentiated histories. Through the Foucauldian approach, the interaction and tension between the secular-infused spirituality and doctrine-loyal religiosity will be explored, along with the relationship between literature and modern order.

African American religious discussions produce significant meanings for black culture. (Akinyela, 2003). Besecke (2001) contended that simultaneous connectedness and transcendence is inevitable given “reflexive spirituality.” Besecke (2001, p. 365) affirmed that spirituality includes and examines many religious systems in the whirlwind of postmodern meaning-making. Thomas Altizer explained this postmodern feeling of surplus meaning-making in detail:

While there are innumerable names of God in our languages, mythologies, and traditions, we now know that there is no possibility whatsoever of reconciling these into a common name of God, or a universal image of God, or a universal concept of God. Hence every truly universal or natural theology has long since disappeared from our world, a disappearance, which is also a disappearance of a common understanding or a common meaning of God. In our century there has not been a major philosopher who could think clearly or decisively about God, and at no other point is there a greater gulf between contemporary philosophy and all previous philosophy. There is no truly major work of twentieth-century art or literature which can openly envision God, or which can fully call forth a God who is not a truly distant, or empty, or alien God. To actually or fully speak of God in our world is to evoke a wholly mysterious, or vacuous, or annihilating presence. (2003, p. 1)

Altizer would describe this phenomenon as “nothingness” or the liberation of the unknown through this inability to reach a consensus. “God” becomes the unknown expressing itself through this very inability to completely explain it: “Now it could be said that our deepest twentieth-century images of God are images of the anonymity of God, the total anonymity of God” (2003, p. 2). Pargament et al. (1995, p. 979) found that “religion appears to mean different things to different people” and that “many people may not be well-attuned to the meanings they attach to religion.” Grant (2001, p. 247) found that “scholars have become increasingly sensitive to the fact that the meanings evoked by religious symbols, stories, and practices are not universally shared and that they vary by social context.” It is in this context—postmodernity—that the discourse of African American religion must now operate and establish meaning.

Besecke’s (2001) reflexive spirituality allows individuals to connect through the contemplation of transcendent meaning in a rational society. Through reflexive creation and synthesis of meaning pertaining to spirituality, individuals connect their mystical experiences to those of others within the community. This results in an amalgamation of religious beliefs that create a meaning that does not contradict rationality; instead, it adapts to it (secularizes) and even influences its course. Therefore, discussion about spirituality that examines many religions and incorporates practicality and adaptability in order to compose one grand transcendent meaning causes community connection. An even greater transcendent meaning is then more possible than when the religious beliefs considered were merely pieces of an underdeveloped puzzle, according to Besecke (2001). Therefore, through the piecing together of diverse religious systems and the

practical and conventional organizing thereof, the meaning supposedly becomes further removed from the idiosyncratic practices of separate systems and closer to *true* transcendent meaning. Altizer (2003), however, would contend that this safe guard against the surplus of meaning through reflexivity is actually a confirmation or affirmation of the anonymity of God. The spiritual discussions involving adaptation—through the acceptance of many different secular and mystical representations—affirms a transcendent meaning in the form of an unknown God. The surplus reflexivity and impregnation of the representation of God with many diverse meanings supports Foucault’s (1983) vision of texts of discourses pointing only to themselves in a postmodern society of saturated meaning. In postmodernity, whether African Americans continue to adapt by adopting new beliefs and gaining inspiration from the secular world or rely increasingly on doctrine-loyal ones is an important issue in determining the process of coping with environmental tensions such as slavery, new freedom, and racism.

### ***Review of literature***

Religion has been prevalent within the black community in America since the inception of slavery. Through slavery, many African cultural concepts were lost. Christianity provided a means to reestablish community bonds through religious gatherings and meaning-making. African Americans were able to connect with each other through church life and discourse.

The research on African American religion has mostly neglected the comparison of religiosity and spirituality approaches to religion. Many researchers consider both spirituality and religiosity as characteristics of the same experience, or steps within a process rather than distinct categories. For this reason spirituality and religiosity are often used interchangeably in research. Hill and Pargament (2003, p. 64) contended that religiosity cannot be ignored in the development and cultivation of spirituality: “The term *religion* is becoming reified into a fixed system of ideas or ideological commitments that ‘fail to represent the dynamic personal element in human piety’” (Wuff, 1996, p. 46). They emphasized that many spiritual experiences are informed by religious teachings and religious systems of belief. Therefore, spirituality is an outgrowth of religiosity. Mattis (2000, p. 101) visualized religiosity “as a path and spirituality as an outcome” therefore irreversibly connecting the two in a smooth process from learning and practicing (religiosity) to applied use (spirituality). Besecke (2001) acknowledged the importance of religious systems of belief in the cultivation of a transcendent meaning. Fernander et al. (2004) also acknowledged that religion provides the foundation for spirituality. In this regard, religiosity demands ritualism and relative adherence to biblical scripture, which may nurture spiritual development.

Some researchers, however, have distinguished between religiosity, or religiousness, and spirituality, finding that religion was related to religious institutions while spirituality was not restricted to formal institutions (Paragment, 1997; Levin, 1996). Levin, Taylor, & Chatters (1995) asserted that African Americans’ religious experience and involvement is three-dimensional and expressed through organizational,

nonorganizational, and subjective religiosity. Lergere (1984) found that spirituality has to do with experiences and is spontaneous, compared to religion, which is a codified conceptualization of the individual spiritual experiences. But in capturing the essence of the experience of God, researchers have relied mostly on the codification and quantification of experiences and language, such as through surveying. The modern episteme weighs heavily on the approaches of the human sciences in interpreting human experiences in an objective, calculable way, in order to transcendently interpret the simplest ordering of human subjects in society (Foucault, 1994). The probabilities of the behavior and temperament of human subjects, based on religious beliefs, have been recorded by the modern man in the form of the human science researcher.

The effect religion has on African Americans socially has been a topic extensively explored over recent years. The church is perceived to be very important in solidifying the African American community (Wong, 1998). Depressive symptoms displayed by African Americans in a southeastern community correlated with a lack of denominational affiliation (Ellison, 1995). Brodsky (2000) discovered that some African American single mothers had positive experiences in religious institutions, while some had mostly negative experiences.

Religious involvement has been shown to increase social activism. Pattilo-McCoy (1998) found that black churches encouraged activism in addition to otherworldly worship. God was presumed to be active in worldly affairs and by default the black church encourages civic duty and volunteer work outside of the church. However, Fitzgerald and Spohn (2005) discovered that church attendance alone did not

automatically render one politically active. The culture of the church had to be politicized in order to incite activism in members who were not previously active. In addition, they found that highly educated members and those who were active in political issues in the church had previously been exposed to organizations in which they helped blacks outside of the church. Subsequently, they brought the message to fellow church members who had not been involved in organizations outside of church or had a lower education. Brown et al. (2003) countered activism originating outside of the church in their findings; church activism, including being involved in church committees, youth programs, and missionary work, increased the likelihood of being involved in political activism, perhaps because church committees helped members build leadership skills that paralleled those needed in political activism.

Barnes (2005) found a link between unique church cultures and community activism through voter-registration and substance abuse programs. Brown and Brown (2003) also discovered that simply attending church did not cause political activism, but instead of political activism being dependent on education and prior experience in organizations, class was correlated with political activism. Middle class black churches were disproportionately more inclined to be exposed to political activism through church than the lower class. However, Chatters et al (1999) found that income was inversely related to measures of spiritual comfort and intensity of denominational involvement. Baer (1988) found black mainstream churches accommodative in response to racism and social stratification. The black church appeared to legitimize the current state of society rather than work toward social change and black theology. He encouraged black

churches to follow the lead of theologians James Cone and Cornel West in their fusing of social issues and religious ones to better the black condition. Billingsley and Caldwell (1994) examined the factors leading to activism within Northern black churches. They found that the existence of a community crisis, a strong black minister, and a strong black church predicted community activism. Harris (1994) argued that religion serves as both an organizational and psychological resource for African Americans; also acting as a catalyst to collective political activism.

Relationships among African Americans within the church have been examined recently. Parents and married persons were more likely to receive supportive relationships from church members than non-married and childless members; the idea of the church as a surrogate family notwithstanding (Chatters et al., 2002). Perhaps because of this, marital status is positively linked with religious involvement and church service attendance (Chatters et al., 1999). Ellison's (1998) research led to a different result: religious institutions increased the social resources of African Americans in general; church members provided informal social support, especially to the elderly, poor, and sick. In fact, the commitment to social support was not hindered by class status according to D'Apolito (2000) who contended that the middle class showed strong racial identity and a "commitment to group advancement within society." They did not identify more with whites because of their higher social class. Jang and Johnson (2004) found that due to a sense of control and social support within the church, religiously involved African Americans showed lower levels of distress than their nonreligious or less religious counterparts.

Regional differences were found regarding African American churchgoers. Chatters et al. (1999) found that Southerners showed more religious involvement than those in other regions. Hunt and Hunt (2001) discovered more religious involvement in the urban south than in the rural south and urban north. The semi-involuntary nature of behavior in religious institutions in the south—markedly the rural south—infiltrated private religious actions according to Sherkat and Cunningham (1998). Ellis and Sherkat (1999) contended that the place for most social gatherings and activities in the rural south was the church and because of the lack of selection outside of the church, society members might have felt obligated to hold on to the only social outlet they had—church life. As is the case in many small towns, visibility was an issue and the members were pressured more than those in urban areas to comply with the norms. The church helped to perpetuate strict moral standards and threats of embarrassment within small communities; therefore making church involvement somewhat involuntary. Traditional standards were held at the exclusion of more liberal approaches. Female-led congregations were more likely to exist among African American and ethnically mixed congregations than white, Asian, or Latino congregations, and in urban areas instead of rural, and with no denominational ties (Konieczny & Chaves, 2000).

Research concerning mainline and conservative sects within the black community over recent years suggests that there are differences in the perception of what constitutes relevant religious activity. Sherkat (2002) looked at the historical progress of African American churches; he indicated that slaves originally had only two sects to choose from: Methodist or Baptist. As Methodist and Baptist churches became more secularized, or

worldly, African Americans began transferring to more conservative, or otherworldly, sects. Sherkat (2001) observed a sermon in which the pastor preached more about racism and politics than about Jesus; the only way for African Americans to embrace “old time religion” where Jesus was valued over the material or worldly concerns was by embracing the conservative sectarian groups. Calhoun-Brown (1998) found that “organizational religiosity strongly predicts support for integrationist-oriented means to empowerment. Otherworldliness strongly predicts support of separatist-oriented means to empowerment.” Non affiliate African American members showed less religious service attendance than mainline Methodists and Baptists but did contend that they prayed on a regular basis (Chatters et al., 1999).

Development and alterations in personal African American religious views over time have also received attention recently. Akinyela (2003) contended that African American slaves infused Christianity with African culture in order to “Africanize” Christianity. Since African American slaves were unable to draw from the particular African culture they came from, they used bits and pieces of African cultures from memory. Through these means, an ethnic identity was forged: a collective consciousness including many African cultural aspects into one new religion. Mattis et al. (2001) discovered that over time African American women could experience a lack of religious affiliation due to “dissatisfaction with organized religion,” thus altering their definition of religion; the interpretation of religion they subsequently acknowledged was exclusive to organized religion. This, however, did not indicate that they did not believe in God, only that their “nonreligious” identification indicated a break from organized religion. Krause

(2004) found that older African Americans benefited from trust-based prayer in which they relied on God to answer prayers when and how it was seen fit rather than when and how they expected God to respond. This approach seemed to have a more positive effect, through self-esteem enhancement, on Africa American elders than their white counterparts. Chatters et al. (1999) study revealed that age was positively linked with religious service attendance and increased subjective religious involvement; also, women were more religiously involved than men, and greater educational attainment equated with more religious service attendance. Elderly African Americans were found to acquire a sense of self and purpose through life stories pertaining to a designated religious path or “having been called” by God. These effects were perhaps also linked to service attendance and involvement. Religion and spirituality were found to be viable coping mechanisms to provide meaning and coherence to life. A sense of self, positive self-perception, and a link to well-being were also found through reliance on religion and spirituality (Wallace & Bergeman, 2002). Religious involvement and religiosity helped older blacks cope and maintain self-worth during the physical decline and death of other family members (Krause, 1992). The negative effects of stress were decreased by increased religious involvement among older blacks (Krause & Van Tran, 1989). Religion was revealed to help elderly African Americans during the aging process (Nye, 1993).

African Americans have been shown to experience religion differently from their white counterparts. African American students showed more spirituality endorsement than their European American counterparts (Jagers & Smith, 1996). African American

elders with chronic illness were more likely to endorse divine intervention than white elders, who were more likely to merge self-management practices with their spirituality (Harvey & Silverman, 2007). Older African Americans were more likely to use prayer to deal with worries than older whites (Gibson, 1982). Taylor, Mattis, and Chatters (1999) found that black respondents had higher levels of subjective religiosity than whites. African American students showed higher levels of spiritual belief and religious involvement than their European American counterparts; however, both groups showed a positive correlation between spiritual belief, religious involvement, and academic performance (Walker & Dixon, 2002). Older African Americans were more likely to gain health-related benefits from their religious involvement than their white counterparts (Krause, 2002). Belief in divine control was related to increased self-esteem among African American women later in life. However, for older white males, belief in divine control was negatively related to self-esteem (Schieman, Pudrovska, & Milkie 2005). Religiousness is more a predictor of psychological well-being in black students compared to their white counterparts (Blaine & Crocker, 1995).

Studies on the psychological effects of religion have revealed a mostly positive effect for African Americans in recent years. Religious involvement was shown to help buffer negative self-esteem issues for African Americans (Ellison, 1993). African American children with lower socioeconomic statuses from Ohio and Michigan had less behavioral and emotional problems (due to poverty) when their parents attended church at least once a week (Christian & Barbarin, 2001). McAdoo (1995) discovered that single lower and middleclass African American mothers relieved stress through faith and

prayer; however, nonreligious mothers had the lowest stress levels. A negative relationship with God was a predictor of pessimism; however, a positive relationship with God, increased age, and subjective spirituality were predictors of optimism. Organizational religious involvement and subjective religiosity did not predict optimism or pessimism (Mattis et al., 2004). Mattis, Hearn, and Jagers' (2002) study revealed that African American men who displayed subjective religiosity and had early religious involvement were likely to have communal attitudes, while religious organizational involvement showed no relation to communal attitudes. The National Survey of Black Americans showed that church attendance was one of several network factors that influenced subjective well-being (Taylor, Chatters, Hardison, & Riley, 2001). African American women recovering from drug abuse exhibiting high levels of spirituality were more likely to have a positive self-concept, viable coping style, and beneficial social relationships, than those who experienced lower levels of spirituality (Brome, Owens, Allen, & Vevaina, 2000). African American students used spirituality to buffer psychological health issues due to racial stress (Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002). Collaborative religious coping methods were shown to decrease suicidal ideation in African American high school students. However, self-directive coping styles were shown to increase hopelessness and suicide attempts (Molock, Puri, Matlin, and Barksdale, 2006). Hummer et al. (1999) found that African Americans who attended church at least once a week lived longer than those who did not attend at all. Parental religiosity in African Americans living in the rural south was linked to familial

cohesiveness and reduced interparental conflict; it also influenced self-regulation of the children (Brody, Stoneman, & Flor, 1996).

Recent research has shown that religion within the black community has *mostly* provided a source of hope, endurance, and psychological wellbeing during life struggles. The church was found to be a conduit for black community involvement and political activism. And, with age, African Americans depended even more on quality personal relationships with God to buffer the possible health and psychological downsides of aging. But even this short summary of religion, which represents the idea of God, negates a lot: the idiosyncrasies of the day to day experiences of the subjects have been omitted; the individual experiences of the researchers prior to conducting the studies are not important, since they are objective observers. Most importantly, however, the sign of religion itself has become impregnated with such representatives as religiosity, spirituality, religiousness, organizational religiosity, nonorganizational religiosity, subjective religiosity, Methodists, Baptists, Non affiliates, and nonreligious people who, upon further investigation, are actually religious. Yet all significations and representations of “religion,” all individual experiences coded through a meticulous process of deduction, all results—mostly positive but some negative—are collapsed onto the sign of religion, which signifies a God that signifies an idea of the eternal. The dialectical man, himself the result of discourse, thinking in terms of signs, in terms of words separated from things, proliferates signifiers in an attempt to order and reduce until the underlying pattern and truth reveals itself through textual consistency. The human sciences, to prove their scientific origins, have objectified the human experience, shaving

it down to its bare essentials by revealing to it its limits, probabilities, and tendencies while still strangely residing outside of the three-dimensional, scientifically established core that is its entirety (Foucault, 1994).

Within the modern episteme, reflexivity is the way in which unchallenged representation and signification can be critiqued and corrected by a transcendental discourse. Black Theology has been studied by several researchers in recent years who analyzed the social and religious perspectives of several prominent black theologians. Frame and Williams (1996) discovered that African spiritual traditions have aided African Americans in liberation and transformation over the past 400 years. The survival of these traditions has been achieved through factors such as African American communalism, story-telling, religion, and social activism. Black Theology emerged in the 1960s as blacks started to systematize their unique religious concerns and affect liberation (Motlhabi, 2004). Black Theology is a reflexive process, a second step in black religious life—the first step being the spontaneous creative energy invested in transforming the Christian religion, forced on slaves, into a liberating religion to enhance the black experience and sense of worth. Through Theology, African Americans are able to critically examine their faith and transform their beliefs continually for the greater good of the black community (Hopkins, 2005).

Azibo (1994) examined black liberation Theology and found it lacking in internal alertness. While black liberation Theology is indeed responsible for black social change and resistance to racism, it has become stagnant in an endless cycle of reaction to external social conditions. Furthermore, black Theology reflects the white academic educations

of prominent black theologians rather than African culture. In order for black liberation Theology to become effective and indicative of African-centered views, internal, rather than external alertness, needs to be appropriated so that perpetual reactivity does not leave a void where true African culture could flourish. Fairchild (1994), however, countered Azibo's (1994) assessment with a critique of his own. He asserted that Azibo was too narrow in his understanding of African liberation Theology. Azibo only covered Christianity and ignored other African religious figures and theologies (Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam). Furthermore, since monotheism began in Africa, Fairchild asserted that instead of being pulled away from African culture by European influences, African American theologians were returning to their roots and affecting change through criticism of the current state of Christianity, rather than experiencing stagnation.

Theologian Anthony Pinn (2006) reflected on the transformation of Christianity in slave religion, continued to the present African American community, resulting in a new subjective religion. Slaves used a religion that was intended to subjugate them to gain self-confidence and worth in spite of dehumanization. Later, blacks used the church in order to gain divine energy through African traditions such as music, dance, and shouts, to offset invisibility in white society and assert a strong bond with God. Original black theologian James Cone (2004) contended that white Theology ignored racism against blacks as a moral evil. Cone found that white theologians rarely addressed racism in their writings, and when they did, black thinkers were never cited. Cone asserted that white Theology should not only recognize racism, but also include and respect black Theology to heal and unite the country in spiritual harmony. One of the factors that prevent this

move to racial tolerance and respect include whites' desire to maintain power and economic dominance. Cone (2004) contended that whites were more likely to help during the civil rights movement because they were willing to accept less aggressive communication with blacks such as Martin Luther King. Malcolm X made them uncomfortable because of his aggressive approach; however, his approach became more popular among marginalized blacks residing in poor communities, despite social equity advances for middle class blacks. James Cone espoused a black Theology focused on black power concepts and the identification of "blackness" through shared oppression, and in opposition to "whiteness." However, Victor Anderson criticized the notion of blackness because of its closed, binary nature. The reification of such concepts as blackness and whiteness does not aid theologians in solving race-based problems, but only compounds them through labeling. Anderson asserted that individual subjectivity is lost when one is given a static label that only exists as the opposite of whiteness (Eppehimer, 2006). Instead, blacks are then objectified by their own people in an attempt to present a uniformed front to both identify the oppressor and overcome oppression. Black existence then becomes vacuous through continual defining in context with white oppression.

Motlhabi (2004) contended that many prominent black theologians appropriate nonviolent approaches to continued racism in the quest for liberation. However, they disagree on the type of ethical system that should be incorporated in a comprehensive black Theology. James Cone, the most prominent black theologian, has come up with the most developed ethical system. He has also benefited from criticism from other black

theologians in adjusting his particular ethical system. Murray (2004) compared and contrasted the theological perspectives of prominent scholars James Cone, Cornel West, Victor Anderson, and Delores Williams. James Cone was classified as a first generation black theologian, while West and Anderson were second and third generation theologians, respectively. Williams presented a new “womanist” theological perspective to account for black women. Murray (2004) found that James Cone and Cornel West were very similar in their religious discourse. Both espoused a black Theology of identification and worth for the African American dogged by racism. The absurd in terms of daily suffering had to be met with a Theology based in every-day life to improve conditions now rather than during the afterlife. Anderson contrasted the need to establish a Theology based on “blackness” because blacks have come to accept their status as sufferers of racial oppression always under stress and in conflict. He observed a perpetual reaction mode and restriction due to continued identification with European oppression. Postmodern influence is revealed in Anderson’s deconstruction of the black self. Anderson found this process to be liberating because it encouraged individuality and not blind identification with a pre-established group. Furthermore, homosexuals, who have been marginalized by the black community, were able to embrace aspects of themselves that had been rejected under the umbrella term, “blackness.” Williams investigated the subservience of African American women in the church. She claimed that the mimicking of white patriarchy organized churches led black men to ignore black women. She also stressed the need for black women to identify with such neglected, yet heroic, biblical figures as Hagar. Black women were able to overcome invisibility in

both the larger society and their own black churches through art and literature to express their experiences.

Black theologians have engaged in reflexive criticism of the way in which blacks represent religion to themselves, but they still maintain hope in the church to uplift the black community (Murray, 2004). The theological reflexivity is a counter-discourse to the human science method of recording experiences, labeling them, calculating them, and interpreting their patterns; it folds over religious representations to reveal their transformations and inconsistencies, allowing text to explore new grounds in man's affirmation, and creating new signifiers to express religion. Literature, as stated before, is also a counter-discourse to modern scientific thought, yet still influenced by the episteme; it continually questions and discredits the grounds on which it is supposed to operate, freeing the text to be unpredictable. The main concern is whether the literary discourses, overtime, have led to a black theological interpretation of religion based on spirituality concepts or religiosity in this postmodern world—through textual evidence.

The study of black religion and its theological and literary dissection over time is a research approach that can encapsulate both the dominant episteme and the loosening of its membrane by the inability of text to arrive at a definite order or form. Foucault (1994) saw this as the failure of "man" and the ending of the modern era. But in order to map the changes in the representation of religion, one must go back in time to the beginning of the African American religious subject and observe his folding over onto himself in reflexive texts. The various truth games pertaining to religion can be explored in individual texts created by authors who existed in their own limited eras, and thus had

more insight into them than an outsider. The goal of the researcher, however, is to explore the textual interpretations of religion and its viability during each era. In other words, the researcher must overlay counter-discourse and unique experiences with commentary and order, which is characteristic of a modern episteme influence in the human sciences. And in so doing, one runs the risk of becoming either the character Don Quixote, who tirelessly and foolishly chases after the real world equivalents of textual signs, or his author, Miguel de Cervantes, who both reveals the futile search for the things behind words and unearths a power in text itself that incites and directs activity so that Don Quixote's quest will never be in vain (Cervantes, 2004; Foucault, 1994).

## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Rationale for literary sample*

There were several black authors, leaders, and speakers who gained wide notoriety through their portrayal of the black experience and concerns during their time.

Unfortunately, women have been underrepresented in major leadership roles throughout history. Most major religious leaders (preachers, public activists) have been males, so their placement in religious discourse, or the meaning-making process, has been overrepresented historically. That fact is reflected in the choices of authors to analyze.

While many women have been influential in social events throughout history, sexism still prevents them from achieving the public resonance of males' influence.

Not only religious authors were heavily involved in African American Christianity discourse. The classic works of Du Bois, Baldwin, and Wright were significant even in their nonreligious tones. Even though they rejected religion, exposure to it was unavoidable within the black community. Baldwin was even a young minister (Hardy, 2003), and Wright was raised by his extremely religious family (Wright, 1998). Their exploration of the African American relationship with Christianity in America was included to show variation in point of view.

Discourse concerning African American Christianity has also been expressed through the activities of fictional characters. Fictional works are inspired by actual

observations and/or real life experiences. One of the most powerful aspects of fiction is the continuity between fictional representations and actual emotional experiences. Readers can also “escape” to fantasy worlds—not within the pages of the fictional novel, but within themselves. This is possible because of the images formed through the written triggers created by the author. Essentially, the creative and popular fictional works pertaining to religion were able to—along with the non-fictional accounts—evoke a powerful experience and familiarity within readers. And as Cervantes (2004) indicated in *Don Quixote*, there is no clear boundary between truth and fiction when they are allowed to commingle and imprint themselves on each other.

### ***Rationale for timeline and sample selection***

Each author selected was affected by and had a significant effect on the discourse of African American Christianity during their time. The environment the authors were born into affected their outlook and, in turn, they influenced future generations through their legacies. Five Periods in African Americans’ racial legacy were selected to provide a meaningful timeline for comparison.

African Americans faced adversity and dehumanization during slavery (1619-1863). The American institution of slavery began for blacks during the Middle Passage. “The Middle Passage is the name given to the transportation of slaves from the West African coast across the Atlantic to the Americas” (Battle & Wells, 2006, p. 39). Shipped like cargo, from Africa, blacks were loaded on ships where they remained for

months on the voyage to the Americas. “It is estimated that between 12 million and 20 million Africans sailed the Middle Passage. Slave ships were crowded and unsanitary” (Battle & Wells, 2006, p. 39). Many died due to the horrible conditions on the ships: “disease spread quickly, and slave mortality was high” (Battle & Wells, 2006, p. 39). Because of high mortality rates, “captains shared two schools of thought. Tight packers herded as many Africans aboard as possible, arguing that the net receipt from sales would offset the number who died on board. Loose packers preferred to give their captives ‘breathing room’, trusting that more would survive the journey under sanitary conditions” (Thomas, 1997, pp. 6-7). Olaudah Equiano, an African who became enslaved at 11 years old, explains his firsthand Middle Passage experience in detail:

The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror, which I am yet at a loss to describe, nor the then feelings of my mind. When I was carried on board I was immediately handled, and tossed up, to see if I were sound, by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had got into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. [...] I was not long suffered to indulge my grief; I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life; so that, with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste any thing. I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me; but soon, to my grief, two of the white men offered me eatables; and, on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands, and laid me across, I think, the windlass, and tied my feet while the other flogged me severely. (Finkenbine, 2004, pp. 5-6)

The excerpt from the slave narrative is offered to portray the emotional impact and decay resulting from the sudden, brutal capture and enslavement of once free and spirited Africans.

Slave trafficking later became illegal in some countries, but this did not stop the slave ship operation: “A vessel would go to the African coast, and secure a cargo of negroes. These were packed in the ship almost like sardines in a box, and so inhuman was the treatment that sometimes thirty percent of them died before reaching America. A smuggling vessel, pursued would sometimes throw its entire cargo of negroes overboard!” (Ward, 2006, p. 168) Ships were soon adapted to avoid capture due to the illegal trafficking of slaves. “Faster ships such as the *Ouragan* were built to outrun slower capture vessels. [...] Following the capture of slavers like the *Wildfire*, intercepted en route to Cuba in 1860, the United States sought to return Blacks to Liberia on captured slave ships” (Battle & Wells, 2006, p. 39).

Faith was an important source of hope for captured Africans. Thomas (1997, p. 22) explained that “it was faith that carried them over the troubled Atlantic [...], faith that led them to believe that trouble did not last forever.” She went on to contend that “religion and spirituals have always been crucial to African people. It was the way my ancestors sought to explain the unknown and to appeal to powers greater than man” (Thomas, 1997, p. 22). However, Christianity has not always been the vehicle through which Africans expressed faith:

In African communities, there were deities associated with nature—gods of the earth that governed fertility and punished men by sending famine and virulent diseases; deities of the sky—gods of thunder, lightning, and rain; and water divinities that dwelled in the rivers, lakes and sea. Africans saw the spirit of the supreme in all things: in the rocks, the tress, and the animals. They had priests and priestesses who oversaw rituals and dictated proper sacrifices, herbal men and women who cured illnesses, and wise elders who kept peace within the community. (Thomas, 1997, pp. 22-23)

Europeans, however, “saw the black man’s worship as heathen and sought not only to enslave Africans but to ‘bring them religion.’ The Europeans believed it was their duty to ‘Christianize’” (Thomas, 1997). Missionaries and merchants “did not show the least respect for the African religious experience—it was only a gross fetishism, tribal customs, diabolical superstitions, savage paganism, they believed” (Chenu, 2003, p. 27). The Middle Passage experience was further exacerbated for slaves who were packed onto boats with other Africans “whose language they did not always understand, whose customs or beliefs they did not completely share” (Chenu, 2003, p. 27). So that Africans who were stripped of their homeland and forced into a situation with Europeans, as well as fellow Africans, with different beliefs and customs, had to maneuver their faith accordingly. Literary expression later provided a public means for former slaves to mold their faith in order to incite hope through the atrocities of slavery and racism.

On arrival in America, slaves were forced to work for their owners. Starting in 1780, northern states began freeing their slaves; by 1804 all northern states were considered free states. Although not all owners were willing to emancipate their slaves, some did, but southern slavery continued. Within slavery (1619-1863), religious conversation by the following authors and former slaves (Table 1) revealed discontent with the conditions of slavery and a reliance on religion for survival and comfort.

**Table 1**  
**Slavery (1619-1863)**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>non-fiction/fiction</b>
<i>The Confessions of Nat Turner</i>	1619-1863	Confession prior to execution	Gray, T.	non
<i>The Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass</i>	1619-1863	Slave narrative	Douglass, F.	non
<i>The Narrative of Sojourner Truth</i>	1619-1863	Slave narrative	Truth, S. and O. Gilbert	non
<i>Harriet Tubman, The Moses of her people</i>	1619-1863	Slave narrative	Bradford, S.	non

Nat Turner (1800-1831) was a controversial slave rebellion leader who used violence to resist slavery. Depicted as an autodidact, Turner was a very religious man who had influence over fellow slaves in Virginia (Gray, 1831). He “showed evidence of outstanding intellect at an early age. Learning to read, he could quote long passages from the Bible, knew enough about science and mechanics to be an expert repairman and to experiment in the making of gun powder, paper and pottery” (Adams, 1984, p. 30). He escaped from slavery only to return on a mission. Professing that he heard the voice of God tell him to kill his white oppressors, he later gathered a group of slaves to help him with the mission. Several white slave owners and their families were killed before the group was eventually captured and brutally executed. The fear and anger Turner created within the white community had serious consequences in the form of more repressive

policies for slaves in Virginia. The debates continue over whether he was an African American hero or a fanatic. One fact is that he pushed the boundaries for accepted forms of resistance against slavery. His contribution to African American religious expression came in the form of his natural leadership: “His various masters—four in all—were proud to own such a brilliant and model slave. His reputation as being a slave minister was well known throughout the country. His fellow slaves sensed that he was no ordinary man and regarded him with a mixture of respect and awe” (Adams, 1984, p. 30). Turner also experienced visions of a struggle between whites and blacks in the heavens. He reported these religious visions to fellow slaves to fuel their opposition to slavery, gaining motivation from voices “telling him he was too wise to be a slave” (Adams, 1984, p. 30).

Former slave Frederick Douglass, born in Maryland (1818-1895), was an influential writer with a significant impact on future generations. He examined the hidden tactics used to mentally and emotionally subdue the slave and blind him to possible future freedoms. Underneath the blatant layer of racism and dehumanization in Confederate states, Douglass found sources of distress that were over-looked due to the assumption that nothing could be worse than being whipped continually, given little to eat, a hard floor to sleep on, being grossly over-worked, and generally treated worse than animals. Douglass explored *mental* slavery and religious contradictions among southern slave owners. He carefully outlined subtle, yet lasting effects of the system of slavery after his escape and during his career as a prominent abolitionist, author, reformer, and speaker. In his autobiography, Douglass (2003) explored the hypocrisy of southern white

Christianity. As a mulatto, he was an example of the very hypocrisy of which he spoke: “Here was the son of a black slave and white slave owner, starting life at the bottom: a constant affront to his master’s white wife; albatross to his master’s black mistress; seed of the immorality of Christians who sold their own children into slavery” (Abdul, 2000, p. 79). At the same time, Douglass embraced the “Christianity of Christ” that he regarded as “pure” religion as opposed to “slaveholding religion” that only served to keep blacks in bondage and smooth over the contradictions of southern whites (Douglass, 2003, p. 100).

A New York native, Sojourner Truth (an escaped slave) became a prominent abolitionist and women’s rights advocate. Unable to read, Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) asked others to read bible verses to her (Truth, 1850). When she asked them to repeat certain sections so that she could obtain a better understanding, some adults would also explain the text, misunderstanding her saying that she did not *hear* the text for her not *understanding* the text. Thereafter she had children who had just learned to read recite the text to her as many times as she pleased without them attempting to explain it to her. This due to the fact that they were so proud of their recently acquired ability to read that simply rereading the text was quite an enjoyable task for them (Truth, 1850). Truth stated that “religion without humanity is a poor human stuff,” (Newman, 2000, p. 285) thus infusing her humanity and individual interpretation with the words on the pages to make them come alive in a unique, empathetic, and liberating way. Truth was intent on forming her own interpretations of religion, just as she was intent on forming her own notions of knowledge in general to relay to her people.

Harriet Tubman (1822-1913), like Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and Nat Turner, escaped from slavery to become an abolitionist who risked her life to help many other slaves escape. She was also born in Maryland. Her vow was to have liberty or death: “I had reasoned dis out in my mind; there was one of two things I had a right to, liberty, or death; if I could not have one, I would have de oder; for no man should take me alive; I should fight for my liberty as long as my strength lasted and when de time came for me to go, de Lord would let dem take me” (Bradford, 1869, p. 29). Tubman’s legacy of freeing slaves was fueled by her strong desire to help her community, along with her faith in God. It was what made her risk her life time after time to rescue fellow African Americans from slavery: “She was a freelance guerrilla in her own private battle against slavery. A self-anointed black liberator, she believed that God selected her to lead her people out of bondage. Which was why she was known as the Moses of her people” (Abdul-Jabbar 2000, p. 103). The slaves told “worshipful stories about her, she represented deliverance: a female black Jesus, a black Joan of Arc” (Abdul-Jabbar, 2000, p. 105).

After the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln ended slavery in the Confederate states of the south through the Emancipation Proclamation. Reconstruction (1863-1877) represented the reuniting of the southern Confederacy with the nation. The acceptance of ex-slaves into the fold of American politics and social structure, however, would prove to be a much harder task.

Post-slavery (1864-1953) introduced new freedoms, including the appearance of more literate African Americans. However, freedom without much political backing

proved quite difficult for many. The Jim Crow laws (1876-1967) enacted in southern states demanded segregation, thus undermining the Freedman's status economically, socially, physically, and politically. These methods of undercutting the abolition of slavery, and other subtleties to continue the mental slavery of the new Freedmen, led to confusion concerning the meaning of the new freedom African Americans enjoyed. The following authors (Table 2) articulated new and significant perspectives for the discourse of Freedmen during post-slavery (1864-1953).

**Table 2**  
**Post-Slavery (1864-1953)**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>non-fiction/fiction</b>
<i>Up From Slavery</i>	1864-1953	Autobiography	Washington, B. T.	non
<i>The Souls of Black Folk</i>	1864-1953	Double consciousness	Du Bois, W.E.B.	non
<i>Black Boy</i>	1864-1953	Autobiography	Wright, R	non
<i>Go Tell it on the Mountain</i>	1864-1953	A preacher's son and his turbulent childhood	Baldwin, J.	fiction

Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) was a prominent educator and political activist who encouraged African Americans to strive for an industrial education. Self-responsibility was one of his main themes; through autonomy African Americans would be able to prove themselves in a capitalistic environment. He headed a school that taught various trades to African Americans; his idea was for African Americans to work their

way up from the bottom (Washington, 1900). Washington's understanding of freedom primarily focused on acquiring physical resources through gained skills that could then be purchased. Using persuasion, he convinced mostly white audiences that helping blacks achieve their goal of gaining resources (now that freedom was possible) would lead to many blessings from God. Washington (1900) insisted that whites could not progress further while simultaneously holding back newly freed blacks. This contrasted the lax religion of past slave owners who suffered no biblical consequences—through their interpretation of the bible—for relentlessly abusing slaves. He used religion, during his political endeavors, to appeal to the conscience of white sympathizers.

Rather than an industrial education, W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963), the first African American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard, believed in classical education. Du Bois (1995), a Sociologist, explained the need for a classical education through his conception of “double consciousness” experienced by the American Negro. Being both African and American, but not being able to merge the two because of mistreatment in America, caused torment within the black psyche: “One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Du Bois, 1995, p. 45). A classical education would provide a depth of understanding of both African and American identity so that the two could be merged effectively. An industrial education, according to Du Bois, would only address half the problem—that of embracing the American consciousness. He believed that the subtleties of slavery and

racism (such as those identified by Douglass) needed to be redressed through a classical education, minus religious influences.

Richard Wright (1908-1960) grew up as a poor child in racist Mississippi later to become the founding father of African American literature. As Walker (1988, p. 13) put it, “Richard Wright came out of hell. [...] Wright’s human condition predestined him thus to be shaped in a crucible of racial suffering, a tormenting cauldron of pure hell. All his life he agonized, and all his days he searched for meaning.” Walker (1988, pp. 13-14) went on to describe his earlier years in “those Mississippi woods” as “a big black hole that followed him in his memory all the days of his life, and it reappears in his fiction, nonfiction, and poetry.” He questioned and criticized African American religion in a crude way not seen before. While *Native Son* (1966) was his most popular novel, *Black Boy* (1998) provided a better understanding of the religious views of his main *Native Son* character, Bigger Thomas. During the introduction of *Native Son*, Wright explained that Bigger’s character was created by images in his own life and the people around him. For instance, Bigger’s religious views mirrored Wright’s own, in that both had lost faith in God and almost pitied those who still believed; both felt alienated by a mostly religious community; and both eventually broke their bitter silence and reservations and condemned religion openly in spite of the community repercussions.

James Baldwin (1924-1987) idolized Wright and eventually wrote his own autobiographical novel, *Go Tell it on the Mountains*, in which he was also critical of religious African Americans and the contradictions he saw in their public versus private lives (Baldwin, 2005). He even received some help and encouragement from Wright

himself when they were both living in Paris (Rowley, 2001). After ten years in Paris, Baldwin moved back to the United States where he became a prominent writer. As a homosexual, Baldwin explored black life from a unique perspective at that time in literary history. Ambivalent about gender boundaries, in part due to his sexual orientation, Baldwin was able to depict nuances in the female psyche in an impressive way. As opposed to Wright's hyper-masculine Bigger Thomas character, Baldwin created well-rounded female characters such as Esther and Deborah in his classic work, *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, that explored sensitive topics in female thought, such as sexual shame, rape, and abandonment (Baldwin, 2005). He was also instrumental in the civil rights movement.

The civil rights and black power (grassroots) movements were products of discontent over the failure of Reconstruction to integrate the ex-slave into society. However, the outlets for such social buildup were expressed differently: civil rights through minority integration into the larger society, and black power through segregation and a return to black nationalism. Table 3 illustrates examples of discourse for the main outlets—civil rights and black power—and other significant literature and thought encapsulated in the time frame (1954-1968).

**Table 3**  
**Civil Rights/Black Power Movement (1954-1968)**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>non-fiction/fiction</b>
<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>	1954-1968	A play that explores the black family and its complexities	Hansberry, L	fiction
<i>The Negro Church In America</i>	1954-1968	Schism between upper and lower class blacks	Frazier, E.F.	non
<i>A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.</i>	1954-1968	MLK's most influential and memorable speeches and writings	Washington, J.	non
<i>Black Power: The politics of liberation</i>	1954-1968	Black nationalism and solidarity	Hamilton, C., K. Ture, and S. Carmichael	non

Lorraine Hansberry (1930-1965) was an important playwright. She was the first African American woman to have a drama on Broadway. Her famous play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, explored the complex inner workings of a struggling black family and the effect of the outside environment on that family. Hansberry did not create *good* versus *bad* characters, but described the flaws and strengths of each character. The only character that was not given obvious flaws was the only African character, Asagai. He convinced the agnostic/atheist Beneatha that her nihilistic views of life and religion were limitations she had placed on herself and her environment. The endless circle of suffering in the

black community that Beneatha observed was countered by Asagai's assertion that "it isn't a circle—it is simply a long line—as in geometry, you know, one that reaches into infinity. And because we cannot see the end—we also cannot see how it changes. And it is very odd but those who see the changes—who dream, who will not give up—are called idealists...and those who see only the circle we call them the 'realists'!" (Hansberry, 1994, p. 134).

E. Franklin Frazier (1894-1962) was an African American Sociologist. He was the first African American president of the American Sociological Association. Frazier (1957, 1963) accused the black middle class of abandoning their true religion in order to embrace capitalism; their new secularized religion became one of make believe and was fueled primarily by the need of socialization and entertainment. True religion was embraced by the lower class, who sustained their African inheritance through worship. He asserted that it was the middle class blacks who were appeasing and imitating whites while the lower class remained self-contained and maintained racial pride and religious loyalty.

Martin Luther King (1929-1968) was the icon of the civil rights movement. It can be said that he popularized a secularization of African American Christianity by including political issues and concepts introduced by a non Christian leader (Gandhi). As a political activist, nonviolence advocate, and southern Baptist minister, King's appeal crossed many boundaries. By infusing religious teachings with notions of political conscience, King resembled Booker T. Washington. Both men forged a connection in

their speeches between secular policies and religious responsibility. His goal was to unite a nation, divided by race, under religious love and harmony.

Kwame Ture (1941-1998) and Charles Hamilton (1929-\*) were dissatisfied with the civil rights movement. In *Black Power* they expressed their disdain for integration efforts; forging a unique African American cultural identity through running their own organizations was the goal. They expressed a grassroots approach of militancy and strong arm defense in opposition to the passive reaction to violence that Martin Luther King embraced—“Turn the other cheek.” The Black Power movement promoted black nationalism or race solidarity without the influences of outside groups. In order to achieve true autonomy, blacks needed to divorce themselves from the mercy of whites and develop their own understanding of freedom and religion. African Americans needed to become self-contained.

Post-civil rights/black power movements (1969-1989) gave African American authors the opportunity to examine the effects of the movements; it represented the actual changes that took place and the dreams realized, deferred, or destroyed. Table 4 includes authors who creatively took on this task.

**Table 4**  
**Post-Civil Rights Movement (1969-1989)**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>non-fiction/ fiction</b>
<i>I know why the caged bird sings</i>	1969-1989	Autobiography	Angelou, M.	non
<i>The Identity Crisis in Black Theology</i>	1969-1989	An analysis of the crisis in black liberation theology	Cone, C.	non
<i>The Color Purple</i>	1969-1989	Young black woman as victim of abuse	Walker, A.	fiction
<i>Beloved</i>	1969-1989	Post-traumatic stress from slavery	Morrison, T.	fiction

Maya Angelou (1928-\*), a world renowned author, poet, civil rights activist, and motivational speaker, wrote five autobiographical novels detailing the journeys of her life. Her first and most popular was, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*; Angelou discussed her troubled earlier years in which she experienced racism, parental neglect, rape, and low self-esteem. In the segregated community in which she lived, religion was used to alleviate racial tension and feelings of inferiority (1969). Angelou also learned that religion, within the black community, could be used to veil a fuller knowledge of their situation. Her autobiography dealt with her struggles growing up and the creative ways in which she was able to persevere. Angelou's sense of humor got her in trouble during church services, but allowed her to float above the hypocrisy she observed.

Cecil Cone, a scholar and theologian, was once the president of Edward Waters College. His brother, James Cone, is considered the father of black Theology; however,

in his criticism of black Theology, his brother was not spared. Cecil Cone (1975) contended that contemporary black theologians were struggling with an identity crisis. Their need to identify with, or be impressive within the academic structure of white seminaries compromised African culture. Their political ideas, taken from black radicals within the secular realm, also compromised a religious, rather than politically influenced Theology.

Alice Walker (1944-\*) is a well known author, feminist, and civil rights activist. She received a Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *The Color Purple*, which was later made into a film. The book is a series of letters written by the main character (Celie) to God, and later, to her sister—the two characters least likely to hurt or betray her. Sexual and physical abuse provided the main themes of the novel, and black men were often the perpetrators. Walker articulated the low status and mistreatment of black women in the black community and the hypocrisy of black men who attended church regularly, only to return home to powerless wives who they continually abused. Even though religion was portrayed as the means of hypocrisy for the abusive black males in the novel, Celie's personal relationship with God (through her letters) showed a more active religion in the dynamic and empowering relationship she formed with her maker.

Toni Morrison (1931-\*) is a celebrated author. She won the Noble Prize in Literature for her collection of work before 1993 and a Pulitzer Prize in Fiction for *Beloved*, which, in 2006, was also named the best American fiction published in the previous twenty five years. The novel was also turned into a film. The mystery of the novel is in the nature of the character named “Beloved.” Whether Beloved is a

hallucination or the actual embodiment of Sethe’s deceased child is left to the reader’s discretion. Mysticism and religious themes thread the story together and in the end, the community’s concern, along with their mysterious or symbolic religious healing power, help Sethe to release a burden. Morrison is known for her supernatural themes blended into everyday reality. Notions of life after death, and even spirit intervention and communication with the living, are liberally applied to many of her celebrated novels (Morrison, 1987, 1998, 2004, 2005).

Postmodernity is a time of angst concerning meaning. Foucault contended that discourses in which many representations and ideas were created led to this current saturation of meaning. The prominent people of Table 5 gained from previous discussions and articulations concerning the meaning of black religion and forged their own philosophies and ideas.

**Table 5**  
**Postmodernity (1990-2006)**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>non-fiction/fiction</b>
<i>Race Rules: Navigating the Color Line</i>	1990-2005	An analysis of the social and church life of African Americans	Dyson, M.E.	non
<i>The Cornel West Reader</i>	1990-2005	The philosophy of Cornel West	West, C.	non
<i>Rock My Soul</i>	1990-2005	Racism and African American religious uplift	hooks, b.	non
<i>The World According to Oprah</i>	1990-2005	Oprah quotes on religion and spirituality	Lawrence, K.	non

Michael Eric Dyson is a prominent professor and author. As a Baptist minister, he incorporates religion in his conversations about racism, classism, and sexism. As a young minister, Dyson experienced first hand the sexism within the black church, and when he tried to empower the women in his congregation he was fired (Dyson, 2004). Dyson also calls for a reassessment of sexuality within the black church which he deems to be repressive and destructive (Dyson, 1997). However, the community togetherness fostered by churches render religion a viable source of power and love for the black psyche in the grips of racism (Dyson, 1997, 2004). “Black churches unleashed the repressed forces of cultural creativity and religious passion” (1997, p. 86). “Black religion freed the black body from its imprisonment in crude, racist stereotypes. The black church combated as best it could the self-hatred and the hatred of other blacks that white supremacy encouraged with evil efficiency” (Dyson, 1997, p. 85).

Cornel West is a public intellectual, professor, and author. As a Christian Existentialist, West wants to reinvigorate African American religion through purposeful meaning-making and community dependency (West, 1999). He views stagnation in current religious meaning and practices due to the capitalistic preoccupations in American society: “Religion becomes but one more stimulant in a culture addicted to stimulation—a stimulation that fuels consumption and breeds existential emptiness” (West, 1999, p. 358). West calls for a Christian Existentialism within the black community: “The black encounter with the absurd in racist American society yields a profound spiritual need for human affirmation and recognition. Hence, the centrality of

religion and music—those most spiritual of human activities—in black life” (Newman, 2000, pp. 54-55).

Bell hooks is a prolific writer and a prominent activist, feminist, and professor. Her work deals mainly with white patriarchy, racism, sexism, class, and religion. An outspoken public figure, hooks openly criticizes a white male dominated education system. Similar to Martin Luther King’s appropriation of Gandhi, hooks advocates the inclusion of many religious teachings along with the dominant Christianity in order to achieve the goal of healing the black psyche from remnants of slavery and institutional racism (2003). Hooks appropriates the Dalai Lama, teachings of the Islamic faith, Buddhism, as well as “the other faiths black people choose to follow” in order to achieve the goal of unity and healing through religion in the black community (hooks, 2003, p. 117).

Oprah Winfrey first rose to prominence as a news anchor and then became the first female African American billionaire in history. As the most famous talk show host, her appeal spans across racial boundaries, making her one of the most influential people of our time. Winfrey attributes her talent and wealth to her spiritual boundlessness: “What God has intended for you goes far beyond anything you can imagine” (Newman, 2000, p. 162). The spirit being the source of her strength, she asserts that “if you want to accomplish the goals of your life, you have to begin with the spirit” (Newman, 2000, p. 331).

### *Sample*

A content analysis was employed for the study. The content analysis approach is beneficial because it allows the “study of processes occurring over long periods of time” (Babbie, 1979, p. 309). Also, since the text exists regardless of the activity of the researcher, content analysis is usually non-obtrusive: “The content analyst seldom has any effect on the subject being studied. Because the novels have already been written, the paintings already painted, the speeches already presented, content analyses can have no effect on them” (Babbie, 1979, p. 309). The weakness of this approach is that what is written down or recorded does not include or capture everything said or felt during certain time frames no matter how much certain authors or icons influence and are influenced by the population of their time period (Babbie, 1979). Also, even though their words cannot be altered by a later observer, the meaning behind those words can always be misinterpreted by the reader.

The sample consisted of twenty influential and/or classic books of fiction and nonfiction authored by prominent African Americans. The majority of the works (16) were nonfiction; only 4 were fictional. Seven of the works were autobiographical. Sixty percent (12) of the authors were men, while forty percent (8) were women. Three authors were nonreligious: Du Bois, Wright, and Baldwin. The works were categorized based on a timeline: Slavery (1619-1863); Post-Slavery (1864-1953); The Civil Rights Movement/Black Power (1954-1968); Post-Civil Rights (1969-1989) and Postmodernity (1990-2006). Four works represented each of the time frames.

**Table 6**  
**Statistical Analysis of Variables in Sample (n=20)**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Autobiographical	7	35
other	13	65
Total	20	100%
Non-fiction	16	80
Fiction	4	20
Total	20	100%
Slavery	4	20
Post-Slavery	4	20
Civil Rights/BP	4	20
Post-Civil Rights	4	20
Postmodernity	4	20
Total	20	100%
Male	12	60
Female	8	40
Total	20	100%

### *Methods*

A content analysis was used to gauge the level of religiosity (conservative meaning) versus spirituality (secularized meaning) in the influential African American works over a time span of about 400 years. A content analysis is a method in which a form of content (text in this case) is summarized through words, phrases, or theme counts. It is a quantitative method in which there is a unit of analysis and a unit of observation. The unit of analysis consisted of the twenty prominent authors, while the unit of observation was the data collected from each of their works. The texts from the works

were employed to discover spiritual versus religiosity oriented phrases. Since influential authors provided the unit of analysis, it was appropriate to use one of their most read and respected works that dealt with religion to a significant degree.

### *Rationale for coding*

The coding categories for religiosity and spirituality phrases were separated into two groups (see Appendix A): The first coding category represented characteristics indicative of religiosity (1-Reliance on obsolete doctrine; 2-Routine worship or practices; 3-Preservation of self over community/other; 4-Static conception of God; 5-Emphasis on heaven/hell/salvation; 6-Does not adapt). The second category represented characteristics indicative of spirituality (7-Sense of community; 8-Quest for ultimate truth or meaning; 9-Adaptability; 10-Personal transformation; 11-Customized (creative) interpretation; 12-Personal relationship with God). Phrases and themes that expressed more of a religiosity orientation were counted according to the corresponding characteristic, and under the broader category, “religiosity oriented phrases.” Phrases that indicated more of a spirituality orientation were counted according to the corresponding spirituality characteristic, and under the broader category, “spirituality oriented phrases.”

The characteristics of religiosity and spirituality were not chosen arbitrarily. Several researchers have previously taken on the task of defining spirituality and religiosity characteristics. Mattis discovered:

Furthermore, both studies find that although religiousness and spirituality are intertwined experiences, there are key factors that distinguish the two. For many participants, religiosity is defined as one's adherence to prescribed rituals and beliefs about God (or a set of gods). Whereas religiousness may involve participation in prescribed rituals, spirituality is defined as an intimate relationship between God, and individual, and others. Spirituality also denotes a journey of self-reflection, self-criticism, and self-awareness that culminates in a greater understanding of the relationship between self, God, and the larger community (including the community of ancestors). (2000, p. 119)

While religiousness (religiosity) is related to the prescribed and static rituals and doctrine in religion (codes 1, 2, 3, & 6), spirituality is depicted as an almost organic process—with the help of God—in which adaptation and change is essential (codes 7, 9 & 10). Bell and Taylor (2004, p. 446) used Maslow's work to inform their conception of spirituality and community: "According to Maslow, self-actualizing people are involved in a cause outside their own skin, something that is outside of themselves." Fernander et al. discovered that the practices of religion (code 2) and the inner belief of it could be completely different:

For example, an individual may consider his or her relationship with a higher power to be very important but rarely participate in any public expression of that belief. Alternatively, an individual may attend religious services regularly [religiosity characteristic] and yet consider belief in a higher power as unimportant. (Fernander, Wilson, Staton & Leukefeld, 2005, p. 683)

This emphasizes the importance of a personal relationship with God (code 12) from a spiritual perspective, as opposed to a superficial relationship that only exists within the boundaries of place of worship.

Religiosity has been described as a multidimensional term by Amey et al. (1996), who examined the concept in three categories: affiliation with religious organizations; extent to which religious system of beliefs affects behavior; religious practices such as service attendance.

Koenig, McCullough, and Larson (2001) discussed dimensions of religiosity and spirituality. Organizational religiosity was characterized as attendance at religious services, and subjective religiosity was gauged by self-rating pertaining to the importance of religion. Spirituality was described as the following: “(a) a search for meaning in life; (b) an encounter with transcendence; (c) a sense of community; (d) a search for ultimate truth, or highest value; (e) a respect and appreciation for the mystery of creation and (f) a personal transformation” (codes 7, 8, 10, 11, & 12). Dyson displayed the boundlessness of God according to a perspective of spirituality:

African-American spirituality is faith in an omnipotent, transcendent force; experienced internally and/or externally as caring interconnectedness with others, God, or a higher power; manifested as empowering transformation of, and liberating consolation for life’s adversities; and thereby inspiring fortified belief in and reliance on the benevolent source of unlimited potential. (1997, p. 1184)

This limitless conception of God opposes a strict, static reliance on doctrine to deliver a god confined to the pages of the Bible, who gives set instructions for how followers can gain salvation (codes 4 & 5).

The research describes spirituality as adaptability (code 9) to life’s adversities through a dynamic and organic relationship with God and the social environment (codes 7, 10, 11, & 12) while religiosity is depicted as a focus mainly on doctrine and practices

instead of outside social and community activities; the relationship with God can be found—with guidelines—within the pages of the bible rather than through environmental clues (codes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). Table 7 compares spirituality and religiosity depictions from the research.

**Table 7**  
**Religiosity characteristics vs. Spirituality characteristics**

Reliance on obsolete doctrine (#1)	Customized (creative) interpretation (#11)
Routine worship or practices (#2)	Personal transformation (#10)
Preservation of self over community (#3)	Sense of community (#7)
Static conception of God (#4)	Personal relationship with God (#12)
Emphasis on heaven/hell/salvation (#5)	Quest for ultimate truth or meaning (#8)
Does not Adapt (#6)	Adaptability (#9)

The table above is reminiscent of the tables created during the Classical episteme to give order to signifiers so that human experience became secondary to pre-established qualitative categories. Agreed upon representation displaced the spontaneity of individualized experiential signs while still relying on experience to further order and create signs and representations within categorical certainty (Foucault, 1994). The subjects of human science inquiry offer their experiences to either be placed in categorical summary or used to create more categories for positive knowledge from objective observation. Consequently, the above categorizing of human science inquiry

into black religious experiences is the folding over of text onto itself to transcendently order itself in a final, all-encompassing way. But as is the case with language attempting to encompass true experience and true things, there is a chance that the twelve representatives of the signification of religion (6 for religiosity; 6 for spirituality) only separate it more from its origins.

### *Method of analysis and caveats*

Section(s) were chosen that displayed religious views and experiences from each work. Where religious material was scattered throughout the particular work or too scant in sections to show the whole picture, the full text was considered. Frequencies were tallied and comparisons drawn between spirituality and religiosity oriented phrases in each work, in each time frame, and overall. The twelve characteristics (1-6 Religiosity; 7-12 Spirituality) were also tallied; a comparison drawn between characteristics in each work, within each time frame, and overall. An attempt to frame religious expression, as presented through black literature over time and through significant social changes, was the goal of this approach. The data collection of all categorized and characterized phrases is provided in Appendix B.

Despite the extent to which the data was examined, there were some shortcomings in the research approach. Spirituality and religiosity may not be mutually exclusive, since they are words connected to other words that represent them and purport to point to the notion of religion and God. But words of affirmation do not necessarily reflect the

connections they reveal or the differences they unveil. Some researchers even assume synonymy—that religiosity and spirituality are interchangeable concepts.

Unfortunately, this study did not explore, quantitatively, the issue of blurred boundaries between the categories. There were no tests to explore the extent to which indicators for spirituality exclusively measured spirituality more than religiosity and vice versa. This was a serious limitation for the research. However, sufficient studies have already presented significance tests on differences between spirituality and religiosity, thus providing the indicators, or characteristics, needed to distinguish between the two experiences of religion. Therefore, although this study did not present a quantitative exploration to justify indicators, the indicators were conceptually relevant given the reliance on research already done on indicators for spirituality and religiosity. Even with the conception of two categories and twelve indicators for those categories, religiosity and spirituality may still feed off of one another. This research only dealt with the socially relevant assigned meanings of each experience.

Another shortcoming was the use of frequencies to assess the extent to which religiosity and spirituality were present in each Period. Frequencies only allowed the suggestion of the degree to which religiosity and spirituality expressions were present in a particular time frame. There is no certainty that variations between spirituality and religiosity representations are significant in actuality. Also, the degree to which literature itself delivers the pulse of the people it seeks to describe is moot. However, this project attempted to delineate the flow of religious meaning-making and discourse over time through literary representations of spirituality and religiosity and amid the turbulence of

social change. The study of the literary rebellion within the modern episteme provided an exploration of the uncertainty of textual behavior on the wave of a new era—postmodernity.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

In Appendix C, table 8 shows that the slavery time frame (1619-1863) yielded more spirituality expressions than religiosity. Overall, there were 26 indicators of spirituality and only 9 for religiosity. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* rendered 7 spirituality and only 1 religiosity indicator, while *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth* yielded 5 spirituality expressions and 2 for religiosity. *The Confessions of Nat Turner* revealed 7 spirituality and 4 religiosity phrases. There were 7 spirituality and 2 religiosity expressions collected from *Harriet Tubman, the Moses of her people*.

The Post-slavery time frame (1864-1953) revealed more religiosity than spirituality indicators. There were 56 religiosity compared to 36 spirituality indicators in all. *Go Tell it on the Mountain* showed 27 religiosity and 24 spirituality phrases, while *The Souls of Black Folk* yielded 7 religiosity and only 2 spirituality phrases. *Black Boy* revealed 21 religiosity phrases and 4 spirituality ones; however, *Up From Slavery* rendered 6 spirituality and just one religiosity expression.

The Civil Rights and Black Power time frame (1954-1968) rendered more spirituality indicators than religiosity overall. With the difference of only 5 phrases, there were 32 spirituality and 27 religiosity phrases; however, the majority of the works studied for this Period actually revealed an inclination toward indicators of religiosity. There

were 19 spirituality phrases in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* and only 4 religiosity expressions. *Black Power* yielded 9 religiosity phrases and 3 spirituality ones. *A Raisin in the Sun* showed 8 religiosity and 5 spirituality indicators and *The Negro Church* rendered 6 religiosity and 5 spirituality phrases.

The Post-Civil Rights and Black Power time frame (1969-1989) revealed an almost equal number of spirituality and religiosity phrases with 43 religiosity and 44 spirituality expressions in all. *Beloved* revealed 11 spirituality and 9 religiosity phrases, while *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* yielded 11 religiosity and 3 spirituality indicators. *The Color Purple* rendered 17 religiosity and 18 spirituality expressions and *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology* revealed 12 spirituality and 6 religiosity phrases.

Postmodernity (1990-2006) yielded more spirituality than religiosity indicators. There were 53 spirituality and 43 religiosity phrases. *Rock My Soul* revealed 12 spirituality and 8 religiosity expressions, while *Race Rules* showed 23 spirituality and 22 religiosity phrases. *The World According to Oprah* yielded 10 spirituality but no religiosity indicators and the *Cornel West Reader* rendered only 8 spirituality phrases and 13 religiosity ones. Overall, there were more literary spirituality phrases than religiosity phrases: spirituality phrases = 191; religiosity phrases = 178; the total number of phrases = 369.

Table 9 (Appendix C) reveals the visible contrasts between the sums of spirituality versus religiosity phrases among the literary representatives for each Period. As shown, the greatest difference between spirituality and religiosity phrase counts

occurred during the slavery and post-slavery time frames. Slavery (1619-1863) and Postmodernity (1990-2006) showed the greatest number of spirituality compared to religiosity phrases (a difference of 17 and 10 phrases respectively), while post-slavery (1864-1953) revealed the greatest number of religiosity compared to spirituality indicators with a difference of 20 phrases. However, post-civil rights (1969-1989) revealed the smallest difference between phrase categories with an almost equal number of religiosity and spirituality expressions (43 and 44 phrases respectively).

Table 10 (Appendix C) shows that out of the twelve male authors, six (50%) yielded mostly spirituality expressions and six yielded mostly religiosity ones. No males within the slavery time frame displayed mostly religiosity phrases, while three males in post-slavery rendered mostly religiosity expressions (75%) and only one (25%) yielded mostly spirituality indicators. The Civil Rights/Black Power time frame yielded two males with mostly religiosity indicators (66.7%) and only one with mostly spirituality expressions. Only one male was represented in the post-civil rights/black power Period and he provided mostly spirituality phrases. Postmodernity yielded one male with mostly spirituality phrases and one with mostly religiosity expressions.

Out of the eight female authors, only two (25%) yielded mostly religiosity phrases, while six (75%) yielded mostly spirituality indicators. Both females represented in the slavery time frame provided mostly spirituality expressions. There were no women represented in the post-slavery time frame. One female was represented in the Civil Rights/Black Power time frame and she yielded mostly religiosity phrases. Two females within the post-civil rights time frame provide mostly spirituality indicators (66.7%) and

only one provided mostly religiosity expressions. Both of the females represented in the postmodern era displayed mostly spirituality phrases.

All four authors represented in the slavery time frame yielded mostly spirituality indicators (2 males; 2 females). Post-slavery yielded three authors displaying mostly religiosity phrases and one providing mostly spirituality expressions (all males). The Civil Rights/Black Power time frame rendered three authors with mostly religiosity indicators (2 males; 1 female) and one author with mostly spirituality phrases (male). In post-civil rights/black power three authors yielded mostly spirituality expressions (2 females; 1 male) while only one rendered mostly religiosity phrases (female). The postmodern time frame displayed three authors with mostly spirituality indicators (2 females; 1 male) and only one author providing mostly religiosity phrases (male). Most of the authors yielded predominantly spirituality indicators (12), while forty percent (8) provided mostly religiosity ones.

Table 11 (Appendix C) illustrates that out of 178 religiosity indicators in all, 45 (25%) were identified as “static conception of God.” “Preservation of self over community/other” described 36 expressions (20%). “Emphasis on heave/hell” was displayed in 28 phrases (16%). “Reliance on obsolete doctrine” was apparent in 27 expressions overall (15%). “Does not adapt” represented 26 phrases (15%) and “routine worship/practices” described 16 phrases (9%).

Out of the 27 phrases defined as “reliance on obsolete doctrine,” Baldwin provided most of the expressions (6). For “routine worship/practices” Hansberry, Angelou, Walker, and Dyson provided the most indicators, at two phrases per author.

For “preservation of self over community,” Dyson yielded the most phrases (7). Walker provided the most expressions for “static conception of god” (10) and Baldwin yielded the most phrases for “emphasis on heaven/hell” (10). Dyson provided the most expressions (8) for “does not adapt.”

Table 12 (Appendix C) shows that out of 191 spirituality phrases, 70 (37%) were described as “customized interpretation.” “Quest for ultimate truth/meaning” represented 26 phrases (14%); “Personal relationship with God” also described 26 expressions (14%). “Sense of community” represented 25 phrases (13%); “Adapt to new situations” also described 25 indicators (13%). “Personal transformation” was represented by 19 expressions (10%).

Morrison and King both provided the most expressions for “sense of community” (3), while Walker yielded the most phrases for “quest for ultimate meaning/truth” (5). King and Dyson rendered the most expressions for “adapts to new situations” (4) and Baldwin provided the most phrases for “personal transformation” (5). With 16 phrases, Dyson yielded the most indicators for “customized interpretation,” while Baldwin provided the most expressions for “personal relationship with God” (8).

Table 13 (Appendix C) illustrates that in the slavery time frame, even though all of the authors displayed mostly spirituality phrases, “static conception of god”—a religiosity characteristic—was acknowledged by all except for Sojourner Truth. Also within slavery, “preservation of self over community” and “does not adapt” were not acknowledged at all by any of the authors; however, “adaptability” had only one

acknowledger: Nat Turner. The spirituality characteristic, “personal transformation” was only acknowledged by Harriet Tubman.

All of the nonreligious authors within post-slavery (Du Bois, Wright, and Baldwin) acknowledged the spirituality characteristic, “sense of community” even though they all yielded mostly religiosity expressions in the interpretations of religion. However, they also all acknowledged “preservation of self over community”—a religiosity characteristic.

“Personal relationship with God”—a spirituality characteristic—was not acknowledged at all by authors within the Civil Rights/Black Power time frame who offered mostly religiosity expressions (Frazier, Hansberry, Ture). However, Martin Luther King did acknowledge “personal relationship with God” (the only author who displayed mostly spirituality indicators). All of the authors who yielded mostly religiosity phrases acknowledged the spirituality characteristics, “sense of community,” and “adaptability” in their interpretations of religion.

All of the post-civil rights/black power authors—even with mostly spirituality phrases—acknowledged two religiosity characteristics: “static conception of God” and “preservation of self over community” in their interpretation of African American religion. Angelou followed suit even though she yielded mostly religiosity indicators.

Although all of the postmodernity authors except for one (Cornel West) yielded mostly spirituality phrases, “personal relationship with God” was scant among spirituality characteristics acknowledged; Oprah was the only author to acknowledge it. The spirituality indicator “Customized interpretation” was the most represented indicator of

all twelve indicators (religiosity 1-6; spirituality 7-12) for each of the three authors who yielded mostly spirituality phrases. For West—the only author with mostly religiosity expressions—“customized interpretation” was the most represented spirituality characteristic; however, it was equal to the phrase count of “inability to adapt”—a religiosity indicator; each totaled five phrases.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

The fluctuations in religiosity and spirituality representations of religion within prominent black literature seem to be related to the important events in history. Double consciousness, the absurd, and Christian existentialism emerged as themes and seem to inform African American history over the span of 400 years. There appears to be a cycle of activism, reevaluation of religious meaning, and inertia or existential angst pertaining to the realization of the absurdities in black life. There also appears to be a correlation between the *type* of author who gained prominence and the social environment in which the literary artist was born into. Spiritual expression and representation is associated with the appearance of non-fiction writers and political activists. However, religiosity expression and acknowledgment seems to be connected with the emergence of the fiction writer, a strained modernity, existential angst, and a reevaluation of religious and social meaning after important events in history, such as the emancipation of slaves and the civil rights movement. A process emerges and the authors appear as activities on the continuum of black evaluation and transformation.

Many slaves were not allowed to read or write, so written accounts of experiences during slavery were scant compared to the written accounts of Freedmen and later generations. The fact that none of the authors during slavery acknowledged the “preservation of self over the community” or the “inability to adapt” as characteristic

of their interpretation of religion reveals the assumed bond and dependency among slaves in a hostile environment. Slaves did not have control over themselves; they had to change according to the whims of their owners; alienation from other slaves and the refusal to adapt to white domination would have led to death. However, discontent is displayed through the four escaped slaves that became literary representations of the black experience of slavery.

These former slaves knew both freedom and slavery and were able to report on both. They spoke for the illiterate slave still in bondage, as well as for the desire to be considered equal in the mostly white environment that they penetrated (with the exception of Nat Turner, who was executed). The vehicle through which they asserted their equality was their faith in God. The themes of “customized interpretation” and “personal relationship with God” were acknowledged during this era. Harriet Tubman believed that she was selected by God to free slaves (Abdul-Jabbar & Seinerberg, 2000). Nat Turner heard voices from God “telling him that he was too wise to be a slave” (Russell, 1984, p. 30). Douglass and Truth both reinterpreted the teachings of the bible to account for the life of a slave. Textually, from the beginning, blacks had already transformed the Christianity they inherited from white slave owners. Thus, a black spirituality emerged, affecting new confidence and a liberation movement. Blacks were not to be humble servants to whites in order to get into heaven; instead, they carved out a unique interpretation of the bible focused on enhancing and uplifting the black experience. To further distinguish the Christianity of the slave from the Christianity of the slave owner, Douglass (2003) criticized the gross hypocrisy of brutal, slave-owning,

southern, white Christians. The spirituality that defined this Period was achieved through the reinterpretation of Christianity into a religion focused on black liberation and self-worth.

After slavery, the created culture of African Americans, through religious adjustment and reinterpretation, was met with the need for adaptation in white society. Booker T. Washington became politically popular as he taught newly Freedmen how to assimilate into a capitalist society. His 1901 *Up From Slavery* text encouraged assimilation and resource accumulation in order to equally compete within the already established American capitalistic society. However, the lure of white American culture also threatened self-annihilation of the Negro. What would become of the unique African American culture developed through slavery and anchored by religious tailoring? How would former slaves be able to reach their own spiritual ideals while also striving for the goals existing within the capitalistic society of previous oppressors? Past slaves had been severed from their homeland and divorced from their African religions and customs; now, even the unique culture, fashioned in the new land, would be forced to undergo yet another transformation. There were also other problems that impeded integration into American society. Psychic damage still existed from many years of slavery. Also, “separate but equal” treatment of Negroes, through Jim Crow laws and Black codes, existed as a more subtle continuation and remembrance of the inferior position of slaves shortly before. But even the dispersion of ex-slaves—no longer immobile and bonded through mutual forced labor—in an open, uncertain, capitalistic space did not destroy the need for community identification; and according to the four authors of post-slavery,

religion was an important catalyst for community bonding: all acknowledged a “sense of community” in connection to black religion.

W.E.B. Du Bois (1995) articulated the threat of self-annihilation through his notion of a double consciousness that Negroes experienced from being both African and American: having knowledge of their uniquely cultivated culture before and during slavery, and the American culture that now beckoned them toward a new understanding of reality, while denying them self-consciousness. Du Bois felt that the pull of these two opposing forces (African and American culture) exhausted the strength of the Freedman and tormented him unabatedly: “One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Du Bois, 1995, p. 45). At the same time, this state of being rendered the Negro “gifted with second-sight” that allowed for the viewing and critiquing of the dominant culture and the way in which the dominant culture defined the Negro.

The solution posited by Du Bois in his 1903 *Souls of Black Folk* was the merging of both Negro and American culture. This could not be done through Washington’s call for the industrial education of Negroes, according to Du Bois, because Washington stressed assimilation at the expense of black culture. He negated the importance of dealing with the psychic injuries from slavery and the need to sustain a uniquely African culture to avoid self-annihilation. Du Bois’s political stance was for a classical education to correct the injury from slavery and assert the worth of black people first and foremost: “And the final product of our training must be neither a psychologist nor a brickmason,

but a man. And to make men, we must have ideals, broad, pure, and inspiring ends of living,—not sordid money-getting, not apples of gold” (Du Bois, 1995, p. 119). Through proper ideals that did not minimize the significance of unique Negro culture, African Americans would not only be able to merely capitalistically exist within American society, they would be able to simultaneously offer their unique culture, in an effort to continually improve and enrich society—this is what makes persons constantly reflect on their worth. However, the texts from both Du Bois and Washington do have a common nature: they both rely on the modern episteme of transcendental ideals and grand narratives for the entire Negro community through the human object. As dialectical men, they objectively looked at the condition of the Negro and contemplated ways to transform the negative representation of the Negro body in the mind of the dominant culture.

The consequences of gauging the double consciousness but not being able to sufficiently merge African and American identities resulted in the emergence of the fiction writer, or novelist. And text became somewhat unruly as authors broke up the grand narrative in order to expose idiosyncratic autobiographical experiences, but in a fictionalized way, allowing text freedom from the dominance of modern ideals over subordinate, descriptive language, but still holding to the political ideal of Negro interests. Emancipated slaves and their descendants became somewhat disillusioned when they found that freedom was not equality. They were expected to become American, but were not treated as equals by whites. They existed in a void, just on the outskirts of the dominant society. Nonexistent within white society, Negroes negotiated their complex existences through text. Unacknowledged by dominant culture, they lived

as invisible yet influential ghosts through literary creativity. The fiction writer emerged to depict this dilemma ignored by the mainstream.

One of the most literal expressions of Du Bois's double consciousness was depicted by white Mississippi novelist William Faulkner (1990). His 1932 novel, *Light in August*, introduced "Joe Christmas," a character tormented and eventually torn apart by his lack of a cohesive identity. His ambiguous appearance (able to assume a white or black identity) forced him to become the dumping ground for human contradiction and ignorance. Christmas was never completely sure of his heritage and was only able to gauge it through the eyes of others. Confused about his history and parentage, he was a wandering anomaly. Never able to develop a personal ideal, Christmas embraced the black identity that had been externally assigned him only to occasionally shock and temporarily gain power over a white society that he knew despised Negroes. But his mostly white appearance presented another problem in that he held the secret of his black identification and always feared it being revealed to society. This represented the shame the Negro was made to endure over his black culture and identity in the presence of the white culture he had recently entered.

Joe Christmas represented visually what Du Bois discussed psychically—the indecision between two warring identities. The tragic conclusion was exhaustion in the character Joe Christmas as Du Bois had insisted was the result of such an irreconcilable incoherence. Christmas finally gave up; he stopped running from the externally defined identity given him and assisted in self-annihilation instead. Christmas was never confirmed as being part Negro but he was treated as such. His black identity was only

pondered when other characters thought it could be used to overshadow their own insecurities and sins. Otherwise, he was assumed to be a white-looking foreigner, accepted by whites. So he spent his life powerless to the labels assigned him, just as the powerless Negro who struggled to form an identity within a dominant culture that ignored him or objectified him. But even before Faulkner's literary critique of the representations assigned to the Negro, cracks in modernity itself were already apparent. In his 1929 novel, *The Sound and the Fury*, published three years earlier, Faulkner had disregarded the linear ordering of time and the idea of a single, reliable narrator. The Compsons, a formerly respectable southern white family, was already crumbling upon the weakening soil of the notion of modern progress and purity. The most disturbing example of this process was depicted through the character Quentin Compson. Having rejected his father's nihilistic views as long as possible, Quentin finally collapsed under the pressure of contradictions in a restricting order on his thoughts and behavior and was unable to continue his linear path away from chaos; his mental collapse takes the reader through the event of the dissolution of time and order.

Richard Wright was the first black novelist to gain a mainstream audience to view textually the turmoil of the invisible American Negro. Like Joe Christmas, Wright's "Bigger Thomas," in his 1940 literary success, *Native Son*, proved to be another tragic character and casualty in the war to produce a uniquely merged identity. Bigger Thomas was clearly defined as black, yet enticed by a white culture he was never allowed to enter. Always on the outskirts of white society, Bigger used crime to alleviate his life of abject poverty. The white world both frightened and intrigued him so that he approached it with

a tragic vacillation that offset his machismo and criminality. The novel results in Thomas's self-annihilation as he refuses to put up a fight for himself in the courtroom after being caught and charged with murder. Both Christmas and Thomas became criminals always on the outskirts of society, running from the accusing society until self-annulment seemed the only way out.

Religion is ultimately rejected by both characters, but only after being revealed in its oppressive, religiosity form, through other characters. Christmas's adoptive father attempted to force a strict and repressive religion on him, and Thomas viewed religion negatively based on the effects it had on complacent blacks living in poverty. Both characters discovered bursts of authentic identity through crime. Bigger felt most alive and purposeful while he was forming an elaborate plan to avoid capture after accidentally killing a white woman. For the first time he was planning out his own life; he was in the driver's seat. Christmas's moment of clarity occurred when he killed a white woman, who was the descendent of a family of abolitionists, because she wanted to define him once and for all—a modernist ideal—or have him partake in the murder-suicide she had planned. She wanted to either seal his fate or his coffin, even though he had never been given the opportunity by society to define himself. In the end, when he gave himself up, a hint of authenticity was shown through the commentary of other characters: "He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad. For him to be a murderer and all dressed up and walking the town like he dared them to touch him, when he ought to have been skulking and hiding in the woods, muddy

and dirty and running. It was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a nigger too” (Faulkner, 1990, p. 350).

This exemplifies the existentialist phase emerging in black life, triggered by a double consciousness and reflected through black literature, or the portrayal of black characters. The foundation of religion was being excavated and explored in its current form, with all of its benefits and contradictions. The absurd—the senseless suffering and unpredictability in life—was finally accepted in a final burst of authentic self, and annihilation followed. The Absurdist movement is most identified with Albert Camus, an African born existentialist philosopher of French descent. However, the absurd was first posited by Danish philosopher and father of Christian Existentialism, Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). Accepting the absurd entails an acknowledgment of suffering and misery in life and the absence of a God to reconcile it. Instead, the individual must reconcile the dilemma through a willingness to persist in spite of senseless suffering and unpredictability. Only through this defying of the crushing weight of senseless suffering is the individual to receive purpose. Camus’ 1942 novel, *The Stranger*, also depicted a socially isolated character, Meursault, who drifted through life entertaining bodily sensations until he commits a murder, has a trial, and learns of his impending execution. Religion is also offered to this character as he awaits his execution, but he rejects it as well. Feeling himself superior to the priest who comes to see him, Meursault had this to say about his lack of belief in God, yet embracement of the absurd:

He seemed so certain about everything, didn’t he? And yet none of his certainties was worth one hair of a woman’s head. He wasn’t even sure he was alive, because he was living like a dead man. Whereas it looked as if I was the only one

who'd come up emptyhanded. But I was sure about me, about everything, surer than he could ever be, sure of my life and sure of the death I had waiting for me. Yes, that was all I had. But at least I had as much of a hold on it as it had on me. I had been right, I was still right, I was always right. (Camus, 1989, pp. 120-121)

All three existentialist characters abandon religion and find meaning through murder. Paradoxically, the murders committed by all three are either accidental or situational and not premeditated. So the absurd in meaningless and senseless suffering in life is emphasized through the misappropriation of blame placed on the existentialist characters. And they, in turn, authenticate their worth, or right to identify themselves by themselves, then disappear as ghosts—through death—shortly thereafter. The literary appearances of these ciphers of human thought mimic the actual invisibility of the marginalized, double conscious people who disappear as soon as they attempt to lift the veil and enter the dominant society. But the spark of individuality and an undying faith is present in the last actions of these marginalized men who symbolically commit suicide rather than leave the unaccepted portion of themselves behind in obscurity and shame: “‘What I killed for must’ve been good!’ Bigger’s voice was full of frenzied anguish. ‘It must have been good! When a man kills, it’s for something. . . . I didn’t know I was really alive in this world until I felt things hard enough to kill for ‘em. . . .’” (Wright, 1966, p. 392).

The embracing of existentialism without religion (through literary characters) was mainly due to the failure of religion to provide a useful foundation from which to enrich or explain life. In Richard Wright’s 1945 autobiographical, *Black Boy*, he depicted his endless quest for meaning and purpose while growing up, and the failure of religion to

accompany him, as it were, through the absurdities of post-slavery racism and poverty. Instead, religion became the barrier between he and his family; it marginalized him because of his agnosticism. Religion took on a certain strict form in the Seventh-day Adventist household and threatened to halt his quest for knowledge and new experiences. Instead of turning to religion, Wright leaves the South from which he thinks absurdity, through racism and religious complacency or religiosity, resides. He is disappointed to later experience absurdity in the north through structurally rigid Communism. However, there is no self-annihilation after the realization that absurdity penetrates all of existence. Five years earlier, Wright's literary success because of *Native Son* had allowed him to textually penetrate the veil of American society. He had written himself into the literary world and was able to see his text widely reproduced. Bigger Thomas represented everything unspeakable and tragic about the black experience, yet Wright was able to introduce the character into the larger society without having to erase himself through neglecting his own experiences in the marginal group. This was the beginning of the expression of a uniquely black experience that did not disintegrate at the doors of white society, but lifted the veil while still intact, carrying the fruits of a unique culture in its complexity and tragedy.

At this point on the continuum of black literature and expression exists what Kierkegaard (Hong & Hong, 2000) would regard as an *infinite resignation* but with glimpses into infinity. The tragic characters of the works all became disillusioned through their exhaustion in their endeavors with the main society and, subsequently, psychically resigned or retreated from that society. Through reflection, however, they

briefly emerged from their resignation from worldly senselessness and suffering, in order to embrace the absurd: “He resigned everything infinitely, and then he grasped everything again by virtue of the absurd” (Hong & Hong, 2000, p. 97). This glimpse at infinity, or burst of authenticity, by way of becoming disillusioned through the absurd—continued racism and social marginalization—would only increase in span through the fictional characters created by Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. These autobiographical characters infinitely resigned from an environment that would not validate them, only to symbolically (through text) reemerge to the light of day of that very same environment, but with a new perspective on life—that the absurd must be lived and accepted continually in order to be understood. So the fictional characters proudly venture out into a hostile environment with this new knowledge, breaking the hold of infinite resignation directed away from the absurd society. Instead of the final burst of authenticity that the past existentialist characters were only allowed to experience right before death, these characters lived to experience a longer period of authenticity and self-worth in the face of religiosity, religious contradiction, and the absurd.

Ralph Ellison was another black novelist whose 1947 novel, *Invisible Man*, was widely celebrated. Here, the main black character was explicitly defined as invisible to the white mainstream society. Again, Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness is reflected in the double sight through which the main character comes to the realization that the white society only sees him as a walking stereotype, or as an object to be defined from the outside. He has no worth as an independent thinking subject, only as an object to be classified and controlled. Du Bois (1995, p. 43) explains this objectification:

“They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? They say, I know an excellent colored man in my town.”

As was Wright’s experience, Ellison too became disillusioned with the Communist party during his lifetime and expressed this disappointment through the realizations of his narrator. While religion did not play a huge role in his novel, religious stagnation and hypocrisy was nevertheless revealed. Ellison not only creatively transformed his disillusionment and acknowledgement of the absurd (in the form of racism and ignorance) into a powerful text that effectively wrote his invisible man into mainstream society, he went further. His narrator defies the pervasive power of the symbolically blind in society that objectified him during their sleepwalking through life by refusing to die because of their foolish absurdity. Instead, the main character chooses to live underground, away from those who give him a false understanding of the world: “I knew that it was better to live out one’s own absurdity than to die for that of others...” (Ellison, 1995, p. 559). Here, underground, Ellison’s fictional character is able to finally recreate himself through love and existential reckoning, and emerge from underground to face the absurd world once again. Except now he will not be caught off guard by hardships: “And the mind that has conceived a plan of living must never lose sight of the chaos against which that pattern was conceived” (Ellison, 1995, p. 580). His narrator comes to understand the need for action, lest existential angst, infinite resignation, and subsequent inertia will get the best of him: “So why do I write, torturing myself to put it down? Because in spite of myself I’ve learned some things. Without the possibility of

action, all knowledge comes to one labeled 'file and forget,' and I can neither file nor forget. Nor will certain ideas forget me; they keep filing away at my lethargy, my complacency" (Ellison, 1995, p. 579). Ellison, who defined himself as a novelist, was mirroring his own desire to report on experiences of blacks, but his character's desire to write about his experience later leads to him leaving the underground in order to be active in society. Ellison's action through writing and his character's transition from writing about his experience to reentering society foreshadows the activism in the civil rights/black power movement to come. The time to reevaluate black meaning and religion was coming to an end and the need for activism within the absurd society loomed.

James Baldwin also symbolically left infinite resignation to embrace the absurd society with newly acquired disillusionment through his fictional, autobiographical character, John. Baldwin's 1952 novel, *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, incorporated religion much more than Ellison's 1947 work, but in a different light than Wright's *Native Son*, or *Black Boy*. The activity in Baldwin's work gave insight into the resubmission of a transformed religious meaning into black life. Whereas Wright and Du Bois recognized the importance of religion in community identification (both recognized "sense of community" in black religion), but questioned its viability in the face of the absurdity of racism and the stagnation of black life, Baldwin found unconditional love in the ashes of religious contradiction and hypocrisy. Wright, while noted for revealing the contradictions of religion, always maintained the importance of religion in shaping an initial black identity in a white culture: "Religion is the form in which America first allowed our personalities to be expressed" (Newman, 2000, pp. 54-55). Baldwin was

able to not only emerge from infinite resignation to embrace an unforgiving society, but also able to reformulate the dead religion of his family, in order to negotiate his own salvation. Whereas love overpowered the ambivalence and suffering Ellison's narrator felt (caused by both white and black characters), being born again through the ashes of a dead religion propelled Baldwin's main character away from the condescending eyes of his viciously religious father and into the loving spirituality of his savior friend, Elisha. Both Baldwin and Ellison's narrators symbolically stepped out on their own into a cruel and contradictory world, defying the balance of infinite resignation, or inertia, by affecting unbalance through religious recreation and love.

Religious uncertainty, brought about by double consciousness angst in a society that continued to reject free Negro bodies, led to yet another recreation of religion. As the slaves had negotiated their own previously denied worth through spiritual creativity, the post-slavery authors were beginning to correct the religiosity appearance they noticed in their communities. Religiosity was more of a defense mechanism that blacks established to solidify their worth in an absurd, uncertain, post-slavery environment. But the certainty obtained had been that of stagnation and did nothing to bring blacks closer to acceptance in mainstream society, or closer to an appreciation of black culture. Blacks would have to go out on a limb, physically, in order to affect structural changes and become accepted Americans. Otherworldly promises of redemption no longer satisfied blacks who wanted earthly equality. The absurd had to be confronted outside of text, and redemption had to be experienced outside of the bible.

Individual recreation through literature and textual acknowledgment was not enough to affect realities of a mainstream society that still treated the American Negro as a stepchild in consideration of the fruits of American culture. Freedom still was not equality for the black marginalized group, and black culture still lacked the ability to shine in mainstream culture in a positive way. The eradication of poverty and segregation would depend upon mainstream structural transformation and would require the conscious efforts of the larger community. Lorraine Hansberry's creative fictional work foreshadowed community activism against poverty and segregation in the civil rights/black power movement. Her fiction contrasted past black literary successes because of the lack of a single, center, autobiographical character. Wright, Ellison, and Baldwin depicted the main character overcoming adversity to become the hero of his own inner turmoil. Hansberry, instead, symbolically carried the entire black family into her text and to an overcoming of adversity in the end. Her play focused on multiple realities and how each character departed from their illusions eventually. The 1959 play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, exhibited the endurance and self-sufficiency of the entire black family. Still marginalized by a racist society and dogged by poverty, the family pulled together to demand equal treatment and integration in the end. Each character represented a certain illusion that was dissipated through life experiences or insights from other members.

Walter's illusion was that of the American Dream, while his mother's was the subconscious idea of African inferiority compared to American Christianity, and Beneatha's was an infinite resignation and negative thinking due to poverty and racism. Asagai, the only African character, who represented the extended family in Africa, was

the only character who did not go through a phase of disillusionment; he catalyzed the spiritual understanding of black suffering by *living* the answer to it. His idealism and faith, in spite of the absurd in life's uncertainties, would later be shown in all the characters as they move from segregated poverty to ill-received integration.

Hansberry's literary transformation and cooperation of the entire family through the pains of poverty symbolized and foreshadowed the cooperation to come in the civil rights movement and black power. And the theme of a "sense of community," received through religion, carried over into this era from post-slavery. The gradual change from fiction writer to nonfiction writers and activists was the result of fiction writing fulfilling its purpose in introducing complex black experience—through text—into a white society that had ignored it, giving depth to a two-dimensional, depthless prior representation. But in the double-conscious authors who reported on the absurd in American racism and the desire to merge an identity in spite of it, there was also a marked transformation through the text. The fiction writer was offering the black reader another way of interpreting his or her experience, or religious meaning-making so that regardless of the changes in the outside world, the black reader could simply change his or her perspective and live under any absurdities. This is the way Kierkegaard suggested Christian Existentialists live—by changing their view within the absurd rather than avoiding the absurd altogether (Hong and Hong 2000). Existentialism clashing with Christian influence was extensively explored by Wright, Baldwin, and Ellison. The previous major fictional character contributions to text had both revealed the inability to affect the larger society beyond the text and the idiosyncratic language that refused to be chained behind

purported order and ideals. The lively created characters in between pages represented the lack of actual black bodies within white culture being able to alter it and affect actual structural change. Nevertheless, the desire was there for the fiction writers, as well as their activist successors. The fictional characters would soon leave the tragic, but redeeming, pages of their authors' masterpieces to inhabit the bodies of black activists who employed cooperation and community purpose to force visibility and equal treatment.

The civil rights movement, beginning in the mid 1950s, represented the uniting of the marginalized groups in society to call for structural changes that would make equality available to all Americans; it also marked the mainstream acknowledgement of minority invisibility, evidenced by the wide support from non-minority members of the mainstream culture. The inward reflections of popular fiction writers would now have to be reversed in order to substitute textual existence with actual existence and acceptance within American culture. Unruly text would again become subordinate and secondary to the transcendent notion of progress and mutual goals that connected the modern episteme through a web of known and controllable representations. Marginalized groups, such as Jews and blacks, as well as sympathetic non-minorities, used their bodies to express civil disobedience through nonviolent boycotts and sit-ins. Here blacks were sure of their visibility within white culture. It was not a pleasant visibility, in that nonviolent activists were often the victims of violent segregationists, but it was an actual visibility. That visibility did lead to social change. Dr. Martin Luther King was the icon of the nonviolent activism by groups previously counted as invisible. Now that a visible black

body was within mainstream white society, King was able to represent structural change. As a Baptist minister, as well as a theologian, he was an appropriate icon to breach the boundaries separating black life from white life because he already embodied the amalgamation of modernist ideals from both white and black culture and religion:

Martin King's dream was defined by two movements of American Protestant Christianity. These two movements—the black church and white, Protestant liberalism—were embodied in his life respectively, in the black Baptist church of his southern childhood and youth and in the northern seminary and graduate school he attended. King's faith was primarily Christian in the black Baptist tradition, but unlike most ministers of that community, he had a long experience among Protestant liberals which reshaped his theological interpretation of his primary faith...They both reinforced the central assumption of King's dream: that America was a Christian nation which had failed to live out the true meaning of its destiny. That destiny was defined by the nation's moral vision of freedom and justice and its religious identity as the Kingdom of God, the "beloved community" that King referred to so often. (Cone, 2006, p. 121).

He was the walking example of what an African American could become if allowed to properly and regularly integrate and influence mainstream white society. But more importantly, he was the last hope for a modern society united in social harmony and religious ideals.

King was critical of Christian hypocrisy in America in the form of racism, poverty, and inequality. He also criticized the stagnation in some Negro ministries. "Repeatedly, King made two main criticisms of the Negro church: its one-sided, anti-intellectual focus on the heaven theme to the exclusion of problems of earth, and its class snobbery" (Cone, 2006, p. 147). Sensationalism in the form of foot-stomping and hand clapping had left no foundation in the real world for Negroes to fight against poverty and inequality: "A minister cannot preach the glories of heaven while ignoring social

conditions in his own community that cause men an earthly hell,” King said (Cone, 2006, p. 147). The founder of 1960s black Theology, James Cone, and later, Cornel West, continued this growing system of counter-discourse that was critical and reflexive toward black religion and the black church; they also tried to bring religion into every-day life and affect social change rather than focus entirely on sensationalism and otherworldly ambitions (Murray, 2004). However, just as all of the authors of the civil rights time frame, as well as post-slavery writers, recognized “sense of community” in black religion, the theologians still defended the community togetherness formed through church interaction.

King’s fight for equality and the end of black poverty proved successful, at least initially. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 in many ways reversed the Jim Crow laws of segregation against Negroes, providing them with the right to equal access to schools, housing, and jobs. This came a year after King’s “I have a dream” speech that called for a nation united in religion and equality, and would prove to be the peak of modern ideals. Later, King became somewhat disillusioned with the eradication of Negro poverty in the years leading up to his murder in 1968: “When Martin saw the poverty still affecting blacks he could not understand why whites assumed that the passage of the recent civil rights legislation meant that Negroes had achieved full equality” (Cone, 2006, p. 224). King visited Los Angeles to find unbearable poverty: “‘Things are not right in this country,’ he said, over and over again. ‘Why are there 40 million poor people in a nation over-flowing with such unbelievable affluence?’” (Cone, 2006, p. 224) This disillusionment would continue as “he began to speak more and more of America as a

morally 'sick society' and of his dream of 1963 being turned into a nightmare" (Cone, 2006, p. 224). One author (Akil, 1993, p. 19) commented on the loss of a dream:

Dr. King was a very sincere and determined leader, who made great accomplishments toward the liberation of our people, but there was a problem....There was a problem with Dr. King's dream. The problem was that Dr. King was "dreaming" during a time of blatant "reality." Dr. King's dream was to obtain the "American Dream" for Black people, but he didn't realize that we obviously already had "The American Dream." All that Black people ever had was "The American Dream." We are asleep having "The American Dream," while white-folks are wide-awake having "The American Reality!"

King said flatly, toward the end of his life: "I am sorry to have to say to you that the vast majority of white Americans are racist, either consciously or unconsciously" (Cone, 2006, p. 233).

Malcolm X's emergence came to embody this nightmare (along with the introduction of the black power movement) that became apparent to King upon his visits to still impoverished black communities. He represented the criticism that was now developing from the failure of Christianity to unite blacks and whites in social unity. As a Muslim, he represented a religious alternative to a mainly Christian black community and fueled the counter-discourse of black power.

King's acknowledgment of continued poverty and disillusionment agreed with Malcolm X's, but it would be wrong to suggest that King became a nationalist, as Malcolm was, toward the end of his life: "This is not to suggest that Martin became a closet black nationalist. He did not, because he viewed its advocates as promoters of hate and violence" (Cone, 2006, p. 225). The black power movement's "by any means

necessary” stance reminded King too much of the violence unleashed on blacks in the past by their oppressor: “Some people are telling us to be like our oppressor, who has a history of using Molotov cocktails, who has a history of dropping the atom bomb, who has a history of lynching Negroes,’ he shouted, venting his anger during a civil rights rally in Yazoo City, Mississippi. ‘Now people are telling me to stoop down to that level’” (Cone, 2006, p. 225).

Malcolm X’s radical stance against poverty, oppression, and idealism motivated blacks to question long-held religious assumptions. After all, Christianity had been a faith inherited by white oppressors and not one that blacks had been able to freely decide upon. Black power advocates turned a critical eye on the ability of Christianity to jumpstart the conscience of the white mainstream:

The third myth proceeds from the premise that political coalitions can be sustained on a moral, friendly or sentimental basis, or on appeals to conscience. We view this as myth because we believe that political relations are based on self-interest: benefits to be gained and losses to be avoided. For the most part, man’s politics is determined by his evaluation of material good and evil. Politics results from a conflict of interests, not of consciences. (Ture & Hamilton, 1967, p. 75)

The counter-discourses, in the form of black Theology and black nationalism, noted King’s frustration in uniting black and white Christians in social and material equality during the civil rights movement. This led the black community into a, once again, segregated position within American society, and began to reveal a rupture in the transcendent ideal of a united black community. King had made blacks visible through his widespread fame as a person, and not text; however, poverty subsequently revealed the lack of integration of black and white culture and social equality. And, furthermore,

the black middle class had left the struggling and larger lower class behind to fend for itself, according to some thinkers.

E. Franklin Frazier, even before King's widespread success, saw the abandonment of the poverty-stricken lower class—and rupture in the black community—by the materialism-obsessed middle class. The Black Bourgeoisie represented blacks who had penetrated the veil separating black society from white society through capitalistic gains alone. They had succeeded in Booker T. Washington's political stance for Negro resource accumulation. Unfortunately, while they existed materially within mainstream white culture, they died spiritually and culturally—left on the fringes of a white society that still did not recognize black culture. Forced to mimic white culture, they became second-rate white people rather than authentic blacks. According to Frazier (1963), the black middle class became disconnected from the authentic religions of their ancestors—a liberating religion in the time of community togetherness and racial segregation. The new integrated religion of the black middle class was only an extension of their materialistic gains, a mere pastime to socialize and gossip rather than gain pride and cultural distinction. However, the disillusionment following King's recognition of continued poverty and his murder would force the black community back into the realization of segregation. James Cone expressed this realization intellectually by the emergence of a black Theology. Through disappointment in civil rights efforts, Cone embraced Malcolm X and the black power movement through his Theology focused on the black experience and the need for black worth and black liberation first and foremost.

For him, symbolic segregation was a way for blacks to incubate and emerge with new confidence and understanding of the failures of integration (Cone, 2004).

Poverty was the most visible veil of disconnect between a capitalistic society and a mostly poor black community. Black novelists emerged again to provide nostalgia for black cultural affirmation, even in the grips of poverty. Unable to effectively uncover the veil and enter the American Dream, the black community retreated into recollection of cultural affirmation before the pressing need of capitalistic integration. And language itself was reemerging from the grips of transcendental rule, expressing its boundlessness and affirmation. Cecil Cone (1975), theologian James Cone's brother, continued the critique of the cultural abandonment by the black middle class and the affected split between the rich and the poor within the black community. He also critiqued his brother's merging of political issues with religious ones through his appropriation of the black power movement in his *Theology*. Accusing James Cone of embracing white academia in his black *Theology*, Cecil Cone looked to the poor and voiceless black community for authentic religion rooted in African culture, instead of European ideals and political worldliness. But language had already begun to fold over onto and destroy set categories from the influence of multiple noted counter-discourses of the black community, which emerged during the civil rights movement: black power concepts, garnered from Malcolm X, were merging with Christianity, secular concerns merged freely with religious ones, and middleclass white academic training worked in the background of black affirmation, creating a *Theology* that critiqued and textually reorganized the very religion from which it sprang.

A stasis resulted from this post-civil rights collapse of both the modern episteme and the reliance on transcendent ideals for permanent social change—a collapse that Foucault (1994) explored in his mid 1960s work, *The Order of Things*. The established categories—spirituality and religiosity—failed to reveal anything of meaning to the idea of a religion ordered by clear signs of representation: the number of phrases pointing to either indicator was equal. The sign of religion had become exhausted through the loosening of signifiers from their assumed categories through reflexive critiques in counter-discourses.

Emergent significant novelists chose to affirm black culture through their symbolic ventures back in time. Through text, they affirmed the significance of black culture, even if it was still not acknowledged in actual form within the main society. The difference between the prominent novelists of post-civil rights/black power and the novelist of post-slavery, or *pre-civil rights*, is the view of coming and going from the veil of white society. Post-slavery novelists Wright, Ellison, and Baldwin symbolized the absurdity of racism, first confronted by the main character, and then conquered through a refusal to be deterred by the condescending veil separating him from mainstream acknowledgment in actual form rather than mere textual form. The textual acknowledgement of their work dealing with the unacknowledged complexity of the black experience led to the actual acknowledgment of black figures such as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. However, following the disappointment of continued poverty and inequality, black novelists of post-civil rights symbolized the retreat from the veil of white society into segregated contemplation and the textual signifier freedom to

affirm the grotesque and unpleasant for its own sake, countering the need for pleasant resolutions in modern thought (Foucault, 1994).

Maya Angelou's 1969 successful—and frequently banned for its unpleasant and grotesque subject matter—autobiographical novel, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, represented a retreat to childhood where she was met with racism, segregation, and religious stagnation, yet creatively found ways to maintain her pride and sense of humor. She candidly questioned her own sexual orientation and, fearing lesbian tendencies, she engaged in experimental heterosexual sex as a way to normalize herself. Alice Walker's 1982 novel (made into successful film), *The Color Purple*, also retreated, symbolically, in time to a segregated, post-slavery black community of religious hypocrisy. Cecil, an emotionally stunted and physically abused woman, found solace in a dysfunctional sexual and emotional relationship with another woman. The 1987 novel, *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison, a tragic depiction of infanticide, was also made into a movie and became the most successful work of American fiction over the past 25 years in 2006. A symbolic retreat to slavery and post-slavery was appropriated to give new meaning to slavery atrocities and affirm personal authenticity in spite of dehumanization, through the freedom and affirmation of language.

The three literary successes channeled the recreation of the absurd through personal reevaluation of the unfavorable situation first explored by post-slavery novelists. This was a symbolic rejuvenation of the Kierkegaard notion of reentering an absurd environment, after finding it lacking, and proving that the only thing that needs to be changed in order for the world to be livable is the mind of the viewer herself. Since

blacks were not culturally allowed into mainstream society—except marginally, through textual creation—successful female novelists enacted their transformation on the fringes of society as they retreated to segregated reaffirmation of black worth and literary freedom through signifier reorganization. Symbolically, they collected the pieces of black culture that had been left behind as blacks attempted to pierce through mainstream modern society, and reconfigured them in their creative ventures into the repressed shame and labeled inferiority.

In attempting to heal the neglected wounds of slavery that Du Bois articulated close to a century before, fiction writers Toni Morrison and Octavia Butler took a more literal approach in their textual transformation of the damaged black psyche. Butler's successful 1979 science fiction work, *Kindred*, presented a young black woman who was repeatedly and forcibly returned to slavery to assist her white and black ancestors. Dana, the main character, returned to this period in time carrying the knowledge of her present 20<sup>th</sup> century self to inject her knowledge and experiences into people of the past. Butler's main character realized that after doing all that she could to heal and direct her ancestors during slavery, she had to move forward to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and leave them behind, as did Morrison's main character, Sethe. This was not a negation of the past, both Dana and Sethe still had memories of past atrocities and injury in the present, but a will to live in the present and not get caught in the cycle of repressed memories. Dana did this by finally killing her white ancestor, who was the one that kept forcing her back into slavery because he wanted her to remain his slave. Sethe moved on by finally letting go of the daughter she murdered in order to prevent her from living a horrible life of slavery. Both

characters would have been perpetually unnerved by repressed memories had they not confronted the past and redefined it, allowing them to finally release themselves from the detrimental and uncontrollable unconscious. The inertia and existential angst suffered by these characters, due to past, repressed injury, had to be broken by reevaluation and a will to live in the present rather than the past.

Still, the past informed the present just as the present novelist informed the past through new lenses. Toni Morrison revealed this through her constant blurring of the boundaries between life and death; past and present. The past was made conscious through Morrison's depiction of the killed daughter of Sethe, *Beloved*, reemerging in order to force Sethe to merge her compartmentalization of past pain. Morrison's earlier 1977 novel, *Song of Solomon*, and later novel, *Paradise*, published in 1998, also symbolized this merging of the past with the present within a segregated black community. Morrison managed to artfully depict this productive merging and communion of the past in the present by introducing ethereal, conscious characters to guide and reassure present characters. Pilate's dead father in *Song of Solomon* assisted her in her poverty-ridden life in maintaining her pride and identity so that when she too died, she would know her name. The main character, Milkman Dead, also found that nothing was more important than embracing his identity and history through real and ethereal discovery of the past. The women in *Paradise*, even in death, asserted themselves consciously and cherished the experiences and transformations that life had provided them with. Written in multiple points of view, the five women of the Convent (Consolata, Mavis, Gigi, Seneca, and Pallas), rejected by society and harmed emotionally

and physically by those they trusted, were bonded by their absurd lives full of senseless suffering and pain. As Kierkegaard contended, once people are bonded through similar pain and suffering, it minimizes the atrocities that brought them together in the first place and they are instead preoccupied with mutual love (Hong & Hong, 2000). The dissolution of the importance of a linear, immediately interpretable time is present in the African American post-civil rights and postmodern fiction texts: the commingling of ghosts with the living, the unexplained transfer of the human body into a past century, and the in-depth descriptions of continued experiences of those who have physically died.

According to Foucault (1994), as modernity ends, so does the dialectical man, who has placed order and differentiation over the threat of formless signifiers brushing over the carefully established categories and transcendent position of the objective thinking being. But as the soil gives way under the feet of the modern man, both created by words and limited by them, there is nowhere to go. One must face nonexistence. The spiritual revival of the *Paradise* women occurred when they stopped running from themselves. Upon initial death, each woman had found the Convent in order to halt the death and rebirth process. Unaware of their deaths, they gravitated toward the Convent—their void between life and death—and reflected on their troubled lives (Morrison, 1998). The all black town that surrounded them (as they lived in the Convent), yet marginalized and branded them loose and abandoned women, mirrored their deaths. The black town was also dead because the inhabitants lived in the past. They celebrated their ancestors who, despite mistreatment from whites and middle class blacks, carried their pride into new land and built their own segregated society. Richard Misner, a controversial

minister who sought to change the stagnant black community, noted that they lacked a celebration of themselves. Every year they would put on a play to act out the courageous efforts of their ancestors in their brutal journey during post-slavery and their triumph in finally securing their own land—this was their culture. But their culture was dead because, isolated from both whites and middle class blacks, they had no connection to the outside world and had made no attempt to change or add to the history they celebrated. Their response to double consciousness and the realization of the veil that separated them from American culture resulted in a stunted culture that not only was invisible to mainstream culture, but was counterproductive to the living descendents who, themselves, felt unworthy of celebration and transformation of culture.

The five women of the Convent, however, gained spiritual redemption through breaking the cycle of reflection and longing that kept them at the religious halfway house between life and death. The inertia and existential angst they felt was palpable through the very existence of the Convent, symbolically erected to house their despair. Consolata, the only Convent woman seemingly aware of their deaths, observed these women and noted their stagnation and perpetual ignorance. In helping the women understand their own deaths, Consolata merges the flesh and spirit of the women. The painful lives, filled with absurdity and neglect and eventual death is analogous to the disillusionment African Americans experienced upon realizing that poverty and racism still existed after the spirited efforts of civil rights activists. The deaths of the women represent three important things: the death of a static religion that closely outlined the boundaries of black belief (for Morrison, this opened up the possibility of magic or

witchcraft); the death from mainstream society, since the women were also isolated and unacknowledged by the surrounding community; and the ultimate death of dreaming man, who thought he was separate and distinct, but upon death, blended into the experiences of others through untamed signifiers: The Convent women gathered their unacknowledged corpses from the society that did not acknowledge them, and connected them with their present consciousnesses after death.

This unity of past and present, living and dead, and flesh and spirit, defined Morrison's characters and helped them accept death, informed. The women of the Convent, just as Pilate and Milkman of *Song of Solomon*, embraced their troubled personal histories of isolation and neglect, even in death, so that their awareness carried over in any environment—finite or infinite—and to future black generations. Time was no obstacle in shared experience. Finally united in the realization of death, the Convent women (who first united by chance), were able to solidify their bond through the gathering of the respective corpses from an indifferent society. They then placed those corpses in an eternal embrace in the car of one of the women. This symbolized the ability of the women to not only leave their troubled lives behind as they finally accepted their deaths and voyaged to the afterlife, but to leave a trace of their unity in an indifferent world. The skeletons that represented each woman's body, and the positioning of those skeletons in an eternal embrace, revealed the ultimate control the women negotiated over their turbulent pasts. Instead of eternally running from an unforgiving society in shame, they found solace in each other, and carved out a permanent place on the very soil that had rejected them. And now they exist in text alone; the death of man has given language

free reign to order itself in unique uncontrolled ways. With no master to subordinate it into representative order, text can either come alive, affirming its own truth, as it did in Cervantes (2004) *Don Quixote*, or remain confusing marks on pages created by authors with unique experiences that will continue to elude transcendent commentary and understanding.

With the dissolution of modern ideals and the freedom of language, the public black academics, existing mostly through the proliferation of their texts, make an art form out of customized understanding of the black experience. Christian Existentialist Kierkegaard described the “knight of infinity” as one who has resigned from the absurdities of life only to reappear in the finite and absurd to continually redefine himself in the face of uncertainty:

He drains the deep sadness of life in infinite resignation, he knows that blessedness of infinity, he has felt the pain of renouncing everything, the most precious thing in the world, and yet the finite tastes just as good to him as to one who never knew anything higher, because his remaining in finitude would have no trace of a timorous, anxious routine, and yet he has this security that makes him delight in it as if finitude were the surest thing of all. And yet, yet the whole earthly figure he presents is a new creation by virtue of the absurd. He resigned everything infinitely, and then he grasped everything again by virtue of the absurd. He is continually making the movement of infinity, but he does it with such precision and assurance that he continually gets finitude out of it, and no one ever suspects anything else. (Hong & Hong, 2000, p. 97)

The will to live after disillusionment has been accomplished by the merging of the past with the present in an agreement to exist in a postmodern society of relative truths, surplus representations, continued racism, and poverty. The theme of “customized interpretation” as a characteristic of spirituality was the most apparent with postmodern

authors; the count of “customized interpretation” phrases nearly tripled those of all other time frames, except post-civil rights. The rapid reconfiguration and proliferation of text and meaning had no room to move in the tiny, catchall category, “customized interpretation.”

The highly individualized and unpredictable texts of the popular postmodern academics, however, involve more than the traces of a postmodern society saturated by meanings and texts, they continue to display spiritual striving in uncertainty. Michael Eric Dyson (1997, 2004) candidly discussed triumphs and blunders in his own life and merged these experiences into a new, present world view, crafted by the unique transformation he experienced. His experiences as a young churchgoer and minister, along with his commentary on that phase of his life, are bound in text. Bell hooks (1989, 1996, 2003) is also candid about her troubled past and individual battle with racism and sexism, but she binds this in text with her current reflections and ideas for the future. Just as the female characters of Toni Morrison’s *Paradise* finally come to accept and reintegrate their past with their present and future in an eternal bond of acceptance in both life and death, Dyson and hooks candidly and carefully explore the depths of their individual lives. They bind these discoveries textually with creative reflection and a will, as well as a plan, to live through absurdities. The prominent academic Christian Existentialist Cornel West (1999, p. 357) also uses an individualized method to continue confronting the absurd: “To be a part of the prophetic tradition is not to be a prophet or elitist. Rather, it is humbly to direct your strongest criticisms at yourself and then self-critically speak your mind to others with painful candor and genuine compassion.”

The inward directed criticism and humility that Cornel West describes and hooks and Dyson display has also been achieved textually by Christian Existentialist inspired authors of the past. The individualized path leading to, and relationship created with God becomes more valuable than any abstract God described or categorized by others. For example, Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky's 1866 novel, *Crime and Punishment*, followed the contemplations and eventual self-realization of a young man who was tormented endlessly until he made the decision to live through life's absurdities and embrace God. However, his path to God was a unique, individualized one, as is every true Christian Existentialist's; and it can be through no other means that one comes to view the infinite. For instance, the main character, Raskolnikov, finally accepted God because of a crime that he originally deemed justified and redeeming to the entire human race. Later, however, he fell into infinite resignation because of guilt and uncertainty about his crime; he criticized his own actions and finally discredited them. The indirect motivation for him to personally choose to go to God came from a young prostitute whom he befriended and eventually fell in love with. Her steadfast trust in God and determination to walk with Raskolnikov through his punishment, as well as help him rebuild his life afterwards, incited humility in him through his emerging love for her. Finally, individualized realization, based on a troublesome and complicated path, led him to accept God as well. Just as the woman's unconditional love and acceptance of Raskolnikov, as well as her steadfast, individualized trust in God, indirectly affected Raskolnikov's own faith, the individualized texts of postmodernity spiritual intellectuals can have an analogous, indirect effect on readers. Since, according to Kierkegaard, every

man must find God through his own unique path and strivings; another person can only provide an indirect model for such an individual path (Hong & Hong, 2000).

Christian Existentialism, as a highly individualized journey to God, seems to encounter the same problem as black religion did at the end of the civil rights movement; it becomes an empty signifier, exhausted by too many individual interpretations to be allowed under the same umbrella term. In an era where signs are completely separated from things and are no longer required to signify anything, the burden is on the author alone to create a compelling use of language to affirm his text and thus make it come alive for the potential reader.

Oprah Winfrey, even as the richest African American woman, still publicly explores the depths of her troubled childhood. Her openness and willingness to admit her flaws and missteps binds the Oprah of the past with the successful Oprah of the present in a unique experience. This experience, however, can only be indirectly acknowledged and appreciated by her multitudes of viewers. Instead, she encourages her viewers to go after their own dreams: “What God has intended for you goes far beyond anything you can imagine” (Newman, 2000, p. 162). This is only an abstract and indirect statement for her viewers as Kierkegaard would contend:

This *oneself* is not humanity in general, subjectivity in general, and other such things, whereby everything becomes easy inasmuch as the difficulty is removed and the whole matter is shifted over into the shadow play of abstraction. The difficulty is greater than for the Greek, because even greater contrasts are playing together because existence is accentuated paradoxically as sin, and eternity paradoxically as the god in time. The difficulty is to exist in them, not abstractly to think oneself out of them and abstractly to think about, for example, an eternal divine becoming and other such things that appear when one removes the difficulty. (Hong & Hong, 2000, p. 227)

The prominent African Americans of postmodernity indirectly display the unity they have with themselves through texts that do not separate the author from the characters. As nonfiction writers and entertainers, they unify their past and present through textual freedom and affirmation. In reading their text, there is no separation between author and characters because of a continual reflexivity that occurs when the transcendent ideal is no longer available; the dialectical man that once controlled the distribution of signifiers is no longer reliable; thought and experience mold language endlessly.

Consistent with recent research, African American Christianity has endured throughout racism, psychological maladjustment, and everyday life, enhancing black life through the spiritual prescribing of worth and motivation. However, the collapse of the system of signification to order and explain religious interpretation after the civil rights time frame revealed the exhaustion of “religion” as a sign that could be accurately studied by the use of twelve indicators. And the emergence of significant counter-discourses—black nationalism and black Theology—threatened even the idea of a unified black community. Also, the proliferation of unpredictable signifier reorganization and creation by prominent African American academics of postmodernity, in their “customized interpretations,” left little room for categorized signifiers to sufficiently order language, which called into question the ability of even “spirituality” to account for the many diverse ways of approaching the notion of God or infinity.

## *Conclusion*

With the exception of Oprah, the academics of postmodernity are expressed mainly in text. Oprah is visibly present on a top rated talk show, but West, Dyson, and hooks are professors who concentrate on African American issues; their numerous, insightful, and engaging texts have led to recognition. They continue the tradition of using text to pierce the veil of American mainstream society, but their bodies are still segregated from that society. Even though they have all taught at mainstream universities, they are still recognized as black thinkers on African American issues and can be easily relegated to special interest group status by mainstream America. They also write extensively about the prevalence of racism and their continued personal experiences with it. Instead of being blended into the American tradition of thinkers, black thinkers and writers continue to be made available through special interest text. They are not successfully integrated into mainline American culture as a viable source of American cultural development at large.

The dilemma is that West, hooks, and Dyson understand that racism still exists and they create texts to indirectly model their own personal continued overcoming of it to readers. West (1999, p. 359) contends that “to be a contemporary religious intellectual-and person-is to be caught in this creative tension on the boundary between past and present, tradition and modernity-yet always mounted in the barricades on this battlefield on which life is lived and history is made.” But continued focus on racism runs the risk of limiting language, making the African American contribution to text reactionary. Berger (1999, pp. 59-60) experienced this phenomenon:

When I attended my first Martin Luther King Day celebration at my daughter's school, I was shocked to see that the kids were being introduced to black culture only through the story of American racism. My daughter's introduction to black culture in school was really about the oppression of black people. Are we teaching our students about the liberation struggles of blacks, or are we teaching them that black people don't matter unless they are oppressed?

Victor Anderson (Murray, 2004) had a similar problem with the reactionary identity blacks had accepted through white oppression. He contended that an identity tied to oppression would not bring about liberation, nor free up creativity for other intellectual endeavors.

The realization of the still erected veil between blacks and the dominant white culture continues the double consciousness experienced by black writers whose literary expression is continually critical of American society because of continued racism and oppression. The skeletons huddled together through similar experiences of suffering in Morrison's *Paradise* carried memory of the struggles of individual experiences just as text gives continued existence to all of the past authors as soon as an interested reader opens the pages and allows the signifiers to speak for themselves.

In a postmodern society saturated with text, relative truths compete for dominance and recognition, from a Foucauldian perspective, and no accepted truth is permanent. Changes in power and historical events can abruptly alter the dominant discourses concerning race, religion, and culture, as well as the type of literary elite. But text extends much further than the author. The black authors and thinkers of the past have significantly influenced the continued reflexivity of a black culture; they have helped reform religion, and encouraged black worth through their texts even today and will

continue to be referenced and acknowledged for this in the future. And this makes up black culture and proves its resilience through the spiritual vehicle present throughout African American history.

This account about Foucault, in death, told by a close friend, sums up the textual continuation and immortality of black culture and the spiritual vehicle through which this is accomplished, as Foucault's own work has extended past his death:

All at once I saw that I was being passed at a high rate of speed by a powerful car, green and joyous, that had axles wider than its chassis, and thick tires. The car, of an unusual make, had a large rectangular window in the rear, which allowed one to see inside. Just as it overtook me, I recognized Foucault as the driver; surprised, he turned his head quickly towards me and smiled at me in passing with his thin lips. I immediately pressed down on the accelerator in order to catch up with him, then let up just as quickly. In the first place, the strange car was gone too fast; and then its appearance did not have the look of a perception but rather the scent of a hallucination. The car disappeared in the distance, or ceased to be, I don't know which (and I am not sure either that the question has any meaning). I had not even understood that the curious rear window was that of a hearse; a friend pointed this out to me, many months later. On the other hand, I knew instantly (and I stopped right away on the shoulder to make a note of this, so as to be sure later on that I had not been dreaming) that the vision meant both that Foucault's history books went much farther than mine, and that Foucault was going where we all shall go. (Veyne, Porter, & Davidson, 1993, p. 9)

There is no telling where the relative truths of today's African American thinkers will lead black culture, but it is clear that black culture and creativity extends much further back than one lifetime. Each generation of writers both symbolize and influence the resilience of the African American will to live within the absurd. Wed to a spiritual vehicle for that mission, and a willingness to ride into the future of uncertainty with the vehicle of faith and identity, the black thinker joyfully takes the texts of past thinkers

along for the ride, knowing that they too hold the jewels of black culture and worth, and that when man has died, only text will be left (Foucault, 1994).

Due to the appropriation of only twelve indicators that statically pointed to either religiosity or spirituality expressions, as a researcher, I ran the risk of becoming a “Don Quixote” by chasing signs that had no real world application; and I became such a character at the end of the civil rights literary contribution. But I also had the opportunity—as Cervante (2004) revealed—to realize both the error and truth in language application to things. The counter-discourse of literature and black Theology paralleled the dissolution of modernity itself and showed the inability of language to be subordinated by ordered signifiers or transcendent interpretation. Language began to affirm its own idiosyncratic truths, and signifiers freely intermingled with each other. Therefore, the study of the course of religion within the black community became its own undoing as religion itself turned into an overstocked sign. Thomas J. J. Altizer’s (2003) concerns that in this postmodern society, there is no clear understanding of a God is evidenced by this research. There are so many subjectivities, unique experiences, and continual reflexive processes concerning God that all that can be confirmed is the total anonymity of God and subsequently, the affirming of nothingness or empty signifiers (Altizer, 2003). The next research step would be to find out why the sign religion is still being used in postmodernity as a catchall sign pointing to diverse experiences

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **CODE SHEET**

#### Religiosity Indicators (1-6)

1. Reliance on obsolete doctrine
2. Routine worship/practices
3. Preservation of self over community/other
4. Static conception of God
5. Emphasis on heaven/hell/salvation
6. Does not adapt

#### Spirituality Indicators (7-12)

7. Sense of community
8. Quest for ultimate truth or meaning
9. Adaptability
10. Personal transformation
11. Customized interpretation
12. Personal relationship with God

## APPENDIX B

### COLLECTED PHRASES

*The Confessions of Nat Turner*      By: Nat Turner

*Entire confession*

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 4**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 7**

#### **Religiosity**

Having soon discovered to be great, I must appear so, and therefore studiously avoided mixing in society, and wrapped myself in mystery, devoting my time to fasting and prayer--By this time, having arrived to man's estate, and hearing the scriptures commented on at meetings, I was struck with that particular passage which says: "Seek ye the kingdom of Heaven and all things shall be added unto you." I reflected much on this passage, and prayed daily for light on this subject. p. 8-9      2

About this time I was placed under an overseer, from whom I ran away- and after remaining in the woods thirty days, I returned, to the astonishment of the negroes on the plantation, who thought I had made my escape to some other part of the country, as my father had done before. But the reason of my return was, that the Spirit appeared to me and said I had my wishes directed to the things of this world, and not to the kingdom of Heaven, and that I should return to the service of my earthly master--"For he who knoweth his Master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes, and thus, have I chastened you." And the negroes found fault, and murmured against me, saying that if they had my sense they would not serve any master in the world. p. 9-10      4

After this revelation in the year 1825, and the knowledge of the elements being made known to me, I sought more than ever to obtain true holiness before the great day of judgment should appear, and then I began to receive the true knowledge of faith. p. 10      5

And on the 12th of May, 1828, I heard a loud noise in the heavens, and the Spirit instantly appeared to me and said the Serpent was loosened, and Christ had laid down the yoke he had borne for the sins of men, and that I should take it on and fight against the Serpent, for the time was fast approaching when the first should be last and the last should be first. p. 11   **5**

## **Spirituality**

Being at play with other children, when three or four years old, I was telling them something, which my mother overhearing, said it had happened before I was born--I stuck to my story, however, and related somethings which went, in her opinion, to confirm it--others being called on were greatly astonished, knowing that these things had happened, and caused them to say in my hearing, I surely would be a prophet, as the Lord had shewn me things that had happened before my birth. p. 7   **12**

As I was praying one day at my plough, the spirit spoke to me, saying "Seek ye the kingdom of Heaven and all things shall be added unto you." *Question*--what do you mean by the Spirit. *Ans.* The Spirit that spoke to the prophets in former days--and I was greatly astonished, and for two years prayed continually, whenever my duty would permit--and then again I had the same revelation, which fully confirmed me in the impression that I was ordained for some great purpose in the hands of the Almighty. p. 9   **12**

Knowing the influence I had obtained over the minds of my fellow servants, (not by the means of conjuring and such like tricks--for to them I always spoke of such things with contempt) but by the communion of the Spirit whose revelations I often communicated to them, and they believed and said my wisdom came from God. p. 9   **12**

And about this time I had a vision--and I saw white spirits and black spirits engaged in battle, and the sun was darkened--the thunder rolled in the Heavens, and blood flowed in streams--and I heard a voice saying, "Such is your luck, such you are called to see, and let it come rough or smooth, you must surely bare it." I now withdrew myself as much as my situation would permit, from the intercourse of my fellow servants, for the avowed purpose of serving the Spirit more fully--and it appeared to me, and reminded me of the things it had already shown me, and that it would then reveal to me the knowledge of the elements, the revolution of the planets, the operation of tides, and changes of the seasons. p. 10   **8**

For they were the lights of the Saviour's hands, stretched forth from east to west, even as they were extended on the cross on Calvary for the redemption of sinners. And I wondered greatly at these miracles, and prayed to be informed of a certainty of the meaning thereof--and shortly afterwards, while laboring in the field, I discovered drops of blood on the corn as though it were dew from heaven-- and I communicated it to many, both white and black, in the neighborhood--and I then found on the leaves in the woods hieroglyphic characters, and numbers, with the forms of men in different attitudes, portrayed in blood, and representing the figures I had seen before in the heavens. And now the Holy Ghost had revealed itself to me, and made plain the miracles it had shown me--For as the blood of Christ had been shed on this earth, and had ascended to heaven for the salvation of sinners, and was now returning to earth again in the form of dew.  
p. 10    **11**

The Spirit appeared to me again, and said, as the Saviour had been baptised so should we be also--and when the white people would not let us be baptised by the church, we went down into the water together, in the sight of many who reviled us, and were baptised by the Spirit--After this I rejoiced greatly, and gave thanks to God. p. 11    **11**

clothed with rags and covered with chains; yet daring to raise his manacled hands to heaven, with a spirit soaring above the attributes of man; I looked on him and my blood curdled in my veins. p. 19    **9**

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Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave    By: Frederick Douglass

*Entire book*

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 1**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 7**

### **Religiosity**

Does a righteous God govern the universe? and for what does he hold the thunders in his right hand, if not to smite the oppressor, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the spoiler? p. 75    **4**

## **Spirituality**

Whether this prophecy is ever fulfilled or not, it is nevertheless plain that a very different-looking class of people are springing up at the south, and are now held in slavery, from those originally brought to this country from Africa; and if their increase will do no other good, it will do away the force of the argument, that God cursed Ham, and therefore American slavery is right. If the lineal descendants of Ham are alone to be scripturally enslaved, it is certain that slavery at the south must soon become unscriptural; for thousands are ushered into the world, annually, who, like myself, owe their existence to white fathers, and those fathers most frequently their own masters. p. 19 **11**

They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension; they were tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. p. 26 **11**

From my earliest recollection, I date the entertainment of a deep conviction that slavery would not always be able to hold me within its foul embrace; and in the darkest hours of my career in slavery, this living word of faith and spirit of hope departed not from me, but remained like ministering angels to cheer me through the gloom. This good spirit was from God, and to him I offer thanksgiving and praise. p. 39 **12**

She stands-she sits-she staggers-she falls-she groans-she dies-and there are none of her children or grandchildren present, to wipe from her wrinkled brow the cold sweat of death, or to place beneath the sod her fallen remains. Will not a righteous God visit for these things? p. 52 **8**

The sight of these always affected me powerfully. My thoughts would compel utterance; and there, with no audience but the Almighty, I would pour out my soul's complaint, in my rude way, with an apostrophe in the moving multitude of ships. p. 63 **12**

It was necessary to keep our religious masters at St. Michael's unacquainted with the fact, that, instead of spending the Sabbath in wrestling, boxing, and drinking whisky, we were trying to learn how to read the will of God; for they had much rather see us engaged in those degrading sports, than to see us behaving like intellectual, moral, and accountable beings. p. 74-75 **8**

What I have said respecting and against religion, I mean strictly to apply to the slaveholding religion of this land, and with no possible reference to Christianity proper; for, between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference-so wide, that to receive the one as good, pure, and holy, is of necessity to be the enemy of the other. I love the pure, peaceable and impartial Christianity of Christ: I therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land. p. 100 **11**

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*The Narrative of Sojourner Truth* By: Sojourner Truth and O. Gilbert

Chapter 27 "Some of Her Views And Reasonings"

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 2**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 5**

### **Religiosity**

As it regarded the worship of God, he was to be worshipped at all times and in all places; and one portion of time never seemed to her more holy than another. **2**

These views, which were the results of the workings of her own mind, assisted solely by the light of her own experience and very limited knowledge, were, for a long time after their adoption, closely locked in her own breast, fearing lest their avowal might bring upon her the imputation of 'infidelity,'-the usual charge preferred by all religionists, against those who entertain religious views and feelings differing materially from their own. If, from their own sad experience, they are withheld from shouting the cry of 'infidel,' they fail not to see and to feel, ay, and to say, that the dissenters are not of the right spirit, and that their spiritual eyes have never been unsealed. **1**

### **Spirituality**

For some time she received it all literally, though it appeared strange to her that 'God worked by the day, got tired, and stopped to rest,' &c. But after a little time, she began to reason upon it, thus-'Why, if God works by the day, and one day's work tires him, and he is obliged to rest, either from weariness or on account of darkness, or if he waited for the "cool of the day to walk in the garden," because he was inconvenienced by the heat of the sun, why then it seems that God cannot do as much as I can; for I can bear the sun at noon, and work several days and nights in succession without being much tired. Or, if he rested nights because of the darkness, it is very queer that he should make the night so dark that he could not see himself. **8**

But the moment she placed this idea of God by the side of the impression she had once so suddenly received of his inconceivable greatness and entire spirituality, that moment she exclaimed mentally, 'No, God does not stop to rest, for he is a spirit, and cannot tire; he cannot want for light, for he hath all light in himself. And if "God is all in all," and "worketh all in all," as I have heard them read, then it is impossible he should rest at all; for if he did, every other thing would stop and rest too; the waters would not flow, and the fishes could not swim; and all motion must cease. God could have no pauses in his work, and he needed no Sabbaths of rest.     **11**

While traveling in Connecticut, she met a minister, with whom she held a long discussion on these points, as well as on various other topics, such as the origin of all things, especially the origin of evil, at the same time bearing her testimony strongly against a paid ministry.     **8**

I had forgotten to mention, in its proper place, a very important fact, that when she was examining the Scriptures, she wished to hear them without comment; but if she employed adult persons to read them to her, and she asked them to read a passage over again, they invariably commenced to explain, by giving her their version of it; and in this way, they tried her feelings exceedingly. In consequence of this, she ceased to ask adult persons to read the Bible to her, and substituted children in their stead. Children, as soon as they could read distinctly, would re-read the same sentence to her, as often as she wished, and without comment; and in that way she was enabled to see what her own mind could make out of the record, and that, she said, was what she wanted, and not what others thought it to mean.     **11**

She wished to compare the teachings of the Bible with the witness within her; and she came to the conclusion, that the spirit of truth spoke in those records, but that the recorders of those truths had intermingled with them ideas and suppositions of their own. This is one among the many proofs of her energy and independence of character.     **8**

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*Harriet Tubman, The Moses of her People*     By: Sarah Bradford

*pages 13-34*

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 2**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 7**

## **Religiosity**

‘Lord, if you ain’t never going to change dat man’s heart, kill him, Lord, and take him out of de way, so he won’t do no more mischief.’ Next ting I heard ole master was dead; p. 24 **4**

Already in her mind her people were the Israelites in the land of Egypt, p. 26 **1**

## **Spirituality**

She seemed ever to feel the Divine Presence near, and she talked with God “as a man talketh with his friend.” p. 23 **12**

Oh, den it ‘peared like I would give de world full of silver and gold, if I had it, to bring dat full of silver and gold, if I had it, to bring dat pore soul back, I would give myself; I would give eberyting! p. 24 **10**

As she recovered from this long illness, a deeper religious spirit seemed to take possession of her than she had ever experienced before. She literally “prayed without ceasing.” “Pears like, I prayed without ceasing.” “Pears like, I prayed all de time,” she said, “about my work, eberywhere; I was always talking to de Lord. p. 24 **12**

“I’m sorry, frien’s, to lebe you,  
Farewell! oh farewell!  
But I’ll meet you in de mornin’,  
Farewell! Oh, farewell! p. 28 **7**

“I had reasoned dis out in my mind; there was one of two things I had a right to, liberty, or death; if I could not have one, I would have de oder; for no man should take me alive; I should fight for my liberty as long as my strength lasted and when de time came for me to go, de Lord would let dem take me.” p. 29 **11**

I would make a home for dem in de North, and de Lord helping me, I would bring dem all dere. p. 32 **7**

“Oh, dear Lord,” I said, “I haint got no friend but you. p. 32 **12**

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*Up From Slavery* By: Booker T. Washington

*Chapter 14 & 15*

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 1**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 6**

### **Religiosity**

Next to a company of business men, I prefer to speak to an audience of Southern people, of either race, together or taken separately. Their enthusiasm and responsiveness are a constant delight. The "amens" and "dat's de truf" that come spontaneously from the coloured individuals are calculated to spur any speaker on to his best efforts. 2

### **Spirituality**

If anywhere there are efforts tending to curtail the fullest growth of the Negro, let these efforts be turned into stimulating, encouraging, and making him the most useful and intelligent citizen. Effort or means so invested will pay a thousand per cent interest. These efforts will be twice blessed -- "blessing him that gives and him that takes." There is no escape through law of man or God from the inevitable: --*The laws of changeless justice bind. Oppressor with oppressed; And close as sin and suffering joined. We march to fate abreast.* 11

and here bending, as it were, over the altar that represents the results of the struggles of your race and mine, both starting practically empty-handed three decades ago, I pledge that in your effort to work out the great and intricate problem which God has laid at the doors of the South, you shall have at all times the patient, sympathetic help of my race; only let this be constantly in mind, that, while from representations in these buildings of the product of field, of forest, of mine, of factory, letters, and art, much good will come, yet far above and beyond material benefits will be that higher good, that, let us pray God, will come, in a blotting out of sectional differences and racial animosities and suspicions, in a determination to administer absolute justice, in a willing obedience among all classes to the mandates of law. This, this, [sic] coupled with our material prosperity, will bring into our beloved South a new heaven and a new earth. 11

I often say to our students, in the course of my talks to them on Sunday evenings in the chapel, that the longer I live and the more experience I have of the world, the more I am convinced that, after all, the one thing that is most worth living for -- and dying for, if need be -- is the opportunity of making some one else more happy and more useful. 7

It was not long before the bishops and other church leaders began to make careful investigation of the conditions of the ministry, and they found out that I was right. In fact, the oldest and most influential bishop in one branch of the Methodist Church said that my words were far too mild. Very soon public sentiment began making itself felt, in demanding a purifying of the ministry. While this is not yet complete by any means, I think I may say, without egotism, and I have been told by many of our most influential ministers, that my words had much to do with starting a demand for the placing of a higher type of men in the pulpit. I have had the satisfaction of having many who once condemned me thank me heartily for my frank words.     **10**

The change of the attitude of the Negro ministry, so far as regards myself, is so complete that at the present time I have no warmer friends among any class than I have among the clergymen. The improvement in the character and life of the Negro ministers is one of the most gratifying evidences of the progress of the race.     **7**

There is a physical and mental and spiritual enjoyment that comes from a consciousness of being the absolute master of one's work, in all its details, that is very satisfactory and inspiring.     **11**

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*The Souls of Black Folk*     By: W.E.B. Du Bois

*Chapter 1*

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 7**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 2**

**Religiosity**

Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house? p. 45     **4**

By the poverty and ignorance of his people, the Negro minister or doctor was tempted toward quackery and demagoguery; p. 46     **3**

This waste of double aims, this seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals, has wrought sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of ten thousand thousand people, - has sent them often wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation, and at times has even seemed about to make them ashamed of themselves. p. 47     **5**

Away back in the days of bondage they thought to see in one divine event the end of all doubt and disappointment. p. 47     **5**

To him, so far as he thought and dreamed, slavery was indeed the sum of all villainies, the cause of all sorrow, the root of all prejudice; Emancipation was the key to a promised land of sweeter beauty than ever stretched before the eyes of wearied Israelites. p. 47 1

In song and exhortation swelled one refrain – Liberty; in his tears and curses the God he implored had Freedom in his right hand. p. 47 4

There is within and without the sound of conflict, the burning of body and rending of soul; inspiration strives with doubt, and faith with vain questioning. p. 51 4

### **Spirituality**

and, all in all, we black men seem the sole oasis of simple faith and reverence in a dusty desert of dollars and smartness. p. 52 11

And the spiritual striving of the freedmen's sons is the travail of souls whose burden is almost beyond the measure of their strength, but who bear it in the name of an historic race, in the name of this land of their father's fathers, and in the name of human opportunity. p. 53 7

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*Black Boy* By: Richard Wright

*Chapters 5 & 6*

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 21**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 4**

### **Religiosity**

Granny and Aunt Addie changed toward me, giving me up for lost; they told me that they were dead to the world, and those of their blood who lived in that world were therefore dead to them. From urgent solicitude they dropped to coldness and hostility. p. 122 3

Granny said that she would not buy worldly books for me. p. 122 1

I argued that Saturdays were the only days on which I could earn any worth-while sum, and Granny looked me straight in the eyes and quoted Scripture (...) And that was the final word. p. 126 1

“You are evil. You bring nothing but trouble!” p. 134 4

But Granny and Aunt Addie quarreled and fought not only with me, but with each other over minor points of religious doctrine, or over some imagined infraction of what they chose to call their moral code. p. 136 1

Wherever I found religion in my life I found strife, the attempt of one individual or group to rule another in the name of God. The naked will to power seemed always to walk in the wake of a hymn. p. 136 3

To Granny, I had accomplished a miracle and some of my sinful qualities evaporated, for she felt that success spelled the reward of righteousness and that failure was the wages of sin. p. 137 4

“Shut up! The angel of death’s in the house!” p. 142 4

“I have nothing to do with whether you go to school or not,” she said. “You left the church and you are on your own. You are with the world. You’re dead to me, dead to Christ.” p. 144 3

“All right,” she said. “If you want to go to hell, then go. But God’ll know that it was not my fault. He’ll forgive me, but He won’t forgive you.” p. 144 3

As the services progressed night after night, my mother tried to persuade me to join, to save my soul at last. p. 151 5

Having thus isolated the sinners, the preacher told the deacons to prevail upon those who lived “in darkness to discuss the state of their soul with him.” p. 152 5

I’m not asking you to join the church but it’s my duty as a man of God to tell you that you are in danger. Your peril is great; p. 152 5

A low, soft hymn began. “This maybe the last time, I don’t know.... They sang it, hummed it, crooned it, moaned it, implying in sweet, frightening tones that if we did not join the church then and there we might die in our sleep that very night and go straight to hell. p. 153 5

Hoping that this was the night of my long-deferred salvation, my mother came forward, limping, weeping, smiling. p. 153 5

“Now, you good sweet mothers, symbols of Mother Mary at the tomb, kneel and pray for your sons, your only sons,” the preacher chanted. p. 153 1

The tribe, for its own safety, was asking us to be at one with it. p. 153 3

“I brought you into the world, now let me help to save you.” p. 154 5

This business of saving souls had no ethics; every human relationship was shamelessly exploited. In essence, the tribe was asking us whether we shared its feelings; if we refused to join the church, it was equivalent to saying no, to placing ourselves in the position of moral monsters. p. 154 3

“Mama, I don’t feel a thing,” I told her truthfully. “Don’t you worry; you’ll grow into feeling it,” she assured me. p. 155 2

“You’ll get yours someday!”

“You won’t be the one to give it to me!”

“And you’ve just been baptized,” he said heavily.

“To hell with that,” I said. p. 160 1

### **Spirituality**

The long hot idle summer days palled on me. I sat at home brooding, nursing bodily and spiritual hunger. p. 133 8

”But this is a new day,” they said, pulling down the corners of their lips. “We don’t holler and moan in church no more.” p. 151 9

“Come to church and be a member of the community.” p. 151 7

Yet I was somehow glad that I had got it over with; no barriers now stood between me and the community. p. 155 7

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*Go Tell it on The Mountain* By: James Baldwin

*Part Three*

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 27**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 24**

## **Religiosity**

This power had struck John, in the head or in the heart; and, in a moment, wholly, filling him with an anguish that he could never in his life have imagined, that he surely could not endure, that even now he could not believe, had opened him up; had cracked him open, as wood beneath the axe cracks down the middle, as rocks break up: had ripped him and felled him in a moment, so that John had not felt the wound but only the agony, had not felt the fall, but only the fear; and lay here, now, helpless, screaming, at the very bottom of darkness. p. 196 6

His father's will was stronger than John's own. His power was greater because he belonged to God. p. 198 4

:all prophecies were true, salvation was finished, damnation was real! p. 198 5

"Set thine house in order," said his father, "for thou shalt die and not live." p. 198 1

He did not know where he was. There was silence everywhere – only a perpetual, distant, faint trembling far beneath him – the roaring, perhaps, of the fires of Hell, over which he was suspended. p. 199 5

"I'm going to beat sin out of him. I'm going to beat it out." p. 199 4

he scrubbed his father's back; and looked, as the accursed son of Noah had looked, on his father's hideous nakedness. It was secret, like sin, and slimy, like the serpent, and heavy, like the rod. p. 199 1

Was this why he lay here, thrust out from all human or heavenly help tonight? This, and not that other, his deadly sin, having looked on his father's nakedness and mocked and cursed him in his heart? p. 200 4

Ah, that son of Noah's had been cursed down to the present groaning generation: "A servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren." p. 200 1

"See! She's uglier than Mama! She's uglier than me!"

"You mighty proud ain't you," his father said, "to be the Devil's son?" p. 201 3

"You see that? That's sin. That's what the Devil's son runs after." p. 201 4

And yet he knew that it would come again – the darkness was full of demons crouching, waiting to worry him with their teeth again. p. 202 5

But he could never go through this darkness, through this fire and this wrath. p. 205 5

Dust rose again in his nostrils, sharp as the fumes of Hell. p. 205 5

I, John, saw a city, way in the middle of the air, waiting, waiting up there. p. 207 4

They cried unto the Lord forever, and lifted up their eyes forever, they were cast down forever, and He lifted them up forever. p. 208 2

And they looked unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of their faith, running with patience the race He had set before them; they endured the cross, and they despised the shame, and the waiting to join Him, one day, in glory, at the right hand of the father. p. 208 1

“Got a man in the Bible, son, who liked music, too. And he got to dancing one day before the Lord. You reckon you going to dance before the Lord one of these days?” p. 212 1

“Another soul struck down,” murmured sister McCandless. “Lord have mercy.” “He said in the last days evil would abound,” said Sister Price. p. 213 5

“When ye see all these things, know that your salvation is at hand,” said Sister McCandless.” p. 213 3

“I know my name is written in the Book of life,” he said. p. 215 5

“Look like,” she said, “you think the Lord’s a man like you; you think you can fool Him like you fool men, and you think He forgets, like men. p. 216 4

The Lord called me out, He chose me and I been running with Him ever since I made a start. You can’t keep your eyes on all this foolishness here below, all this wickedness here below. p. 216 3

“I been living a long time,” he said, “and I ain’t never seen nothing but evil overtake the enemies of the Lord. You think you going to use that letter to hurt me – but the Lord ain’t going to let it come to pass. You going to be cut down.” p. 219 5

As all would be changed on the last day when the skies would be open up once more to gather up the saints. p. 220 5

“The song they sing,” said John, finally, “if it costs my life – is that the price?” “Yes,” said Elisha, “that’s the price.” p. 222 1

“The Devil, he don’t ask for nothing less than your life. And he take it, too, and it’s lost forever, Forever, Johnny. p. 223 5

## **Spirituality**

And something moved in John's body which was not John. He was invaded, set at naught, possessed. p. 195 **10**

He wanted to rise – a malicious, ironic voice insisted that he rise – and, at once, to leave this temple and go out into the world. p. 196 **9**

He wanted to obey the voice, which was the only voice that spoke to him; p. 196 **12**

Nothing remained: all was swallowed up in chaos. And: Is this it? John's terrified soul inquired – What is it? – to no purpose, receiving no answer. Only the ironic voice insisted yet once more that he rise from that filthy floor if he did not want to become like all the other niggers. p. 196 **8**

He had started at this, an awful bitterness in his heart, wanting to curse – and the spirit spoke, and spoke in him. p. 197 **12**

“Leave him be. Leave him alone. Let him pray to the Lord.”

“Yes, Mama. I'm gong to try to love the Lord.” p. 199 **12**

Could a curse come down so many ages? Did it live in time, or in the moment? p.200 **8**

This sound had filled John's life, so it now seemed from the moment he had first drawn breath. He had heard it everywhere, in prayer and in daily speech, and whenever the saints were gathered; and in the unbelieving streets. p. 203 **12**

Yes, he had heard it all his life, but it was only now that his ears were opened to this sound that came from darkness, that could only come from darkness, that yet bore such witness to the glory of the light. p. 203 **11**

“Yes,” said the voice, “go through. Go through.”

“Lift me up,” whispered John, “lift me up. I can't go through.”

“Go through,” said the voice, “go through.” p. 205 **12**

Then, in a moment, he was set free; p. 207 **10**

Of tears there was, yes, a very fountain – springing from a depth never sounded before, from depths John had not known were in him. And he wanted to rise up, singing, singing in that great morning, the morning of his new life. p. 207 **10**

And a sweetness filled John as he heard this voice and heard the sound of singing: the singing was for him. p. 207 **11**

For his drifting soul was anchored in the love of God; in the rock that endured forever.  
p. 207 **12**

The light and the darkness had kissed each other, and were married now, forever, in the  
life and the vision of John's soul. p. 207 **11**

"Lord, I ain't No stranger now!" p. 209 **12**

and he scarcely knew how he moved, for his hands were new, and his feet were new, and  
he moved in a new and Heaven-bright air. p. 209 **10**

his tongue only could bear witness to the wonders he had seen. p. 210 **11**

"I just tell you," said sister McCandless, "all you got to do is listen to the Lord; He'll lead  
you right every time; He'll move every time. Can't nobody tell me my God ain't real."  
p. 211 **12**

The joy of the Lord is the strength of His people. Where joy was, there strength  
followed. p. 221 **11**

Out of joy, strength came, strength that was fashioned to bear sorrow: sorrow brought  
forth joy. Forever? This was Ezekiel's wheel, in the middle of the burning air forever –  
and the little wheel ran by faith, and the big wheel ran by the grace of God. p. 221 **8**

"If you ask Him to bear you up, " said Elisha, as though he had read his thoughts, "He  
won't never let you fall." p. 221 **9**

"We was all praying, little brother," said Elisha. p. 221 **7**

"Elisha," he said, "no matter what happens to me, where I go, what folks say about me,  
no matter what anybody says, you remember-please remember-I was saved. I was there."  
p. 225 **10**

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*A Raisin in The Sun* By: Lorraine Hansberry

*Entire Book*

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 8**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 5**

## Religiosity

“Seem like God didn’t see fit to give the black man nothing but dreams-but He did give us children to make them dreams seem worth while.” p. 46 4

“Course you going to be a doctor, honey, God willing.”

“God hasn’t got a thing to do with it.” p. 50 4

It don’t sound nice for a young girl to say things like that-you wasn’t brought up that way. Me and your father went to trouble to get you and Brother to church every Sunday. p. 51 2

Now-you say after me, in my mother’s house there is still God. (There is a long pause and BENEATHA stares at the floor wordlessly. MAMA repeats the phrase with precision and cool emotion) In my mother’s house there is still God. (...) There are some ideas we ain’t going to have in this house. Not long as I am the head of this family. p. 51 6

“Why do you give money at church for missionary work?”

“Well, that’s to help save people.”

“You mean save them from *heathensim*-“

“Yes.” p. 57 4

Why? You want to know why? ‘Cause we all tied up in a race of people that don’t know how to do nothing but moan, pray and have babies! p. 87 2

“Father give us strength. (knowing-and without fun) Did he threaten us?”

“Oh-Mama-they don’t do it like that any more. He talked Brotherhood. He said everyone ought to learn how to sit down and hate each other with good Christian fellowship.” p. 120-121 6

I always thought it was the one concrete thing in the world that a human being could do. Fix up the sick, you know-and make them whole again. This was truly being God.... p. 133 4

## Spirituality

I got wings...you got wings....

All God’s children got wings... p. 122 7

Oh God....(She looks up to Him) Look down here-and show me the strength. p. 130 9

I always thought it was the one concrete thing in the world that a human being could do. Fix up the sick, you know-and make them whole again. This was truly being God....  
p. 133 7

(Bitterly) Because it doesn't seem deep enough, close enough to what ails mankind! It was a child's way of seeing things-or an idealist's. p. 133 8

What you just said about the circle. It isn't a circle-it is simply a long line-as in geometry, you know, one that reaches into infinity. And because we cannot see the end-we also cannot see how it changes. And it is very odd but those who see the changes-who dream, who will not give up-are called idealists...and those who see only the circle we call them the "realists"! p. 134 11

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*The Negro Church in America* By: E. Franklin Frazier

*Chapter 5*

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 6**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 5**

**Religiosity**

When one comes to the Negro church which is the most important cultural institution created by Negroes, one encounters the most important institutional barrier to integration and the assimilation of Negroes. p. 71 6

Recognizing the need for a more complex social organization to serve the needs of urbanized Negroes and at the same time take cognizance of the fact that Negroes were still excluded from labour unions, a Negro sociologist proposed that the Negro church, being the largest organized unit of Negro life, incorporate some of the functions of the new forms of organized social life which are required in the city. It is apparent, however, that this proposal was impractical since the Negro church could not perform the functions of the new types of associations necessary to life in the city. p. 72 6

We have seen how lower-class Negroes have reacted to the cold impersonal environment of the city and of the larger denominational churches by joining the 'storefront' churches and the various cults. p. 72 3

More important still for us here is the fact that the Gospel Singers symbolize something that is characteristic of Negro religion from the standpoint of assimilation. Some of the so-called advanced Negro churches resented these gospel singers and refused to permit them to sing within their churches. p. 74 3

There is first a tendency for middle-class status Negroes to sever their affiliation with the Baptist and Methodist churches and join the Presbyterian, Congregational, and Episcopal churches. The middle-class Negroes who continue their affiliation with the Baptist and Methodist churches choose those churches with intelligent ministers and a relatively large middle-class membership. p. 79 3

This type of dual church affiliation is more characteristic of Negro professional men who affiliate with churches mainly for social and professional reasons. Some professional Negroes affiliate with a church which their friends or middle-class Negroes attend, and at the same time affiliate with churches attended by the lower class who are their clients. p. 80 2

### **Spirituality**

The church is the most important of these institutions in which the masses of Negroes find a refuge within white society which treats them with condescension if not contempt. p. 71 7

We have seen how Negroes in the established denominational churches developed secular interests in order to deal with race prejudice and discriminations to which they are exposed when the 'walls of segregation comes tumbling down.' p. 72 9

They continue to be influenced in their thinking and especially in their feelings and sentiments by the social heritage of the Negro which is represented by the Spirituals and religious orientation towards the world contained in the Spirituals. p. 73 11

Out of the revolt of the lower strata against the church and the growing secularization of Negro religion there has come an accommodation between traditional Negro religion and the new outlook of Negroes in the new American environment. This accommodation is symbolized by the Gospel Singers. Their songs which the Gospel Singers sing have been described as a compound of 'elements found in the old tabernacle songs, the Negro Spirituals and the blues.' p. 73 11

The Gospel Singers, then, unlike the cults, do not represent a complete break with the religious traditions of the Negro. They represent or symbolize the attempt of the Negro to utilize his religious heritage in order to come to terms with changes in his own institutions as well as the problems of the world of which he is a part. p. 75 11

*A Testament of Hope* By: James M. Washington (MLK speeches are writings)

“*I Have a Dream*” p. 217-220

“*Pilgrimage to Nonviolence*” p. 35-40

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 4**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 19**

### **Religiosity**

Having being raised in a rather strict fundamentalistic tradition..... p. 35 **1**

The more I thought about human nature the more I saw how our tragic inclination for sin causes us to use our minds to rationalize our actions. P. 36 **5**

In its attempt to preserve the transcendence of God, which had been neglected by liberalism’s *overstress of his immanence*, neo-orthodoxy went to the extreme of stressing a God who was hidden, unknown and “wholly other.” p. 36 **4**

Granted that we face a world crisis which often leaves us standing amid the surging murmur of life’s restless sea. But every crisis has both its dangers and its opportunities. Each can spell either salvation or doom. In a dark, confused world the spirit of God may yet reign supreme. P. 40 **5**

### **Spirituality**

Now is the time to make justice a reality for all God’s children. P. 218 **7**

Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct or struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. P. 218 **11**

You have been veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive. P. 219 **11**

With this faith we will be able to hew out the mountains of despair a stone of hope. P. 219 **9**

With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free on day. P. 219 **7**

And when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and hamlet, from every state and city, we will be able to speed up the day when all of God's children-black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants-will be able to join hands and to sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last." P. 220 **7**

I was occasionally shocked as my intellectual journey carried me through new and sometimes complex doctrinal lands. But despite the shock the pilgrimage was always stimulating, and it gave me a new appreciation for objective appraisal and critical analysis. P. 35 **10**

My early theological training did the same for me as the reading of Hume did for Kant: it knocked me out of my dogmatic slumber. P. 35 **9**

Liberalism's contribution to the philological-historical criticism of biblical literature has been of immeasurable value and should be defended with religious and scientific passion. P. 35 **8**

Reason, devoid of purifying power of faith, can never free itself from distortions and rationalizations. P. 36 **11**

I am now convinced that the truth about man is found neither in liberalism nor in neo-orthodoxy. Each represents a partial truth. A larger segment of Protestant liberalism defined man only in terms of his essential nature, his capacity for good. Neo-orthodoxy tended to define man only in terms of his existential nature, his capacity for evil. An adequate understanding of man is found neither in the thesis of liberalism nor in the antithesis of neo-orthodoxy, but in a synthesis which reconciles the truths of both. P. 36 **11**

In their revolt against Hegel's essentialism, all existentialists contend that the world is fragmented. History is a series of unreconciled conflicts and man's existence is filled with anxiety and threatened with meaninglessness. While the ultimate Christian answer is not found in any of these existential assertions, there is much here that the theologian can use to describe the true state of man's existence. P. 37 **9**

Moreover, he came perilously close to identifying the kingdom of God with a particular social and economic system-a temptation which the church should never give into (...) The gospel at its best deals with the whole man, not only his soul but his body, not only his spiritual well-being, but his material well-being. P. 37-38. **11**

I came to see for the first time that the Christian doctrine of love operating through the Gandhian method of nonviolence was one of the most potent weapons available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom. P. 38 **11**

Christ furnished the spirit and motivation while Gandhi furnished the method. P. 38 **11**

But I am convinced that the church cannot remain silent while mankind faces the threat of being plunged into the abyss of nuclear annihilation. If the church is true to its mission it must call for an end to the arms race. P. 39-40 **9**

In recent months I have also become more and more convinced of the reality of a personal God. True, I have always believed in the personality of God. But in past years the idea of a personal God was little more than a metaphysical category which I found theologically and philosophically satisfying. Now it is a living reality that has been validated in the experiences of everyday life. P. 40 **12**

In many instances I have felt the power of God transforming the fatigue of despair into the buoyancy of hope. P. 40 **10**

Behind the harsh appearances of the world there is a benign power. To say God is personal is not to make him an object among other objects or attribute to him the finiteness and limitations of human personality; it is to take what is finest and noblest in our consciousness and affirm its perfect existence in him. It is certainly true that human personality is limited, but personality as such involves no necessary limitations. It simply means self-consciousness and self-direction. SO in the truest sense of the word, God is a living God. In him there is feeling and will, responsive to the deepest yearnings of the human heart: this God both evokes and answers prayers. P. 40 **8**

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*Black Power* By: Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) and Charles V. Hamilton

*Entire book* (index assistance under words *MLK*, *North Carolina*, *Religion*, and *Values*)

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 9**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 3**

## **Religiosity**

The third myth proceeds from the premise that political coalitions can be sustained on a moral, friendly or sentimental basis, or on appeals to conscience. We view this as myth because we believe that political relations are based on self-interest: benefits to be gained and losses to be avoided. For the most part, man's politics is determined by his evaluation of material good and evil. Politics results from a conflict of interests, not of consciences. P. 75 6

There is no question that significant number of clergy and lay groups participated in the successful lobbying of those bills, but we should be careful not to overemphasize the value of this. To begin with, many of those religious groups were available only until the bills were passed; their sustained moral force is not on hand for the all-important process of ensuring federal implementation of these laws, particularly with respect to the appointment of more federal voting registrars and the setting of guidelines for school desegregation. P. 76 6

After all, ministers – North and South – are often forced out of their pulpits if they speak or act too forcefully in favor of civil rights. Their parishioners do not lose sleep at night worrying about the oppressed status of black Americans; they are not morally torn inside themselves. As Silberman said, they simply do not want their peace disrupted and their businesses hurt. P. 76 3

Indeed, the missionaries turned the African's eyes toward heaven, and then robbed them blind in the process. P. 17 5

The ability and power of these local leaders, however rested inside the black community and was geared toward religious and social affairs only. P. 101 6

The ministers, likewise, could invoke the authority of God; they were, after all, "called to preach the gospel," and, therefore, their words have almost a kind of divine authority in the black community. P. 102 4

The middle-class black community is clinging to a set of values and a rhetoric which never applied in that area or any other of this country: a language of Christian love, charity, good will. P. 140 6

I believe in the American dream-the Christian principle- of democracy for all regardless of race, color or creed. I have stood by this. In recent days, especially last Saturday, the events connected with the equal rights movement did nothing for progress but only damaged the cause of responsible citizenship. I refer, of course, to the display of undisciplined and irresponsible behavior by a few young persons which was marked by rock and bottle throwing. I am ashamed of every person who set off this ugly incident or who had any part in it....the vast majority of mature, Christian, right-thinking Negro citizens regret what happened. P. 140-141     **6**

White people know that power is not love, Christian charity, etc. If these things come, let them develop out of a respect for mutual power. p 143     **6**

### **Spirituality**

Spurred by the demonstration and Dr. King's presence in Selma in early 1965, some seventeen brave people rallied around Mr. John Hulett, a lifelong resident of the county, to form the Lowndes County Christian Movement for Human Rights in March of that year. P. 106     **7**

There were several black organizations in Lowndes County, all centered around the church: The Baptists ministerial alliances and the lodges (Eastern Star, Elks, Masons). All these groups met regularly, held functions, made decisions, collected and paid money- again laying bare the myth that black people are unorganized and unable to organize themselves. P. 101     **7**

In many communities, to become head deacon of a church one must know politics, play politics, be political. P. 101     **9**

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*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

By: Maya Angelou

*Chapter 5 & 6*

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 11**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 3**

## **Religiosity**

“Thou shall not be dirty” and “Thou shall not be impudent” were the two commandments of Grandmother Henderson upon which hung our total salvation. P. 26 1

But Momma convinced us that not only was cleanliness next to Godliness, dirtiness was the inventor of misery. P. 26-27 4

The impudent child was detested by God and a shame to its parents and could bring destruction to its house and line. P. 26-27 4

If there was any justice in the world, God should strike them dumb at once! P. 28 4

Every three months he visited our church, stayed at Momma’s over the Saturday night and preached a loud passionate sermon on Sunday. He collected the money that had been taken in over the preceding months, heard reports from all the church groups and shook hands with the adults and kissed all small children. Then he went away. p. 33 3

“Uh, huh, uh, huh, Sister Henderson, just like a penny with a hole in it, I always turns up.”

Right on cue every time, Momma would answer,

“That’s right, Elder Thomas, thank the blessed Jesus, come right in.” p. 34 4

Then he opened his awful arms and groaned, “Suffer little children to come unto me, for such is the Kingdom of Heaven.” p. 34 1

Momma sent us to her bedroom with warnings to have our Sunday school lesson perfectly memorized or we knew what we could expect. p. 35 2

After all, the Bible did say, “God is not mocked,” and the man was God’s representative. He sued to say to me, “Come on, little sister. Come and get this blessing.” p. 34-35 3

But as the Reverend droned on and on and on to a God who I thought must be bored to hear the same things over and over again. p. 37 2

Deuteronomy was my favorite book in the Bible. The laws were so absolute, so clearly set down, that I knew if a person truly wanted to avoid hell and brimstone, and being roasted forever the devil’s fire, all she had to do was memorize Deuteronomy and follow its teaching, word for word. p. 37-38 5

## **Spirituality**

Momma changed her song to “Bread of Heaven, bread of Heaven, feed me till I want no more.”

I found that I was praying too. How long could Mamma hold out? What new indignity would they think of to subject her to? P. 31 9

On the next Sunday, he took his text from the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke, and talked quietly but seriously about the Pharisees, who prayed in the streets so that the public would be impressed with their religious devotion. I doubt that anyone got the message-certainly not those to whom it was directed. p. 40 11

The custom of letting obedient children be seen but not heard was so agreeable to me that I went one step further: Obedient children should not see or hear if they chose not to do so. I laid a handful of attention on my face and tuned up the sounds in the church. p. 41 11

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*The Identity Crisis in Black Theology* By: Cecil Wayne Cone

*Conclusion*

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 6**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 12**

## **Religiosity**

When the slave encountered God, “way down yonder” where the slave was at the threshold of death, the divine forced himself upon the slave in such a manner that the slave recognized at once his own state of sinfulness. p. 139 4

First, contemporary black theologians must be brought to see that the source of the identity crisis in their attempts at a theological interpretation of black religion is related to their identification with the academic structure of white seminaries and with the Black power motif of black radicals. While both may be a part of an appropriate analysis of black religion at certain points, they cannot serve as the point of departure without at some point distorting what is intended to be analyzed, namely black religion. The chief reason for contemporary black theologians’ inability to grasp the essence of black religion is their failure to recognize the irreconcilability of these two foci with black religion as a starting point. p. 141 3

For Cone, Washington, and others who are infatuated with the themes of liberation, freedom, and equality in the social structures, this means that they must begin to realize that they are being influenced more by Euro-American conceptions of freedom than by the religious freedom of the black religious experience. Black Power, despite its positive affirmations of blackness and freedom, owes more in its origin to Europe than to Africa. African freedom cannot be separated from religion. Indeed it is religion, a meeting of the God of their existence in the depths of the struggle to be human. As long as Cone and Washington ignore this decisive theme for the starting point of Black Theology, and accept the Euro-American view of freedom in history, they will remain in an identity crisis, failing really to probe the depths and scope of black religion, even though they affirm it verbally. p. 142 **3**

The primary focus is God, not white people. This God is so overwhelming that others are reduced to mere nothings. To start any other place in an analysis of black religion is to distort its true meaning. p. 142-143 **4**

Cone, Roberts, and Washington miss the mark because they have made their commitment to people—sometimes black and at other times white. For Cone and Washington the commitment is to Black Power advocates, with a side-glance at the academic tools of white theologians. For Roberts, the commitment apparently is first to white people (reconciliation) with a look at the feelings of blacks (liberation). But all are looking in the wrong place for their priority. p. 143 **3**

This experience is continued in black churches today and is to be found wherever two or three are gathered in the name of God for prayer, song, or sermon. p. 144 **2**

### **Spirituality**

It was created out of the encounter of African religion with Christianity in a special and peculiar setting. These elements were woven together as the black slave underwent a conversion experience in the presence of the Almighty Sovereign God. This experience provides the slave with a historical possibility for existence in a situation of contradiction. p. 138 **11**

It opened up the slave's inner being, enabling him to discern levels of reality not known before. p. 138 **10**

Having encountered Him in the midst of servitude, the slave experienced a knowledge of the divine will and purpose for humanity which his oppressor could never know. p.138 **8**

Although the religion of the slave took on the outward appearance of the “Christian” religion as it was given to him by the oppressor, the essence of his religion had little to do with white peoples’ meaning of Christianity. The essence of black slave religion was not a set of beliefs or doctrines to be memorized nor was it an ethical code of do’s and don’t which the slave learned. Rather, the essence of black religion was a black religious experience. p. 138 **11**

The black religious experience is an experience of God, emerging out of the context of suffering. It is that experience of the divine wrought out of the slave’s encounter with the absurdity of his condition and his meeting with the Almighty Sovereign God in the midst of that historical reality. In the midst of this awful situation, God forced himself upon the slave as a highly exceptional and extremely impressive Other, radically different from everything known in this world. p. 139 **10**

Indeed, when the slave emerged from his conversion experience he was free. And this freedom which he experienced signified that the slave’s life was no longer determined by the slave system. p. 139 **10**

The freedom of which the slave speaks is the present reality. He does not accept the designation given him by the oppressive society. A close examination of this spiritual reveals that the slave is very careful in what he is not saying, as well as what he is saying. He is not saying, “Before I’d be a slave anymore,” or “Before I’d accept being a slave very long.” He says, “*Before I’d BE a slave in the first place!*” In the mind and heart of this man of African descent there existed a freedom which could not be denied. According to his own understanding of the situation surrounding his life, he is not a slave. Furthermore, death would be his lot before he would ever become one. p. 140 **10**

Far from causing the slave to bury himself in the kind of religious faith that is escapist and narcotic, the black religious experience gave the slave the necessary strength, fortitude, and character to fight against the legalized form of slavery. This is to say, the slave’s involvement with the Almighty Sovereign God caused him to experience freedom at once internally, while it gave him the assurance that if he participated in the struggle with the divine against the institution of slavery, freedom would eventually become an external reality as well. p. 140-141 **9**

Black people did not resist slavery because they believed Jesus was a radical revolutionary. They resisted because Jesus encountered them and gave them new names wherein their identity was affirmed as children of the heavenly father. This experience was specifically religious. Political struggle happened as a consequence, and not as the point of departure. p. 141 **12**

This divine reality, about which the slaves spoke, is a happening not to be defined *in* or *out* of history but primarily in the totality of the slaves’ whole way of life. p. 143 **12**

Indeed, an encounter with the divine is what constitutes the core or essence of that religion. Such an encounter is known as the black religious experience. p. 143-144 12

Black Theology must come to terms not with black people as such, but with the God of black people, the One who encountered the people in their concrete and peculiar circumstances and gave them “the imagination to think of a good reason to keep on keepin’ on,” and the power “to make the best of a bad situation.” p. 144 9

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*The Color Purple* By: Alice Walker

*Entire book*

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 17**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 18**

### **Religiosity**

He act like he can't stand me no more. Say I'm evil an always up to no good. He took my other little baby, a boy this time. p. 3 4

The women at church sometime nice to me. Sometime not. They look at me there struggling with Mr. \_\_\_\_ children. p. 43 3

Trying to *drag* 'em to the church, trying to keep 'em quiet after us get there. p.43 2

Even the preacher got mouth on Shug Avery, now she down. He take her condition for his text. He don't call no name, but he don't have to. Everybody know who he mean. He talk about a strumpet in short skirts, smoking cigarettes, drinking gin. Singing for money and taking women mens. Talk bout slut, hussy, heifer and streetcleaner. p. 43-44 3

I cut my eyes back at Mr. \_\_\_\_ when he say that. Streetcleaner. Somebody got to sand up for Shug, I think. But he don't say nothing. He cross his legs first to one side, then to the other. He gaze out the window. The same women smile at him, say amen gainst Shug. p. 44 3

I see 'em all as clear as day. Angels all in white, white hair and white eyes, look like albinos. God all white too, looking like some stout white man work at the bank. p. 91 4

Anyway, when I don't write to you I feel as bad as I do when I don't pray, locked up in myself and chocking on my own heart. I am so lonely, Celie. p. 130 4

Dear Nettie, I don't write to God no more. I write to you.  
What happen to God? ast Shug.  
Who that? I say. p. 192 6

Anyhow, I say, the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown. p. 192 4

She say, Miss Celie, You better hush. God might hear you. p. 192 4

I is a sinner, say Shug. Cause I was born I don't deny it. p. 193 1

You telling me God love you, and you ain't never done nothing for him? I mean, not go to church, sing in the choir, feed the preacher and all like that? p. 193 2

Okay, I say. He big and old and tall and graybearded and white. He wear white robes and go barefooted.  
Blue eyes? she ast.  
Sort of bluish-gray. Cool. Big though. White lashes. I say. p. 194 4

Shug! I say. God wrote the bible, white folks had nothing to do with it. p. 194 4

Man corrupt everything, say Shug. He on your box of grits, in your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere. Soon as you think he everywhere, you think he God. p. 197 4

He threaten lightening, floods and earthquakes. Us fight. I hardly pray at all. Every time I conjure up a rock, I throw it. p. 197 4

I say, happiness was just a trick in your case. Just cause you never had any before Shug, you thought it was time to have some, and that it was gon last. Even thought you had trees with you. The whole earth. The stars. But look at you. When Shug left, happiness desert. p. 259 4

### **Spirituality**

Dear God, I am fourteen years old. I have always been a good girl. Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me. p. 1 8

I see him looking at my little sister. She scared. But I say I'll take care of you. With God help. p. 3 12

Me and Squeak don't say nothing. I don't know what she think, but I think bout angels, God coming down by chariot, swinging down real low and carrying ole Sofia home.  
p. 90 **7**

And they are being brought up in love, Christian charity and awareness of God. And now "god" has sent me to watch over them, to protect and cherish them. To lavish all the love I feel for you on them. p. 133 **7**

Big a devil as you is, you not worried bout no God, Surely  
She say, Wait a minute. Hold on just a minute here. Just because I don't harass it like some people us know don't mean I ain't got religion.  
What God do for me I ast.  
She say, Celie! Like she shock. He gave you life, good health, and a good woman that love you to death. p. 192 **9**

Sinners have more good times, I say.  
You know why? she ast.  
Cause you ain't all the time worrying bout God I say. Naw, that ain't it, she say. Us worry bout God a lot. But once us feel loved by God, us do the best us can to please him with what us like. p. 193 **12**

But if God love me, Celie, I don't have to do all that. Unless I want to. There's a lot of other things I can do that I speck God likes.  
Like what? I ast  
Oh, she say. I can lay back and just admire stuff. Be happy. Have a good time.  
p. 193 **11**

She say, Celie, tell the truth, have you ever found God in church? I never did. I just found a bunch of folks hoping for him to show. Any God I ever felt in church I brought in with me. And I think all the other folks did too. They come to church to share God, not find God. p. 193 **8**

Cause that's the one that's in the white folks' white bible.....How come he look just like them? p. 194 **11**

Ain't no way to read the bible and not think God white, she say. (...) You mad cause he don't seem to listen to your prayers. Humph! Do the mayor listen to anything colored say? p. 195 **11**

Here's the thing, say Shug. The thing I believe. God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifest itself even if you not looking or don't know what you looking for. p. 195 **12**

Don't look like nothing, she say. It ain't a picture show. It ain't something you can look at apart from anything else, including yourself. I believe God is everything, say Shug. Everything that is or ever was or ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you've found it. p. 195 **11**

She say, My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed. And I laughed and I cried and I run all around the house. I knew just what it was. In fact, when it happen, you can't miss it. p. 196 **8**

God love all them feelings. That's some of the best stuff God did. And when you know God loves 'em you enjoy 'em a lot more. You can just relax, go with everything that's going, and praise God by liking what you like. p. 196 **12**

People think pleasing God is all God care about. But any fool living in the world can see it always trying to please us back. p. 196 **8**

But this hard work, let me tell you. He been there so long, he don't want to budge. p. 197 **10**

And I don't believe you dead. How can you be dead if I still feel you? Maybe, like God, you changed into something different that I'll have to speak to in a different way, but you not dead to me Nettie. p. 260 **11**

When it come to what folks do together with they bodies, he say, anybody's guess is as good as mine. But when you talk bout love I don't have to guess. I have love and have been love. And I thank God he let me gain understanding enough to know love can't be halted just cause some peoples moan and groan. It don't surprise me you love Shug Avery, he say. I have love Shug Avery all my life. p. 269-270 **8**

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*Beloved* By: Toni Morrison

*Entire book*

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 9**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 11**

## **Religiosity**

“Good God.” He backed out the door onto the porch. “What kind of evil you got in here?” p. 10 5

“Those white things have taken all I had or dreamed,” she said, “and broke my heartstrings too. There is no bad luck in the world but white folks.” 124 shut down and put up with the venom of its ghost.... Baby Suggs, holy, believed she had lied. There was no grace- imaginary or real- and no sunlit dance in a clearing could change that. Here faith, her love, her imagination and her great big old heart began to collapse twenty-eight days after her daughter-in-law arrived. P. 105 4

But since there was still no sign of Halle and Sethe herself didn't know what had happened to him, she let the whoop lie-not wishing to hurt his chances by thanking God too soon. P. 159 4

Loaves and fishes were His [Jesus's] powers- they did not belong to an ex-slave who had probably never carried one hundred pounds to the scale, or pickedokra with a baby on her back. P. 161 1

She was accustomed to the knowledge that nobody prayed for her- but this free-floating repulsion was new. It wasn't white folks- that much she could tell- so it must be colored ones. And then she knew. Her friends and neighbors were angry at her because she had overstepped, given too much, offended them by excess. P. 163 3

I disliked the place I was before this last one, but I did get to church every Sunday some kind of way, I bet the Lord done forgot who I am by now. P. 172-73 4

God puzzled her and she was too ashamed of Him to say so. P. 208 4

And she said she always wished she could read the Bible like real preachers. P. 246 1

The devil-child is clever, they thought. P. 308 5

## **Spirituality**

“It's not evil, just sad.” P. 10 11

“If it's still there, waiting, that must mean that nothing ever dies.”  
Sethe looked right in Denver's face. “Nothing ever does,” she said. P. 44 8

Accepting no title of honor before her name, but allowing a small caress after it, she became an unchurched preacher, one who visited pulpits and opened her great heart to those who could use it...Uncalled, unrobed, unanointed, she let her great heart beat in their presence. P. 102 **7**

She did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more. She did not tell them they were the blessed of the earth, its inheriting meek or its glorybound pure. She told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it. P. 103 **11**

“Go see Reverend Pike, ma’am. He’ll reacquaint you.”  
“I won’t need him for that. I can make my own acquaintance...” P. 173 **12**

She fixed on that and her own brand of preaching, having made up her mind about what to do with the heart that started beating the minute she crossed the Ohio River. P. 173 **10**

Other than that, he would rely on the power of Jesus Christ to deal with things older, but not stronger, than He Himself was. P. 202 **9**

“You know as well as I do that people who die bad don’t stay in the ground.”  
He couldn’t deny it. Jesus Christ Himself didn’t... p. 221 **11**

She mentioned her church’s committee, invented so nobody had to go hungry. P. 292 **7**

But she could not countenance the possibility of sin moving on in the house, unleashed and sassy. Daily life took as much as she had. The future was sunset; the past something to leave behind. And if it didn’t stay behind, well, you might have to stomp it out. Slave life; freed life- every day was a test and a trial. Nothing could be counted on in a world where even when you were a solution you were a problem. “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,” and nobody needed more; nobody needed a grown-up evil sitting at the table with a grudge. P. 302 **11**

Together they stood in the doorway. For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash. P. 308 **7**

*Chapter 3*

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 22**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 23**

**Religiosity**

The visiting preachers, a brawny brown man with smooth skin and teeth made of pearl, was coming to the close of his sermon a ritual moment of climax in the black church. p. 78 **2**

I got a glimpse that night, or I should say, a reminder of how deeply ambivalent Christians are about sex. I learned too, how dishonest we're sometimes made by the unresolved disputes between our bodies and our beliefs. p. 80 **6**

As a young minister in my early twenties, I was just glad to be in their number, bonding with ministerial mentors, men standing on the front line of spiritual warfare, or, as the black church memorably refers to it, "standing in the gap": carrying and crying the judgment of the Almighty, opening opportunity for salvation, proclaiming the soul's rescue and the requirements of redemption, and edifying believers with the inscrutable, wholly uncompromising, tell-it-like-it-is, to-be-preached-in-season-and-out-of-season gospel of the living God. p. 81 **5**

The married preacher's naked desire shocked me. p. 82 **3**

I thought immediately of how angry I'd been in the past when I heard preachers justify their moral failings, especially their sexual faults. Such ministers chided their followers with a bit of theological doggerel dressed up as a maxim: "God can hit a straight lick with a crooked stick." p. 82 **1**

He was able to zoom in on his desire and, to borrow a favorite neo-Pentecostal catchphrase, "to name it and claim it." The preacher-and he was surely aware of it, since he didn't let principle stand in the way of his pleasure-had apparently made his peace, however temporary, with the war between Christian ideals and delights of the flesh. p. 82 **3**

Some things, however, have changed very little. There remains deeply entrenched in black churches a profoundly conservative theology of sexuality. p. 86 **1**

The sexual exploitation of black female members by male clergy. p. 87 **3**

The continued rule of black churches by a mainly male leadership. p. 87 6

And the split between mind and body that leads to confusion and a black Christian theology of Incarnation. p. 87 4

It is indeed ironic that, with so much staked on the body, many black Christians continue to punish themselves with the sort of extreme self-denial that has little to do with healthy sexuality. To a large extent, the black church has aimed to rid the black body of lascivious desires and to purge its erotic imagination with “clean” thoughts. p. 91 6

Indeed, the story of the visiting minister that begins this chapter portrays the erotic intensity of the black worship experience: the electric call-and response between minister and congregation; the fervent temper of the preacher’s words of wisdom and warning; the extraordinary effort by the minister to seduce the audience onto God’s side through verbal solicitation; and the orgasmic eruption of the congregation at the end of the sermon. It requires no large sophistication to tell that something like sexual stimulation was going on. p. 91 3

Black Christians are reluctant to admit the connection because we continue to live in Cartesian captivity: the mind-body split thought up by philosopher Descartes flourishes in black theologies of sexuality. Black Christians have taken sexual refuge in the sort of rigid segregation they sought to escape in the social realm-the body and soul in worship are kept one place, the body and soul in heat are kept somewhere else. p. 91-92 6

What’s even more intriguing is that the sermons pretty much stay the same. Black Christians pretty much tell their children and each other that that’s how things out to be. p. 93 6

He preached a theology of sexuality that satisfied the demands of black church tradition. But he was also moved by erotic desires that are rarely openly discussed in black churches, or in the seminaries that prepare men and women to pastor. The exploitation of black women by black preachers, and the seduction of preachers by female members, rests on just this sort of confusion. p. 95 3

Because so many black Christians have taken up the task of being sexual saviors-of crucifying the of black hypersexuality and sexual deviance-we abhor out-of-bounds sexuality. This social conservatism expresses itself as a need to be morally upright. Beyond reproach. p. 100 6

Why, you can see the strain of erotic repression on unmade-up faces, in long dresses that hide flesh, and in the desexualized carriage of bodies (notice the burden is largely on the women) in the most theologically rigid of orthodox black churches. p. 101 6

Too often, though, there are women who come to the minister seeking a helping hand who get two instead. Plus some lips, legs, arms-well, you get the picture. p. 101 **3**

The notorious homophobia of the black church just doesn't square with the numerous same-sex unions taking place, from the pulpit to the pew. p. 104 **6**

This erotic Cartesianism is encouraged when Christians mindlessly repeat about gays and lesbians, "we love the sinner but we hate the sin." p. 105 **2**

The deeply entrenched cultural and theological bias against gays and lesbians contradicts the love ethic at the heart of black Christianity. p. 106 **3**

Better still, isn't God's love capable of redeeming a gay or lesbian person? The traditional black theological answer has been yes, if that person is willing to "give up" his or her sin-in this case, being gay or lesbian-and turn to God. p. 107 **1**

## **Spirituality**

I simply enjoying this magical moment of fraternal friendliness. p. 81 **7**

Still, I'm glad I didn't mount a high horse that night to trample the preacher. I've developed enough failures in the sometimes bloody management of erotic desire. So have many other black Christians. Especially those seeking, like most people of faith, to close the gap between what they believe and how they behave. p. 82 **10**

It's much more difficult to figure out how we can have a healthy sense of black Christian sexual identity in a world where being black has been a sin, where black sexuality has been viewed as a pathology, and where the inability to own-and to own up to-our black bodies has led us to devalue our own flesh. p. 83 **11**

Black religion freed the black body from its imprisonment in crude, racist stereotypes. The black church combated as best it could the self-hatred and the hatred of other blacks that white supremacy encouraged with evil efficiency. It fought racist oppression by becoming the headquarters of militant social and political action in black communities. p. 85 **11**

Black churches unleashed the repressed forces of cultural creativity and religious passion. The church also redirected black sexual energies into the sheer passion and emotional explosiveness of its worship services. p. 86 **9**

I'm simply suggesting that the textures, styles, and themes of black worship owe a debt to a complicated sexual history. p. 86 **11**

Unlike, say, the Catholic or Episcopal church where elaborate and more unyielding hierarchy prevails, historically black churches have a real opportunity to bring lasting change more quickly to their religious bodies. p. 86-87 **9**

The role of eroticism in a healthy black Christian sexuality. p. 87 **11**

In the black church, it's all about the body: the saved and sanctified body, the fruitful and faithful body, working and waiting for the Lord. p. 89 **11**

That scandal has special relevance for black Christians, who draw courage from a God who would dare sneak into human history as a lowly, suffering servant. From the plantation to the postindustrial city, suffering blacks have readily identified with a God who, they believe, first identified with them. p.89-90 **11**

The black church has helped blacks find a way to overcome pain, to live through it, to get around it, and, finally, to prosper in spite of it. Black religion has often encouraged black folk to triumph over tragedy by believing that underserved suffering could be turned to good use. p. 90 **9**

Every time the words of Holy Communion were repeated, "this do in remembrance of me," black Christians remembered those lost warriors who once fought mightily against oppression but who now slept with the ancestors. p. 90 **11**

Perhaps that's because there is a profound kinship between spirituality and sexuality. p. 91 **11**

It is also a rebuke to those who believe that God is opposed to our sexual pleasure. To twist literary critic Roland Barthes, we should celebrate the pleasure of the text, especially when the text is, literally, our bodies. Simply put, the black church needs a theology of eroticism. p. 92 **11**

As one wise churchman put it: tradition is the living faith of dead people, while the traditional is the dead faith of living people. Too often, the latter has ruled black churches. While we may share our forebears' faith, we can certainly leave aspects of their theologies behind. p. 93 **11**

On my way home, I couldn't help thinking of the visiting preacher. I got a lot more humble. Still, I kept thinking about my erotic encounter with Ms. Bright. Despite trying to feel bad about it, I found myself getting aroused all over again. I hadn't yet figured out that it's alright to enjoy erotic desire-to own up to the fact that you can be horny and holy-as long as you don't live at the mercy of your hormones. p. 100 **11**

But that's just the point: mere repression is not the proper perspective. We've got to find a mean between sexual annihilation and erotic excess. Otherwise, the erotic practices of church members will continue to be stuck in silence and confusion. p. 101 **11**

The very energy exerted against erotic adventure becomes a measure for ministerial integrity. It becomes the very force the minister must resist if he is to be erotically honest. Erotic desire both induces guilt in the minister and is his reward for preaching passionately about the need for the denial of erotic exploitation! p. 103 **11**

His presence at the end of such a sermon symbolizes a silent endorsement of the preacher's message. Ironically, the presence of his gay Christian body at the highest moment of worship also negates the preacher's attempt to censure his presence, to erase his body to deny his legitimacy as a child of God. p. 105 **11**

A theology of queerness the raw material of black social alienation to build bridges between gay and lesbian and straight black church members. p. 106 **11**

Are gays and lesbians who remain faithful to their partners committing a greater sin than married heterosexuals who commit adultery? The ridiculousness of such a proposition calls for a radical rethinking of our black Christian theology of sexuality. p. 107 **8**

But a more faithful interpretation of a black theology of love and liberation asserts that God takes on the very identity that is despised or scorned-being black, say, or being poor, or being a woman-to prove its worthiness as a vehicle for redemption. We don't have to stop being black to be saved. We don't have to stop being women to be saved. We don't have to stop being poor to be saved. And we don't have to stop being gay or lesbian to be saved. Black Christians, who have been despised and oppressed for much of our existence, should be wary of extending that oppression to our lesbian sisters and gay brothers. p. 107 **11**

The black church has been at the forefront of every major social, political, and moral movement in black culture. It remains our most precious institution. p.108 **9**

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*The Cornel West Reader* By: Cornel West

*Chapter 24*

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 13**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 8**

## **Religiosity**

These introductory remarks to my second book, *Prophetic Fragments* (1988), convey my moral outrage at the relative indifference of American religion to the challenges of social justice beyond charity. P. 357 6

There is an undeniable decline in the clarity of vision, complexity of understanding and quality of moral action among religious Americans. P. 357 6

This accommodation is suffocating much of the best in American religion; it promotes and encourages an existential emptiness and political irrelevance. This accommodation is, at bottom, idolatrous-it worships the gods created by American society and kneels before the altars erected by American culture. P. 357 4

American religious life-despite its weekly rituals and everyday practices-is shot through with existential emptiness. P. 357 2

This emptiness-or lack of spiritual depth-results from the excessive preoccupation with isolated personal interests and atomistic individual concerns in American religious life. These interests and concerns unduly accommodate the status quo by mirroring the privatism and careerism rampant in American society. P. 358 3

Religion becomes but one more stimulant in a culture addicted to stimulation—a stimulation that fuels consumption and breeds existential emptiness. P. 358 4

In the way, postmodern American culture attempts to eliminate spiritual depth, disseminate stimulatory surfaces, flatten out transcendence into titillation and replace the sense of the mystery of existence with that of the self's feelings of intensity (usually of the orgiastic sort). P. 358 3

Furthermore, American religious life-notwithstanding its vast philanthropic networks and impressive charitable record-lacks a substantive social consciousness. This is so because, like so many of American life, it suffers from social amnesia. P. 358 6

American religious people have little memory of or sense of collective struggle and communal combat. At the level of family and individuals, this memory and sense lingers. But at the level of larger social groups and institutions, this memory and sense of struggle evaporates. P. 358 3

This social amnesia prevents systemic social analysis of power, wealth and influence in society from taking hold among most religious Americans. Instead, the tendency is to fall back on personalistic and individualistic explanations for poverty, occupational mobility or social catastrophe. P. 358 6

For instance, moralistic acts are often conflated with moral actions. Yet the former proceeds from sheer sentimental concerns—for example, pity . . . . . In short, moralistic acts rest upon a narrow, parochial anti-intellectualism that sees only pitiful individuals.

P. 358 **1**

It is no accident that the moralistic, anti-intellectualistic forms of American religion thoroughly trash modernity and secularity, yet revel in the wonders of technology and in the comfortable living of modern prosperity. P. 358 **3**

On the one hand, I assume that religious traditions are, for the most part, reactionary, repressive and repulsive without heavy doses of modern formulations of rule of law, gender and racial equality, tolerance and, especially, substantive democracy. P. 359 **6**

### **Spirituality**

To be a part of the prophetic tradition is not to be a prophet or elitist. Rather, it is humbly to direct your strongest criticisms at yourself and then self-critically speak your mind to others with painful candor and genuine compassion. P. 357 **11**

The principal aim of *Prophetic Fragments* is to examine and explore, delineate and demystify, counter and contest the widespread accommodation of American religion to the political and cultural status quo. P. 357 **11**

For instance, moralistic acts are often conflated with moral actions. . . . . whereas the latter flow from an understanding of the larger context in which the action takes place and of the impact of the action on the problem. . . moral action is based on a broad, robust prophetism that highlights systemic social analysis of the circumstances under which tragic persons struggle. P. 358 **9**

This flagrant hypocrisy—simply highlighted in the events in recent months, yet true for all of the big-time, narrow TV evangelists—is overcome only when one adopts a principled prophetism, that is, a prophetic religion that incorporates the best of modernity and secularity (tolerance, fallibilism, criticism), yet brings prophetic critique to bear upon the idols of modernity and secularity (science, technology and wealth.) p. 358-59 **11**

My prophetic outlook is informed by a deep, historical consciousness that accents the finitude and fallenness of all human beings and accentuates an international outlook that links the human family with a common destiny; an acknowledgement of the inescapable yet ambiguous legacy of tradition and the fundamental role of community; p. 359 **7**

a profound sense of the tragic character of life and history that generates a strenuous mood, a call for heroic, courageous moral action always against the odds; p. 359 **9**

To be a contemporary religious intellectual-and person-is to be caught in this creative tension on the boundary between past and present, tradition and modernity-yet always mounted in the barricades on this battlefield on which life is lived and history is made. P. 359 **11**

Prophetic thought and action is preservative in that it tries to keep alive certain elements of a tradition bequeathed to us from the past and revolutionary in that it attempts to project a vision and inspire a praxis that fundamentally transforms the prevailing status quo in light of the best of the tradition and the flawed yet significant achievements of the present order. P. 359 **11**

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*Rock My Soul* By: Bell Hooks

*Chapter 8*

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 8**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 12**

### **Religiosity**

From their reading of the Bible enslaved black folks were able to envision a religion grounded in the belief that obedience to the will of God was the only necessary requirement to be chosen, to be lifted out of slavery into freedom. P. 108 **1**

Identifying with a god of justice, who not only chooses the poor and oppressed but especially loves them, enabled exploited and oppressed African Americans to create a basis for self-acceptance. P. 108-109 **3**

As the black church became in time an organized corporate institution the religion of African Americans shifted from the liberation theology that had been so necessary for survival and settled in a conservative faith, on that relied on more fundamentalist interpretations of the Bible. P. 109 **1**

Black people who embrace a more fundamentalist Christian doctrine, with its binary focus on good and evil, dark and light, chosen and unchosen, could no longer look to religion to provide a healthy basis for self-esteem. By investing in a belief system that not only deemed some folks worthy and others unworthy, but suggests it is natural for the strong to rule over the weak, that those who do not obey authority should be punished, black folks were essentially internalizing the Western metaphysical dualism that was already used to affirm and uphold domination. P. 110 **5**

The rigid body-hating doctrines of the scriptures perpetuated the notion that the body was inherently unclean, evil, corrupt, that sexuality was bad. Instead of offering black folks ways of thinking about the body that countered racist stereotypes these conservative interpretations of scripture reinforced and promoted internalized racism. P. 110-111 **1**

Since the movement away from the organized black church as well as other forms of spiritual practice coincide with an overall move in the nation toward narcissistic individualism, young black folks who were tired of an ethic of communalism that had emphasized racial uplift and the community found support for solely focusing on satisfying the desires of the self. P. 112 **3**

Their worldview is countered by those who cling to an old-style Christianity of the “God will take care of you” kind that diffuses the will to protest. P. 112 **4**

More than ever before in our nation there are New Age alternatives to religion that seek to impede genuine spiritual growth. P. 117 **6**

## **Spirituality**

Fusing Christian traditions with the diverse spiritual traditions from Africa, black folks created ways to worship that were celebrating and life-sustaining. P. 107 **11**

They interpreted scriptures and chose texts that reinforced their humanity, their quest for liberation. P. 107 **11**

Through their religious and spiritual experience enslaved Africans not only kept hope alive, they developed a liberation theology, designed to serve as a constant reminder of their right to freedom, to citizenship, to divine love. P. 108 **11**

By surrendering to their situation through recognition of the reality that as long as they were enslaved they had to restore their souls through hope, they could then strategize a spirituality of resistance that would lead to freedom. P. 109 **9**

It was this conservative, conformist thrust in contemporary African-American religious experience that led Martin Luther King, Jr., to give a sermon titled “Transformed Nonconformist” where he quoted from the biblical Book of Romans, scripture daring us to “be non conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” P. 109 **10**

Writing about my childhood experience in the church and the ideas toward the poor I learned there in *Where We Stand: Class Matters*, I state: “Again and Again were told in church that once we crossed the threshold of this holy place sanctified by divine spirit we were all one... P. 113 7

At last, blacks have psychologically untangled themselves from whites religiously and found a flowering of racial pride and a growth of black identity. P. 114 10

They argued that black folks had developed a “healing black morality, psychologically profound and true.” P. 114 9

Just as the liberation theology of the past offered to African Americans a vision of a counterculture where justice could prevail, where excess and decadence were questioned, p.116 8

a religion that truly celebrates coming together, reunion. p. 116 7

King stated in his sermon on nonconformity that “every true Christian is a citizen of two worlds, the world of time and the world of eternity,” that we are “paradoxically of the world and yet not of the world. P. 116 11

The prophetic imagination offers a revisioning of origin where we can imagine ourselves outside the boundaries set by humans in a mystical universe, like the one Matthew Fox evokes wherein all souls are loved, where there is no valuation based on skin color or status. This is the cosmic Christ that enslaved Africans chose. P. 116 8

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*The World According to Oprah* By: Ken Lawrence

*Chapter 14*

**Religiosity oriented phrases = 0**

**Spirituality oriented phrases = 10**

**Religiosity**

**0**

## **Spirituality**

I am guided by a higher calling. It's not so much a voice as it is a feeling. If it doesn't feel right to me, I don't do it. P. 106 **12**

You come from a power source and therefore you have great power. And the moment you recognize that power, you will recognize the power is God. P. 106 **11**

I believe when you lose a loved one, you gain an angel whose name you know. P.107 **11**

I didn't know what the future held for me [in moving from Baltimore to Chicago]. But I knew who held the future. P. 108 **9**

I feel tremendously powerful because I do believe I have reached a point in life where my personality is aligned with what my soul came to do. I believe you have to use your ego for a higher good. P. 109 **8**

All that I am or will ever become is because of my spiritual foundation and my educational foundation. My life is a living testimony to what God can do with a human being. P. 110 **10**

We live in a world that observes our external selves. What's significant, however, is finding a deeper meaning so that your life has a better balance and wholeness. P. 111 **8**

Spirit is not a religion; it's just about what is really great about yourself and remembering to live that way. P. 113 **11**

I learned that you have to be careful what you ask for, because when you get it, the form may not be exactly what you had in mind. P. 114 **11**

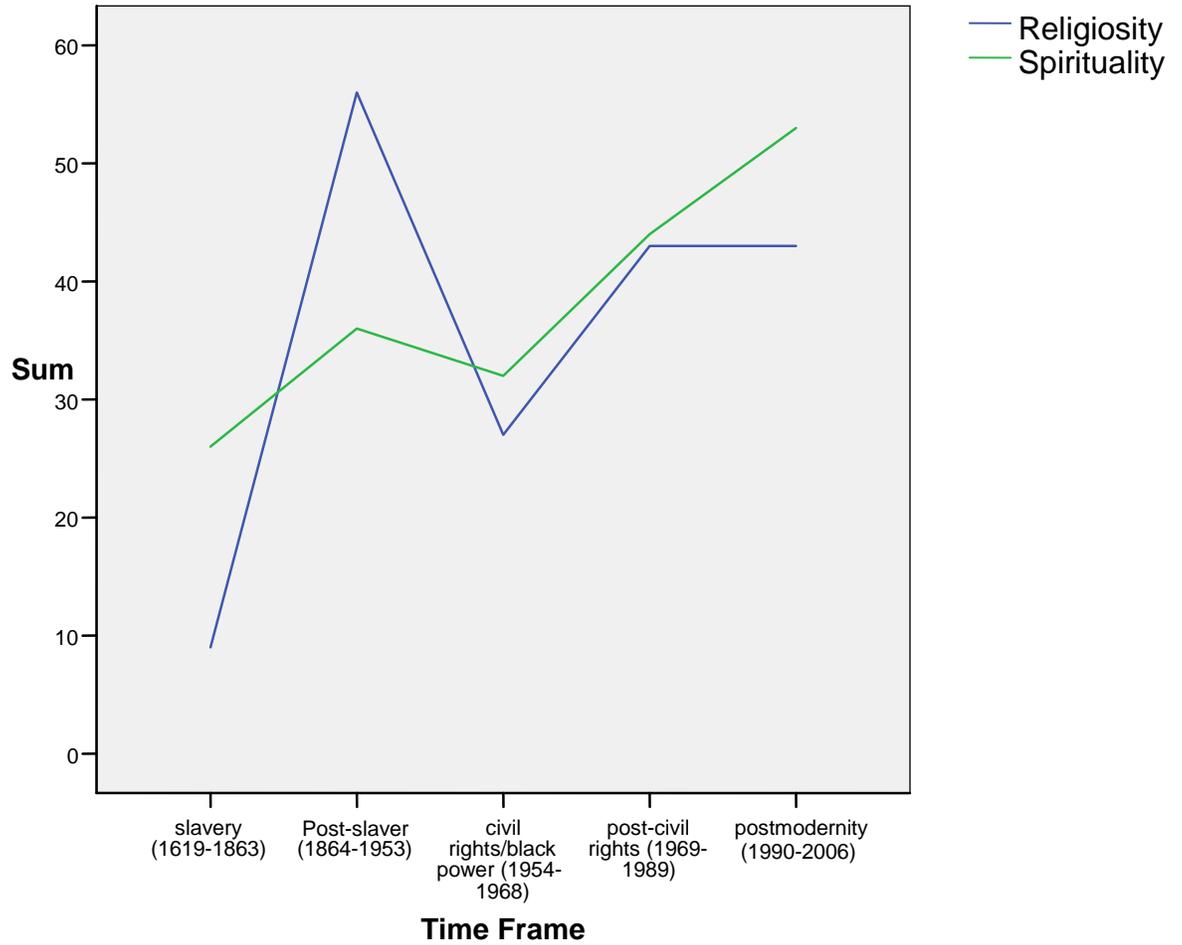
I think everybody has to figure out a way-I think the real job of your life is figuring out what is the job of your life. What is your calling? And I think everybody is called here to earth to do something special. I think there's not a person born that doesn't have a gift to offer in some way. P. 115 **8**

**APPENDIX C**  
**RESULTS TABLES**

**Table 8**  
**Table of time frame, phrase frequencies, and totals**

Title	Section(s) used	# Religiosity phrases	# Spirituality phrases	Total
<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>	Entire book	1	7	8
<i>The Narrative of Sojourner Truth</i>	Ch. 27	2	5	7
<i>The Confessions of Nat Turner</i>	Entire confession	4	7	11
<i>Harriet Tubman, The Moses of her People</i>	pp. 13-34	2	7	9
<b>Slavery (1619-1863) Totals</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>35</b>
<i>Go Tell it on the Mountain</i>	Part 3	27	24	51
<i>The Souls of Black Folk</i>	Ch. 1	7	2	9
<i>Black Boy</i>	Ch. 5 & 6	21	4	25
<i>Up From Slavery</i>	Ch. 14 & 15	1	6	7
<b>Post-Slavery (1864-1953)</b>		<b>56</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>92</b>
<i>A Testament of Hope</i>	pp. 217-220 pp. 35-40	4	19	23
<i>Black Power</i>	Entire book	9	3	12
<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>	Entire book	8	5	13
<i>The Negro Church in America</i>	Ch. 5	6	5	11
<b>Civil Rights/B.P. (1954-1968)</b>		<b>27</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>59</b>
<i>Beloved</i>	Entire book	9	11	20
<i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i>	Ch. 6	11	3	14
<i>The Color Purple</i>	Entire book	17	18	35
<i>The Identity Crisis in Black Theology</i>	Conclusion	6	12	18
<b>Post-Civil Rights (1969-1989)</b>		<b>43</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>87</b>
<i>The Cornel West Reader</i>	Ch. 24	13	8	21
<i>Rock My Soul</i>	Ch. 8	8	12	20
<i>The World According to Oprah</i>	Ch. 14	0	10	10
<i>Race Rules</i>	Ch. 3	22	23	45
<b>Postmodern (1990-2006)</b>		<b>43</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Totals</b>		<b>178</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>369</b>

**Table 9**  
**Differences in phrase count by time frame**



**Table 10**  
**Religiosity/Spirituality of males vs. females**

Era	Male n = 12		Female n = 8		Total n = 20
	Religiosity Frequency	Spirituality F	Religiosity F	Spirituality F	F
Slavery	0	2	0	2	4
post-slavery	3	1	0	0	4
civil rights/bp	2	1	1	0	4
post-civil rights	0	1	1	2	4
postmodernity	1	1	0	2	4
Total	6	6	2	6	20

**Table 11**  
**Case summaries for Religiosity characteristics**

	Reliance on obsolete doctrine	Routine worship/ practices	Preservation of self over community	Static conception of god	Emphasis on heaven/hell	Does not adapt
Douglass	0	0	0	1	0	0
Truth	1	1	0	0	0	0
Tubman	1	0	0	1	0	0
Turner	0	1	0	1	2	0
Baldwin	6	1	3	6	10	1
Du Bois	1	0	1	3	2	0
Washington	0	1	0	0	0	0
Wright	5	1	6	3	6	0
Frazier	0	1	3	0	0	2
Hansberry	0	2	0	4	0	2
King	1	0	0	1	2	0
Ture	0	0	1	1	1	6
Angelou	2	2	2	4	1	0
Cone	0	1	3	2	0	0
Morrison	2	0	1	4	2	0
Walker	1	2	3	10	0	1
Dyson	3	2	7	1	1	8
hooks	3	0	2	1	1	1
West	1	1	4	2	0	5
Winfrey	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total						
Minimum	0	0	0	0	0	0
Maximum	6	2	7	10	10	8
Sum	27	16	36	45	28	26

**Table 12**  
**Case summaries of Spirituality characteristics**

	Sense of community	Quest for ultimate truth/meaning	Adapt to new situations	Personal transformation	Customized interpretation	Personal relationship with God
Douglass	0	2	0	0	3	2
Truth	0	3	0	0	2	0
Tubman	2	0	0	1	1	3
Turner	0	1	1	0	2	3
Baldwin	1	3	2	5	5	8
Du Bois	1	0	0	0	1	0
Washington	2	0	0	1	3	0
Wright	2	1	1	0	0	0
Frazier	1	0	1	0	3	0
Hansberry	2	1	1	0	1	0
King	3	2	4	2	7	1
Ture	2	0	1	0	0	0
Angelou	0	0	1	0	2	0
Cone	0	1	2	4	2	3
Morrison	3	1	1	1	4	1
Walker	2	5	1	1	5	4
Dyson	1	1	4	1	16	0
hooks	2	2	2	2	4	0
West	1	0	2	0	5	0
Winfrey	0	3	1	1	4	1
Total						
Minimum	0	0	0	0	0	0
Maximum	3	5	4	5	16	8
Sum	25	26	25	19	70	26

**Table 13**  
**Sum of characteristics for each time frame**

Era	Reliance on obsolete doctrine	Routine worship/practices	Preserves self over community	Static concept of god	Emphasis on heaven/hell	Does not adapt	Sense of community	Quest for ultimate truth/meaning	Adapts to new situations	Personal transformation	Customized Interpretation	Personal relationship with God
	Freq	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Slavery	2 7.4	2 12.5	0 .0	3 6.7	2 7.1	0 .0	2 8.0	6 23.1	1 4.0	1 5.3	8 11.4	8 30.8
Post-slavery	12 44.4	3 18.8	10 27.8	12 26.7	18 64.3	1 3.8	6 24.0	4 15.4	3 12.0	6 31.6	9 12.9	8 30.8
Civil Rights/ BP	1 3.7	3 18.8	4 11.1	6 13.3	3 10.7	10 38.5	8 32.0	3 11.5	7 28.0	2 10.5	11 15.7	1 3.8
Post-civil rights	5 18.5	5 31.3	9 25.0	20 44.4	3 10.7	1 3.8	5 20.0	7 26.9	5 20.0	6 31.6	13 18.6	8 30.8
Post-modern	7 25.9	3 18.8	13 36.1	4 8.9	2 7.1	14 53.8	4 16.0	6 23.1	9 36.0	4 21.1	29 41.4	1 3.8
Total	27 100.0	16 100.0	36 100.0	45 100.0	28 100.0	26 100.0	25 100.0	26 100.0	25 100.0	19 100.0	70 100.0	26 100.0