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Hush Gal No More: a Ministerial Approach to Integrating
Womanist Theology in the Black Church

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HUSH GAL NO MORE
A MINISTERIAL APPROACH TO INTEGRATING WOMANIST THEOLOGY IN THE
BLACK CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

Part of the daily struggle in the African American community revolves around oppression and obscurity that many Black women regularly experience. Even though she has proven herself the backbone of her community, she experiences more suffering than anyone else. It is a fact that Black women are the most educated group in America, yet they are the last to advance in the public sphere. As a Black woman and educator, I have experienced the pain and suffering that most Black women today suffer. No matter how educated, experienced or talented she is; there is concrete evidence that in the workplace she is last hired and first to be fired, and in the church, she is silenced and oppressed. Black women have contributed much to the advancement of society, yet it has been overwhelmingly convenient to forget about her and silence her in the leadership of her community. Nevertheless, research proves that no one can live without her.

The ministerial concerns addressed in this Thesis-Project are the following: a.) the issues that have contributed to silencing Black women in the Black Church as equal partners in the pulpit and at the sacred table; b.) the retrieval of qualities characteristic of Black women's experience that foster communal ways of living and thinking that are spiritual and are used to the welfare of the community they behold; c.) strategies for action where Black women can find their collective voice in meaningful dialogue, and wherein will be empowered by the Black Church. My intuition was that it is possible for Black Womanist Theologians and the leaders of the Black Church to reach a consensus in knowing that Black women are the ones who have kept the Black church alive in so many ways and that it is impossible for Black women to continue to be silenced and relegated to the sidelines, and not have an essential voice in leadership.

The theological perspective that grounds my thesis-project is moral theology through Womanist reflection. My theological approach identifies and elucidates the principles that determine the quality of human behavior in light of Christian revelation found in Black women's ministry and Christological reflection. I follow the Whiteheads' framework of attending, asserting, and pastoral response in conjunction with Stacey Floyd-Thomas' analytical methodology in Womanist reflection. The basic structure identifies the Whiteheads' model of reflection as a correlate to the Womanist's struggle to find their voice in the Christian tradition, experience, and cultural context. I employ qualitative research to collect data through surveys and interviews of 25 women who are members of the Florida East Coast Baptist Church Association. I identify the primary concerns, problems, and challenges that exist in the organization and analyze them with regards to women being silenced and excluded.

In Chapter 1, I use the Whiteheads' first movement of attending to listen to the past and future concrete realities that concern Black women. Chapter 2 continues the attending movement of Whiteheads' method by listening to culture and tradition and experience while employing Floyd-Thomas' first movement of examining Black women's experiences and listening to their stories. Chapter 3 engages the second movement of the Whiteheads' method of attending while responding to Floyd-Thomas' second task of debunking the social myths that

denigrate Black women's experience. Chapter 4 employs the Whiteheads' movement of pastoral response, allowing for dialogue and self-evaluation emphasizing how oral tradition is an essential aspect of Womanist reflection and aiming to liberate Black women who have been "hushed" and oppressed. Chapter 4 concludes with a response to Floyd-Thomas' third, fourth, and fifth movement by first constructing religious ethics and theological discourse in light of Black women's experiences, secondly, by employing a theological approach focusing on the hermeneutics of Black women religious and cultural traditions and, finally, concluding with the process of pastoral response to "hushed" Black women and calling for change in future dialogue to keep Black women active in ministry. I propose to continue the conversation by working with my television ministry that uses that communication tool as a medium for highlighting open forums for women to be actively engaged in a wider audience for dialogue in ministry so as to be "hushed" no more.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis project developed from a myriad of concerns. Initially, the womanist thought struck my attention when I matriculated for my Master's degree at St. Thomas University in 2003. It came to my attention that in recent years, many Black women theologians have been exploring and embracing a womanist¹ perspective for their work; however, there has been a lack of dialogue between these womanist scholars and laywomen in the church. The church is a space where a person should be able to come, find solace, and experience equality as a human being made in the image and likeness of God.² On the contrary, often-church institutions have organized themselves based on gender instead of God's unmerited favor. It is well known, that many churches place men at the helm of leadership and scrutinize women to be subordinate. I believe it is important that access points be created between those who have consciously embraced the womanist perspective, and those who are living out this religious-cultural perspective daily. It is important to understand that the womanist perspective is not limited to the church yet it has been a place where that interpretation has been established. As such, I have come to know; the womanist perspective embraces and reflects a communal way of living and thinking that is spiritual and religious in nature.

The challenge the perspective faces is that it has not found a collective voice in the Black Church³ in order to be more effective in promoting the welfare of the community in which it is

¹Womanist is a Black feminist of color. Womanist Theology emerged from African American Christian women and other sources inform development of this theology. Alice Walker coined the name, "womanist", and Bell Hooks called it one of Black women's "cultural codes". Cultural codes for Hooks are "words, beliefs, and behavior patterns that must be deciphered before meaningful conversation can happen cross culturally. Refer to chapter one page 31 for an in-depth definition of womanist.

² Katie Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, (Atlanta: Scholars 1988), pp. 168. 678.

³ Black Church is referring to protestant churches in the United States that serves predominately black people. When Black Church is used in capital letters, it is referring to all denomination and communities of Black

beholden. The challenge goes on for ages. It is well documented of early abolitionists such as Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman who preached and took the leadership role as preacher. However, Delores C. Carpenter tells the experiences of Maria Stewart as she embarked upon her ministry in the African American Methodist Church to partake in leadership, only to be told by her pastor, that there was no provision for women to preach.⁴ This dilemma persists despite of the fact that women make up the vast majority of Black congregations. Daphne C. Wiggins also explained, “Black women have been regarded as the backbone of the black church. However, their extensive and significant contributions are made as lay leaders, not as religious heads of churches. The congregations of African American churches are predominantly women, and the pastors of African American churches are nearly all male.⁵ Until Black women in the Black Church, both trained and untrained, find their collective voices in meaningful dialogue, Black men will not truly, hear, respect, or recognize their presence at the sacred table.

I am an African American woman, born and raised in Southwest Georgia to a Pentecostal preacher father and a Baptist mother. All of my life I have lived under pervasive oppression and bigotry because I am a woman in Black skin. The experiences I have gained from these oppressions have given me a voice with authority to speak truth and to speak power from a lived social context and perspective as a woman in ministry and as a woman with a call to serve. All my life, I have had to live under the auspice that because I was born a woman and that God had limits on where and how I can serve him in the church, especially the Black

Churches and small letters refer to a single denomination or community. James Cones defines the black church in his book *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church*.

⁴ Delores Carpenter, *Black Women in Religious Institutions: A Historical Summary from Slavery to the 1960s*: Journal of Religious Thought; Winter89/Spring90, Vol. 46 Issue 2, p7.

⁵ Daphne C. Wiggins, *Righteous Content: Black women perspective of Church and Faith, Religion, Race and Ethnicity*. (New York, New York University Press. 2005), pp 68-75.

Church. If the Black community is to ever become truly liberated it must first look at its own sociological spirituality and the Black Church. As Stacey Floyd-Thomas points out, “A womanist sociology analysis takes seriously the task of liberation for the entire Black community by examining its most subjugated class - the Black woman.”⁶

Through my lived experience, I have had to deny myself the experience of God’s greatness because of the fear of being silenced and put aside in the church. I have witnessed incidences where men who were not sound in mind, were afforded an opportunity to serve in ministry because hierarchy refused to use a woman with all of her faculties intact, just because she was born a woman. One great Baptist preacher in Miami said in his sermon one Sunday morning, “A woman cannot lead another woman. What can a woman do for another woman? In the spirit, that is called spiritual homosexuality.”⁷ This preacher’s type of teaching and thinking has for so long reinforced the negative images of women in the church, especially the Black Church and the Black community as a whole. In this thesis-project, I aim to bring to light much of this thinking and rebut the teaching, which has become cancerous to the Black Church and the Black community.

With this concern in mind, the task of this thesis project is first, to address the ministerial issues that have contributed to silencing Black women in the Black Church as equal partners at the pulpit and sacred table. The second task will be to retrieve a religious narrative in the Christian tradition that fosters the welfare of an inclusive church. The final task is to aim for action where Black women can find their collective voice in meaningful dialogue, wherein seek for hope that will empower them, and for the Black Church to learn from her past and present experiences. Since the beginning of time, it has been a Black

⁶ Stacy Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2006), 65.

⁷ Pastor C. P. Preston, Peaceful Zion Baptist Church. 2400 NW 68th St Miami, FL. 10:00 AM, May 12, 2013.

woman who has raised nations. If the men in the Black Church would share the power and unleash the silencing of women in the church, they will quickly realize that the Black Church and the Black community will begin the healing process it so long deserve.

Ministerial Questions

The overarching question for this project is: In view of the fact that Black men have dominated the platform in the Black Church for so long, will they assist in giving voice to the silent ones, that is, the women in the Black Church? Additional questions flesh out from the overarching question that seeks to find answers to the issue of Black women that have been silenced and paralyzed in the Black Church for so long, such as the following: Will the Black Church allow womanist theologians to partake in ministry? How do we overcome the limits placed on women doing ministry in our church and helping to heal our community? Is there a place for womanist theology in the Black Church whereby the entire church can hear the issue that womanist theology uncovers? These questions resonate for me because typically women who are allowed to participate in church leadership are limited in the scope of their ministry, giving them little or no jurisdiction over men. Overcoming the obstacles of women's exclusion might help to overcome structural oppressions. From the early beginning of the Black Church, women have been present in the organizing but never given a role in hierarchy. Pamela Smoot added, "Black women, in the wake of racial and gender discrimination, have long contributed to the advancement of both the black church and black community. As the church rapidly took form, so did the exclusion of black women."⁸

⁸ Pamela Smoot, *Keep Your Hand On The Plow Hold On: Black Baptist Women in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*. Baptist History and Heritage, 40 no 3 Sum - Fall 2005, p 28-39.

Often Black women struggle with solidarity with each other. It is important for them to come together to work out their differences first in order to start a movement that will be long lasting. My initial claims are that the Black woman's voice is unwelcome by men in the Black Church. In addition, Black women are reluctant to trust Black men to share the power they (the men) have held so long, and Black women often are suspicious of one another and doubt that they can together become a force with which to be "reckoned". I will pursue the challenge of giving voice to the powerless using the same tenacity that has been used in the past by men, though openly and with the challenge that comes when speaking truth to power.

Ministerial Issues

The most important issues raised by the ministerial question, that I am pursuing, militates against the stigma that Black women are angry and unable to work together without conflict with one another. Since this stigma is present in the culture, how will the Black Church allow the thoughts of womanist theologians to transform ministry without the fear of chaos in the church and a hostile "take over"? For many years, the churches have tried to limit the work of women to women's ministry and have had no other choice but to use women in other areas of ministry because churches face the lack of male presence to carry out the work the community calls for. So, how will the work of womanists succeed in the church if it is limited to women's ministries only? I raise these issues because many churches allow women to preach and some allow women to pastor. Yet, this burning issue of the silent voices in the majority of the churches nevertheless remains. Even though, some denominations have allowed women to preach and some are in leadership positions, many churches still hold on to the traditions that have kept their Black

women silent. As Maisha Handy expresses, “If current and future generations of women are to be empowered, a liberative pedagogy for the Black Church that includes the stories and contributions of Black women is needed.⁹ In the tradition of the Black Church, in most cases, leadership is saying to women that in order for them to work in ministry, they must conform to the voices of the men who ultimately are in charge of her. This means, her sermons must line up with his sermons and teach the same messages because of his bias that she cannot articulate her inner voice. As Na'im Akbar states, "Unfortunately, most people have come to fear their inner voices because they tell the truth about us. They speak our fears and our weaknesses while also revealing our strengths. Most of us have learned to run before we get to the strengths because we fear these inner voices, we quickly go back to the loud outer voices."¹⁰

For so long, I have worked alongside other Black women in my denomination and local church, ministering to others in their times of needs, visiting hospitals, prisons, nursing homes and those who are confined to their homes. In addition, I have been a catalyst to maintain the church financially and assist in church growth. It has been a difficult task for me because, at times, it feels as if all of these efforts are in vain. When it comes to financial decision-making or church advancement in leadership, women are usually the ones who do not have access points or a voice in these matters to give our opinion on what we deem appropriate to continue the work that we are doing in the first place. In the work of this thesis project, I will benefit because it will allow me to hear what other women are saying about these issues, to learn from them, to be built-up spiritually and to make me a better minister.

⁹Maisha Handy, *Fighting the Matrix: Towards a Womanist Pedagogy For the Black Church*, The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center, 32 no 1 - 2 Fall – Spring 2004 - 2005, p 55.

¹⁰ Ha'im Akbar, *The Community of Self* (Tallahassee, FL: Mind Productions & Associates, 1985), p18.

Theological Issues and Perspective

Two main theological issues are at the root of the question I am pursuing. These issues correlate the Judeo-Christian message that says, all men and women are made in the image and likeness of God, and called to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. The first theological issue challenges the claim in many Christian denominations that since Jesus came in the form of a male person, then, women cannot be in leadership. However, this thinking goes against what Scripture states, “women and men are created in the image and likeness of God.”¹¹ So, if this is what the Scripture implies, then the church must answer the question: Are women and men alike, called to fulfill this mandate of being in the likeness and image of God? Second, if the church is the Body of Christ, and woman are included as baptized believers also, then the church must give voice to its women members so that they may preach the Good News. In summary, to continue to silence its women members, the Black Church both violates the *imago Dei* and denies the mandate that all the baptized are to evangelize.¹² These two theological foundations will serve the mandate that Christ left for the church a more inclusive practice of leadership. Nevertheless, women have found creative ways to present their messages of hope using the tools given to them, such as their lived stories, often produced in to cinema. Movies like the *Color Purple* and *His Eyes Were Watching God* depict issues as well as answers to how women have survived through stringent times and demonstrate how some women have brought communities, towns and states to a place of wholeness. If the church takes advantage of how women are gifted, and how they are called to serve, I believe the church will reach its own

¹¹ Romans 8:29-30

¹² Matthew 28:19

healing and wholeness. Some of the erroneous teachings that have found their way into the gospel message will cease to exist and women will be hushed no more.

Another theological perspective that grounds this thesis project will be moral theology from the womanist ethical interpretation. The moral theological approach will concern itself with identifying and elucidating the principles that determine the quality of human behavior in light of Christian revelation that deals with women in ministry and Christian vocation. Moral theology appeals to the authority of revelation, specifically found in the preaching and activity of Jesus Christ. Since Jesus welcomed women into so many areas in his ministry, church leadership today should look at how he responded to women. Jesus sent Mary Magdalen into the evangelistic mission field when he told her to “go and sin no more”.¹³ He also sent the woman at the graveside into the evangelistic field when he told her to “go and tell Peter and his disciple to meet him”.¹⁴ Working in the Black church, I know personally the struggles that Black women have experienced and I have come to agree that Black women should not have been silenced, or remain silent in the world, or in the church. Womanist theology takes the real lived experiences of Black women, especially in the United States and finds in that history – often untold, silenced and unknown to many– a witness to strength, power, and faith to overcome adversity in its mild and mortally oppressive forms. Womanist theology speaks to and for those individuals whom feminist and Black theology have left out. It opens the door for other women to enter and actively execute their call to ministry while speaking truth to power and to say, “hush no more” to their silencing. As Delores Williams states, “Womanist Theologians must search for voices, actions, opinions, and faith experiences of women whose

¹³ John 8:11

¹⁴ Mark 16:7.

names sometimes slip into the male-centered rendering of Black history, but whose actual stories remains remote”.¹⁵ The Church has a moral responsibility before God to bring wholeness to the entire ecclesial body. Therefore, no one should ever be denied an opportunity of worship, or an opportunity of service.

This thesis project is founded on the claim that oppression and denial of access points are in direct opposition to where God is calling the Body of Christ. Jesus plainly told his followers to “go into all the world teaching and preaching (Mark 16:15). He never was gender specific. I plan to engage the moral approach by first reminding the church of our responsibility to God and his church. Second, I propose to allow Black women to tell their stories to a wider audience. Third, I propose to develop a venue whereby they can openly share their experience with other women and the Church as a whole. If the church refuses to allow women access, there must be a place where these access points are available. I feel that television and, in some cases, social media can be a great tool cross all cultures and denominational barriers.

¹⁵ Delores Williams, Black Women’s Voices, *Christianity and Crisis*, Volume 47 Number 3, March 2, 1987, p. 67.

Method and Research Technique

I will employ James and Evelyn Whiteheads' method¹⁶ as a framework for this thesis project in conjunction with Stacy Floyd-Thomas' analytical methodology¹⁷. The basic methodological structure will involve the Whiteheads' models of reflection, which are important components for understanding the Womanist's struggle to find their voice: (1) Christian tradition, (2) experience and (3) cultural context. This model will work in conjunction with Floyd-Thomas' model of bringing messages of liberation to light through literary analysis in constructing womanist theology. Her first task, examine and reintegrate Black women's experiences in Black society into a wider American society. This is where we listen to the stories of Black women while examining where do we, as Black women, find the living God in these stories and Christian tradition.

Floyd-Thomas' second and third tasks, "debunks the social myths that denigrate Black women while privileging their Black men and white women counterparts" and "constructing religious ethics and theological discourse in light of Black women's experience in order to influence the approaches and sources of these fields."¹⁸ This is the Whitehead's attending stage, whereby I intend to engage in theological reflection by fleshing out an in-depth experience in conversation with the theological tradition of the community of Black women. The fourth and fifth movement of Floyd-Thomas' methodology, is "the theoretical approach; which focuses on the hermeneutic of Black female religious and cultural traditions" and "envision an inclusive

¹⁶ James Whitehead and Evelyn Whiteheads, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Chicago: Seed and Ward, 1995), pp.13-16.

¹⁷ Stacy Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2006), 65.

¹⁸ Ibid

liberation perspective that seeks to dismantle the interlocking systems of oppression for all humanity.”¹⁹ This movement is where I propose to usher the project into pastoral response by utilizing television and social media as a venue for Black women’s issues and voices to be heard.

In brief, Floyd-Thomas uses in her methodology, the attending stage, where the conversation and experiences of Black women are heard. Within her assertion stage, moral reflection by Black women begins; and a pastoral response moves from insight to decision and action on behalf of Black women and the Black Church.²⁰

I will employ a qualitative approach to gather the data for this thesis project. First, I will examine the women’s ministry of the Florida East Coast Baptist Association (FECBA) in the Miami area to find Black women who are willing to tell their stories and engage in participant observation of where women are being hushed in ministry. I will employ a semi-structured interview platform of 20 Black women who are FECBA members, collect the data, and examine their responses using a series of questions in conversation-survey format (see Appendix A). Moderator Rev. Johnny Barber, of the FECBA, has given me access to the women’s department of this organization. I will attend one of the monthly women’s meetings and be a part of the agenda where I will introduce my project and collect data in hopes of uncovering voices that have been hushed and gain insight on issues that will assist Black women to become more recognizable in the church and in the world. I will create a talk show forum for television broadcasting as the pastoral response that allows Black women to tell their stories and listen to oral history from early womanist theologians and ethicists as it is recorded

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

in womanist literature. Additionally, I will interview five women who are part of a program that is called “Our Living Legends.”²¹ For the interviews, I will employ Floyd Thomas’ emancipatory meta-ethnography.²²

²¹ Our Living Legends is program created to honors women who have been helpful to others in their churches, communities and families. They have made a difference in their historical time and in the future of others.

²² Floyd Thomas idea of emancipatory meta-ethnography is another form of sociology of Black liberation undergirded with womanist ethical sensibilities. Her approach aims to present and embrace the experiences of Black woman, who are notoriously absent from discourses of faith development. Stacy Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2006), pg. 90.

Chapter 1: LISTENING TO THE EARLY ENCOUNTERS OF WOMNIST DIALOUGE PARTNERS IN THE BLACK CHURCH

Introduction

For centuries, women of African descent have endured a great deal of scrutiny to prove their self-worth and validation as being fully human both to the dominant community of white men and women and to the community of African American men and some Black women too. No other creation upon the face of the earth has suffered bigotry and discrimination at the level African women have endured. Traditionally, African American women have had to bear the humiliations of being sold as chattel, sexually abused, forced into labor as slaves and servants, and used as human dairies.

Through these humiliations, which are well documented and expounded upon, African American women have pressed toward a higher calling knowing that this degradation is neither right nor what God wants for them. In spite of these atrocities and injustices, Black women have kept their eyes on the prize, of one day, being respected equally by women of other cultures and men in general. Unfortunately, just when many African American women think that they have reached their goals, they find that there are still more obstacles for them to overcome, mountains to climb, and more burdens for them to bear. This chapter opens with a dialogue of past encounters that Black women have faced during the early modern period, using the atrocities of Saartjie Baartman as point of reference. The chapter continues to listen to experiences of women during three other important eras of the life of Black women during the civil rights movement, the development of Black Theology and Womanist Theology.

It would be a travesty to silence the voice and the experiences of the South African woman, Saartjie Baartman when looking at the suffering of African American women. The

atrocities of her lived experiences as a Black woman, is a prime example and it gives validity to how Black women have suffered degradations for so many years at the hands of the other.

According to Rachel Holmes, young Saartjie was an orphaned Khoisan girl born in 1789 on the eastern frontier of Cape Colony and she was smuggled to London at twenty-one years old. She was forced to experience every mortifying act possible for women of any race.²³ Noted by *The Guardian*, on March 31, 2007, Saartjie was a small, beautiful woman with an irresistible bottom and strangely elongated labia. To the western European eyes, of that time, she was extraordinary. Her physique caused many people to ponder over how it was possible for someone to be shaped with such an amazing figure.²⁴

At a young age, men convinced Saartjie on the idea that she had a lucrative potential as an entertainer in England and that she would become rich and famous. Believing this promise, Saartjie agreed to leave her homeland and seek for riches with hope of someday returning. Never the less, she fell into the hands of human traffickers, where they used her in circuses all over England. Her first performance was September 24, 1810. She was dressed in a tight fitting body suit with beads and feathers, with fur cloaked from her neck to her feet, as she wore petrifying face paint and suggestive curly hair. It further noted, her imagery was a fantasy made flesh to the London audiences. She was ordered to sing, dance, as she played her tin guitar, while being poked and felt on by onlookers. In no time, London was taken over by the Saartjie mania. She went from being a mysterious immigrant to the city's most talked about celebrity. Her image

²³ "Review: Arts: Flesh made Fantasy: Saartjie Baartman was a Beautiful South African Showgirl with an Irresistible Bottom - no Wonder She Caused such a Sensation in Georgian England. Rachel Holmes on the Legend of the 'Hottentot Venus'." *The Guardian*, Mar 31, 2007. 14, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/244163509?accountid=14129>.

²⁴ Ibid.

became omnipresent on bright posters and penny prints, and being favored for cartoons and caricature.²⁵

Months later, an abolitionist was convinced that Saartjie was brought to England and forced to perform against her will, and began a high court lawsuit on her behalf which excited the English press and public. In court, Saartjie was asked if she preferred to attend bible school and then return home or stay in England performing on contract and salary, Saartjie said, “Stay here.” Unable to prove she was performing against her will, the case collapsed. Saartjie’s choice was limited. Who wanted to live in a poor, colonized, South African country where there were no opportunities for women at all? Again, Saartjie believed in, and had no other choice but to work for people that meant to exploit, use, and abuse her. Surely, the show owners would live up to their agreement to place Saartjie under contract and salary in a free country. Nevertheless, they did not, the show went on and she experienced more humiliation.

In the spring of 1815, Saartjie posed for three days as a life model for Europe’s leading scientist, naturalist and staff painters at the Museum of National History where her entire body was gazed upon and examined in public. Artists produced delicate portraits of her body that became collectible popular art, copied and sold in great quantity. The same year Saartjie died at age 26 and more indignity followed her death. Georges Cuvier, the father of comparative anatomy and paleontology, conducted the post-mortem examination. Within 48 hours, her bones were boiled, and her brain and genitals were bottled. Once Saartjie’s whole body was examined and an autopsy performed, sculptors and artists were allowed to make plastered casts of her body, polished the mold with turpentine, skinned and painted it, and the whole body varnished.

²⁵ Ibid.

For more than two centuries, the relics of Saartjie's body kept in the Museum of Natural History on display. Her violated body became Europe's most analyzed specimen. It was not until 2002 that President Nelson Mandela demanded that Saartjie's body released to give her a proper burial.

It is evident that Saartjie's body was subjected to indignity and exaggeration. However, through lack of recognition of the works and examination of George Cuvier, the father of comparative anatomy and paleontology, Saartjie has influenced modernist female form and will forever live on in the fields of Medicine, Ethics, and the Arts. The experience of Baartman in early modernity, is symbolic of the alienation and degradation that women have experienced oftentimes in life, be it the expropriation of female labor, sexuality or economic exploitation. Though filled with irony, historically, like Saartjie, many American Black women have inherited great attributes, wisdom and strength from the experiences of oppression and hardship in the world and in today's churches. Just as Saartjie wanted to obtain wealth in hopes of one day leading her people to a better life; so does other Black women in our world, and church today. Leadership and decision making has been engrained in American Black women's memory, from managing the plantation, rearing off-springs (their own and those of the plantation owners), and as a confidant. African American women too have suffered and experienced a lack of recognition for their contributions to a nation and institution that literally cleaved to her breast.

African American women have measured up to and even surpassed men and other women, yet they still counted as irrelevant and many doors closed in their faces if they are not subservient or if they reject employer's expectation to serve in humbleness. According to Stacy Floyd-Thomas, "Black women are only relevant to explain, legitimate, or ensure the logic of men and other women's lives, security, comfort, and success. Black women have no meaning for

themselves outside of the utilitarian end. Simply put, for them to be relevant is for them to be useful.”²⁶ Ironically, many entities cannot survive without the Black woman. One entity in particular is that of the Black Church, which uses Black women to a certain degree usually to fulfill some subservient role as a minor level church leader. In reality, these women allowed limited access to ministry and even less access for the role of a preacher, minister or theologian.

Culturally, whenever a Black woman took on an attitude of being knowledgeable, a leader, or one that possessed a deeper thought relevant to promote advancement within certain environment, these attitudes considered and described as “womanish.” The term usually indicated that these women were stepping into territories that were off limits and preserved for others. Many people assumed that they were thinking, asserting, and acting “out-of-order.” However, by the end of the twentieth century work in womanist theology began to penetrate colleges, universities and seminaries, advocating for Black women, womanist theology, and womanist ethics. For example, Diana Hayes argues that “womanist” theology goes beyond Alice Walkers’ definition of a womanist as a Black feminist or a feminist of color. It serves to provide a critical response to the absence or invisibility of Black women in both feminist and Black liberation theology. It acknowledges the “coming to voice” as articulators of a holistic communication theology challenging racism, and sexism.²⁷ Since womanist theologians are making their voices heard in academia, it is important that Black women begin a dialogue in the church in order for Black women to begin a dialogue with one another. It is important to note that dialogue is crucial for this project. It will allow women, whose voices silenced, to have their voices un-hushed and their stories of the past remembered and respected as authentic voices

²⁶ Stacey Floyd Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*. (Cleveland, Ohio. The Pilgrim Press. 2006) p. 170.

²⁷ Diane Hayes, *And Still We Rise: An Introduction to Black Theology*. (New York, Paulist Press. 1996) p.

remembering the hidden secrets that caused them to be silenced, and to begin to correct those issues that have held many Black women down and silenced them for ages.

For over two hundred years that the United States has been in existences, she has had an issue with finding value for her African American citizens, especially the African American women. James Cones sees the Black woman not as a special specimen of womanhood, rather as a Black woman given less protected and burdensome positions in society.²⁸ As, Michelle Wallace pointed out, “this has resulted in the myth of the superwoman, which is not a description of the Black woman but, rather, a measure of the difference between what is regularly expected of white women and what is essentially required of Black women.”²⁹ It is true, Black women expected to endure atrocities in life that cannot endured by neither men nor white women. She is known to give birth in the morning and tend the fields in the afternoon, all while nursing someone else’s child. Therefore, as Cones puts it, “the value that Black women have derived for themselves and have offered as an option to the Black community as well as the members of a broader, dominant society cannot be understood or adequately explained apart from the historical context in which Black women have found themselves as moral agents.”³⁰ Cone further explains that moral values that Black women have provided as a legacy to the Black community traditions have been irrepressible in redeeming and transforming an entire human environment.³¹

Retrospectively, there were not very many occasions, during turbulent times, where a Black woman was not present to “save the day”. She has rebelled against oppressive institutions,

²⁸ James Cone, *Black Theology: a documentary history volume two: 1980-1992*. (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books. 1993) p. 310.

²⁹ Michelle Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. (New York, Dial Press). 1979.

³⁰ James Cones, *Black Theology: a documentary history volume two: 1980-1992*. (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books. 1993) p. 319.

³¹ Ibid.

led communities, and triumphed in the face of adversity. Yet, none can live without her, but many find the need to silence her. As Katie Canon explains,

The Black woman has been placed under a double injunction. She has to face a critical jury, particular white and male, that makes claims for gender neutral and value free inquiry as a model for knowledge. She has little opportunity to expand her creative energy or concentrates on searching for universal truth unhampered by so-called incidental matters such as race sex and class differences. If the Black woman engages in this type of abstract moral discourse, she runs the risk of being misunderstood, misinterpreted and frequently devalued.”³² Canon goes on to argue that Black female scholars accepted canonical methods of moral reasoning contain deeply biases that make it exceedingly difficult to turn them to the service of the best interest of Black women and universally does not include the Black woman’s experience.³³ Diverse movements in the Black experience in America have attempted to give liberty to Black Americans. However, three of them, in my opinion, have made great headways in the Black experience than many others, yet they have their biases where the Black woman is concerned. These three movements include the Civil Rights Movement, Black Theology and Womanist Theology.

The Civil Rights Movement

The initial Civil Rights Act passed in 1866 gave citizenship to all persons born in the United States and gave the same rights to Black men as given to white men regardless to race, color or previous condition. The Act passed because America wanted Black men to have the privilege to vote. However, the Act was construed in such a way by many white men added all types of tests to make sure that Black men were not afforded that right. According to Heather Cox Richardson, “the Civil Rights Act, written by the man who had drafted the Thirteenth Amendment, Illinois Senator Lyman Trumbull, was intended to secure to African-Americans full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of person and property as is

³² Ibid, page 301.

³³ Ibid, page 304.

enjoyed by white citizens.”³⁴ Richardson further added, “It guaranteed only that the legal playing field would be level for all citizens; state legislatures could not enact legislations endangering a Black person’s right to his life or his land.”³⁵

However, well documented, the Civil Rights Movement of 1866 did not accomplish what it set out to do. The act defined African Americans as citizens and placed this definition in the Constitution in order to prevent Congress from later overturning it. The Civil Rights Act declared that the “states could not deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the law. It also nudged Southerners toward Black suffrage by threatening to reduce congressional representation denying any state that denied the vote of twenty-one-years old male citizens in good standing.”³⁶ Never-the- less, the Act proved to be unsuccessful. Again, it did it included the rights of women of any race. Isabella Baumfree, “Sojourner Truth” as we know her today, appeared before conferences time after time to speak her mind about the suffrage to include all African Americans and women. It is noted, in 1851, Sojourner Truth delivered what is recognized as one of the most famous women’s right speeches in American history, “*Ain’t I a Woman?*” She continued to speak out for women, Black women in particular, until her death in 1883.

Another pioneer for justice for Black people and women was Ida B. Wells. She was born as a slave in 1862. However, Wells’ parents managed to raise and support their family because Wells’ mother was a famous cook and her father was a skilled carpenter. When Wells was just

³⁴ Heather Cox, Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race Labor and politics in the Post- Civil War North, 1865-1901*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), p 122.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p123.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 32.

fourteen, her parents and youngest sibling died of yellow fever. However, she kept her family together by becoming a teacher. It was in 1884 when Wells began her plight to fight racial and gender injustice. A conductor on a train for the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad Company, in which Wells was a passenger, asked her to give up her seat to a white man and ordered Wells to the smoking car, which was in fact the Jim Crow Car, which was already crowded. Despite of the 1875 Civil Rights Act banning discrimination based on race, creed, or color in hotels, theaters, transports, and other public accommodations. Wells wrote:

I refused, saying that the forward car was a smoker, and as I was in the ladies' car, I proposed to stay. The conductor tried to drag me out of the seat, but the moment he caught hold of my arm I fastened my teeth in the back of his hand. I had braced my feet on the back of the seat in front of me and was holding to the back, and as he had already been badly bitten, he didn't try it again by himself. He went forward and got the baggage man and another man to help him and of course they succeeded in dragging me out.³⁷

Wells, forced off the train while all the white passengers applauded. As soon as she got home, Wells hired an attorney and sued the railroad. She won the court case, but the railroad appealed and reversed the case in a lower court. From that moment on Wells worked tirelessly and fearlessly to overturn injustices against women and people of color. However, over the years, women of all races continued to suffer and it took approximately another one hundred years to draw closer to women's inclusion to the rest of society. Moreover, it is still a work in progress.

Nevertheless, the fight for equality for all Negroes and all women, eventually addressed during the civil rights movement of 1965, where many people suffered and died for the cause. According to Septima Poinsetta Clark, "In stories about the civil rights movement you hear

³⁷ Lee D. Baker, April 1996. (Idbaker at acub.duke.edu) Source Franklin, Vincent. 1995 Living Our Stories, Telling Our Truths Autobiography and the Making of African American Intellectual Tradition. 1995 Oxford University Press.

mostly about Black ministers. Nevertheless, if you talk to women who were there, you will hear another story. I think the civil rights movement would never have taken off if some women had not started to speak up. A lot more are just getting to the place now where they can speak out.³⁸

It was 1963, in Americus, Georgia that thirteen teenage girls, between the ages of thirteen and sixteen, decided that they had had enough of injustice and rebelled against the norm by trying to enter the Martin Theatre, which was an establishment for white people only. The girls, told to leave and if they did not leave, they would be hauled off to jail. The girls, stood their ground, did not leave the theatre, and taken, as promised to jail. None of the girls' parents had any idea where they were. The girls taken to an abandoned army stockade, held in captivity for at least three months without a change of clothes, clean water, or nourishing food. According to Shirley Reese Green, she was thirteen years old at the time.

We had no beds, no mattress, no blankets, pillows or sheets. The floor was real hard and cold. I could only lie down on the floor for a little while because it started to get hard. So, many of us just sat up and just walked around in that small jail cell. They only gave us half-done hamburgers to eat and we drank the drips of water that came from the shower. The smell in that place was awful because the toilet was not working. Feces piled up in the toilet because it was not a working sanitary facility, and all we had was the paper wrapping from the hamburger to use as toilet tissue. For all that longtime we could not take baths. During the day, gnats covered our bodies, and at night mosquitos, roaches and snakes hunted us. I just thank God that I am alive today to tell the story. When I hear of people talking about civil rights, our stories of being locked in that stockade is silent. No one ever mentions our horrific experience. This incident happened years before anybody had even heard of Snitch or Dr. Martin Luther King.³⁹

³⁸ Rosetta E. Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*. (Minnesota, Augsburg Fortress. 2003), P1.

³⁹ This information, taken from an interview with the Stockade Girls taken in Albany Georgia on June 6, 2015.

Whenever most historians describe events and people that contributed to the Civil Rights Movement and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), they mention the men who played a role in the movement, such as Dr. King, Malcolm X, Julian Bond, John Lewis, Emmett Till, Medgar Evers and so on. They seldom mention the silent fact that it was Ida B. Wells, a Black woman, who organized the NAACP in the first place and she was marginalized from position in leadership in the organization she formed.

In 1906, Wells joined William E.B. Dubois and others to further the Niagara Movement. This Movement's aim was to oppose racial segregation and disenfranchisement of Black people. In addition, it opposed the agreement laid out by Booker T. Washington known as the Atlanta Compromise. The agreement promised that Blacks would work meekly and to submit to white political rule, in exchange for free basic education, which was limited to vocational and industrial training. The Atlanta Compromise did not advocate for equality, integration, and ultimately caused Dubois to oppose the Compromise and the Niagara Movement formed as a result. However, the Movement came with problems of its own. It did not allow women to participate as members. During the early months of 1906, friction between many of the Movement's members developed over the idea of admitting women to the organization, in which W.E.B. Dubois favored. He invited Wells and a few other women to attend the meeting. Soon, the organization split and Wells was one of the two Black women who signed the document that formed the NAACP. However, W.E.B. Dubois voted as the first NAACP President and the struggle for African American women coming to voice continues.

It was not until 1964, that the issue of civil rights in place for Black men and all women in America. This time it brought all Black men and women to the table to converse about equal rights and discrimination. The Act, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson on July 2,

1964, prohibiting discrimination in public places, provided integration of schools and other facilities, and made employment discrimination illegal. It also outlawed segregation of business, such as restaurants, hotels, and theaters. Yet, all of this was not to complete full equality for women, because in 2009 the first bill that President Obama signed into legislation was the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. This Act dealt with women's right to equal pay in the governmental workplace. As the issues of African American equality were being dealt with in the 1960's, another equal rights issue was being analyzed by James Cone and this time it looked at the church and what it meant for Black people.

Black Theology

James Cone is an African Methodist Episcopal preacher, theologian and Professor at Union Theological Seminary in Manhattan, New York. Many people recognize Cone as the father of Black Liberation Theology, because he was first to analyze "Blackness" from a theological perspective. Cone looked first at the Black Power movement placing emphasis on its relationship to Christianity, the church, and contemporary American theology. He explained, "If, as I believe, Black Power is the most important development in American life in this century, there is a need to begin to analyze it from a theological perspective. Some critics reject Black Power because to them it means Blacks hating whites. However, the advocates of Black Power hail it as the only viable option for Black people. For these persons Black Power means Black people taking the dominant role in determining the Black-white relationship in American society."⁴⁰

⁴⁰ James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, (New York The Seabury Press, 1969), p.1.

Cone was born in a small town in Arkansas with a population of 400 Blacks and 800 whites. He said, “Two important realities shaped my consciousness, the Black church experience and the sociopolitical significance of white people.”⁴¹ It was there that he experienced the life-affirming community of the Black church alongside the soul crushing reality of white racism. With compassion, Cone noted, “I was within inches of leaving the Christian faith, because that faith as I had received it and learned it no longer explained the world to me satisfactorily.”⁴² It is further noted, “It was the voice Malcolm X that first made Cone question his theology. Malcolm X proclaimed loudly that Christianity is a white man’s religion and said that Blacks should adopt an understanding of God that grew out of their own history and experience.”⁴³ Yet he believed in the nonviolent, Christian love of Martin Luther King Jr.

Cone has spent most of his life trying to bring understanding to the Christian faith that seemed to exclude Black people in America. It is evident the he has listened to Dr. King, Malcolm X and the students he taught. Cone learned a great deal about philosophy and theology from the pre-Socratics to modern existentialism and linguistic analysis, from Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Origen to Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, and Tillich. Cone, known to be an expert on Karl Barth recognizes the complex theological issues that shaped his theology. In seminary, he wrote papers on the Barth and Brunner debates, and ended up with a Ph.D. on Barth’s anthropology. Nevertheless, when he left seminary and began to teach what he had learned to his Black students, he found himself head-on with the contradictions of his seminary education. As Cone explains, “Those Black students drove me back to the primary art form of the Black religious experience by refusing to accept a refabricated theology from the lips of James Cone. I

⁴¹ James Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, (New York, The Seabury Press, 1975). P.1.

⁴² James Cone in interview with Blackside Producer Valerie Linson,
www.pbsorg/thisfarbyfaith/james_cone.html

⁴³ Ibid.

began to once more to listen to the heartbeat of Black life as reflected in the song and speech of Black people. As I did so, I asked myself; what is theology?"⁴⁴ For Cone, the white American theology that he had learned about over the years seemed to be a theology that did not relate to the needs and liberation of Black people. Moreover, his aim was to produce a theology that Black people could relate to and embrace as their own. Cone recognized,

Like white American theology, Black thought on Christianity has been influenced by its social context. Nevertheless, unlike white theologians, who spoke to and for the culture of the ruling class, Black people's religious ideas were shaped by the cultural and political existence of the victims in North America. Unlike Europeans who immigrated to this land to escape tyranny, Africans came in chains to serve a nation of tyrants. The slave experiences shaped our idea of the land. In addition, this difference in social existence between Europeans and Africans must be recognized, if we are to understand correctly the contrast in the form and context of Black and white theology.⁴⁵

To flesh out his deliberation on Black theology, Cone teaches that Black theology is the story of Black people's struggle for liberation in the extreme of oppression. However, there is a sharp distinction between the thought and process, worship and theology, because as Cone stated, "Black theological reflection about God occurred in the Black struggle for freedom."⁴⁶ Moreover, for him there is a grave difference between the Black and white thought and it is theological. Black people did not arrive at God's existence through a philosophical argument because, as Cone puts it, "the God of the Black experience is not metaphysical idea, but a God of history, the Liberator of the oppressed from bondage."⁴⁷

⁴⁴ James Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, (New York, The Seabury Press, 1975). p.5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.53

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.54

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.55

Cone has a unique way of making Black theology live through the truths of Black people. Black theology is theology for Black people, an examination of their stories of “how we got over.” Cone looks to Black theology to answer the question of what it meant to be Black and to uncover the structures and forms of the Black people’s experiences and Black theology rises out of thought and form of the Black experience itself. He managed to bring understanding to the church, that Black Theology is a way of understanding who the Black Church is, and how we live within the content of what we have taught about God, and how Black people survive in the face of oppression. There were many who understood what Cone was aiming to accomplish by introducing Black Theology. Nevertheless, some did not understand what Cone set out to do. During the Presidential campaign with President Obama, Jeremiah Wright tried publicly to preach a Black Theological sermon, which caused chaos not only in the white church but in the Black churches as well. Many people did not understand what Wright meant in his delivery of his sermons; thus, denounce the true essence of what Black Theology stands for.

Womanist Theology

Even though Cone set out to do great exploits in Black Theology, he met with scrutiny among some women theologians. Delores Williams a theologian notable for her role in the development of womanist theology, argues that Black Liberation theology have left out the Black woman. As a result, she introduces Womanist Theology. Her aim introduces a theology inclusive to Black women. She argues, “The concept of womanist allows women to claim their roots in Black history, religion, and culture.”⁴⁸ One may ask; what is the unique Womanist perspective? Williams response is, “Her origins are in the Black folk expression, “You acting

⁴⁸ James Cones and Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Theology: a documentary history volume two 1980-1992*, (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 2005), p.265.

womanish,” meaning according to Alice Walker, wanting to know more and in great depth than is good for one. A womanist is a Black feminist of color.”⁴⁹ Womanist theology immersed from African American Christian women and other sources informing development of this theology. Alice Walker coined the name, “womanist,” and Bell Hooks called it one of Black women’s “cultural codes.” Cultural codes for Hooks are “words, beliefs, and behavior patterns that must be deciphered before meaningful conversation can happen cross culturally.”⁵⁰ Black women have used words and behavior patterns to communicate to their daughters, sisters and other Black women to pass on wisdom for survival to live in a white world, in the Black community, and with men as long as most people can remember. When a young girl, told she was “acting Womanish,” that was not a compliment nor was it flattering. It meant she was trying to take the lead. So, this “code word” used to “put her in check.” As Williams explains, “these cultural codes and their corresponding traditions are valuable resources for indicating and validating the kind of data upon womanist theologians can reflect as they bring Black women’s social, religious, and cultural experience into the discourse of theology, ethics, biblical and religious studies.”⁵¹ Womanist theology sets out to bring liberation to Black women in ways that Black theology and feminist theology could never do, because they could not relate to the plight of a Black woman and her plight to survive in a world that looks to her for survival and to silence her when she tries to elevate herself towards leadership. Jacqueline Grant says, “Black women have been invisible in theology, including Black theology and feminist theology. In order for any

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 266.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid

liberation theology to be faithful to itself it must hear from the critique coming to it from the perspective of Black women, perhaps the most oppressed of all the oppressed.”⁵²

In examining the attributes of Black women, it is amazing how the other can look over the Black woman as if she never was in the scheme of things. Some people may assume that Black women have no place in the world or that men are capable for speaking for her. However, these assumptions are false and need to be relinquished. Grant points out,

Male dominated cultures restrict women from certain areas in society. In such a culture, men given the warrant to speak for women on all matter of significance. It is no accident, for so long, all Black theologians were men. This is expected; given the status and power accorded the discipline of Theology. As Grant noted, “professional theology is done by those who are highly trained. It requires, moreover, mastery of that power most accepted in the definition of manhood, the power or ability to reason.”⁵³

This idea is what supposedly opens the doors for one to partake in logical and philosophical debates and discussion. For some of our male counterparts, this form of communication is out of the sphere of any woman, especially a woman of color.

Womanist theology sets out to break down these barriers and un-silence the main players that have caused the world to survive, that are its Black women. Most times, the nature of men is defined as one with reason and intellect, whereas, women are looked upon as emotional and intuitional. Therefore, her ability to lead is limited to the home while men carry out leadership roles in public society. As our society evolves, Black women are moving farther away from the slave community. According to Grant, “slave women were thought to share the characteristic of emotionality and irrationality. As we move away from the slave culture, a dualism between

⁵² Jacqueline Grant, *Black Theology a documentary history volume one 1966-1979*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Book, 1993). p. 324.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 325.

Black men and women increasingly emerge. This means that Black men have gradually increased their power and participation in the male-dominated society, while Black women have continued to endure stereotypes and oppressions.”⁵⁴

Black women in America have brought a new voice and insight to theology. In addition, as Black women work to bring womanist theology to its full fruition, there are yet more desired clarifications made. Just as with any new ideas, womanist theologians are under the scrutiny to show how they will bring a larger understanding and liberation to Blackness and the Christian faith. Grant believes,

Black theology that opened the door for Black people to explore the richness of their own experience in their efforts to understand the meaning of God’s presence in the human story. Black theology laid the groundwork for the emergence of various theological voices from the Black community and Black theologians write for a vantage point of the total Black experience. However, Black women were invisible in Black theology.⁵⁵

For any movement to be full proof it must consider all of its members. Womanist theology emerged partly because Black theology’s failure to address women’s issues. Grant explains, “The emergence of womanist theology is twofold. First, by linking God to the Black experience, Black theology gave access to systematic theological reflection. Secondly, by ignoring Black women’s experience Black theology forced Black women to develop the own theological perspective.”⁵⁶ A men dominated theology can never speak wholeness to women. Black women’s experiences are unique from any other, because she has had to learn to bare oppression and cope with it while building a nation. Womanist counterparts do not know and never will know what it is like to be a Black woman living in a man’s world. She has to fight the injustices

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 325

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.292.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

forced on her by white men and white women in the world, many times, oppressed in the church, and oppressed at home too. Grant points out, “womanist theology begins with Black women’s story of struggle. Womanist Theology reflects at least two aspects of that story: first, the complexity of Black women’s oppression and secondly, Black women’s resolute efforts to survive and be free from the oppression.”⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

The Civil Rights Movement, Black Theology, and Womanist Theology, all help to bring a liberation and hermeneutic to the Black community and to the Black Church. However, there is still much work to be done to bring about awareness and wholeness to a people who have been held back for so long, especially Black Women. To draw out liberation more fully there must be a bringing to voice our present situation when it concerns Black Women in the world and in the Church. There are limited number of churches in the Black communities who give women a place to speak and share their lived experiences. In the next chapter, we open a discussion that will give other Black women a voice at the center of the church leadership. We will hear what women in the church are saying about being a Black woman in the world and in the Black Church.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.292.

CHAPTER 2: THE CONCRETE REALITY OF WOMANIST EXPERIENCE

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I look to my own religious experience for answers to why Black women are “hushed.” I employed a qualitative approach to gather the data for this thesis project. First, I examined the women’s ministry of the Florida East Coast Baptist Association (FECBA) in the Miami area to find Black women who are willing to tell their stories and engage in participant observation of where women are being hushed in ministry. I use a semi-structured interview platform of 20 Black women who are FECBA members, collect the data, and examine their responses using a series of questions in conversation-survey format (see Appendix A). I attended one of the monthly women’s meetings to introduce my project and to collect the data using surveys that consist of fourteen questions.

Additionally, I interview five elderly women, using video recording, who are between the ages of 75 and 90. They are also members of the FECBA, and are a part of a program that I sponsor each year called “Our Living Legends.” This program honors women who have been helpful to others in their churches, communities and families. They have made a difference in their historical time and in the future of others. For the interviews, I employ Floyd Thomas’ emancipator meta-ethnography.⁵⁸ However, before I get in to the data information, I inject a brief background on the development of the Black Missionary Baptist Church, the National Baptist Association and the FECBA.

⁵⁸ Floyd Thomas idea of emancipatory meta-ethnography is another form of sociology of Black liberation undergirded with womanist ethical sensibilities. Her approach aims to present and embrace the experiences of Black woman, who are notoriously absent from discourses of faith development. Stacey Floyd Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*. (Cleveland, Ohio. The Pilgrim Press. 2006) 90.

Lived Experience

For most Black Americans, religion is an important aspect of life. All of my life, religion has played a major role and for the most part, I have been a member of the Missionary Baptist denomination. Even though my father was a Pentecostal Preacher for the House of God Saints in Christ, my spiritual genesis began with my mother, and her side of the family, and they are members of the Missionary Baptist Church, where I have continued in the faith until today.

Edward L. Wheeler, states,

As important as the church has been for Blacks, we know little of its history. However, we do know when Africans began to arrive in America in the early 1600's; their white slave owner did not allow them to partake in religious ceremonies. The white owners hesitate to provide religious instruction, fearing that literacy and the Christian message would disrupt the master-slave relationship...There were two contradictory traditions about slavery and religion: the first decreed that no baptized Christian could be enslaved; the second permitted the enslavement of Christians.⁵⁹

According to David B. Davis, "It is evident that the slave master did not want to take a chance that their valuable property (slaves) would be freed by Baptism".⁶⁰ Later in the seven hundred, the first attempt to Christianize African people began with Catholics, Anglicans and Quakers. According to Wheeler, "Catholics and Anglicans met with little success, but Quakers made some progress in their attempt to educate slaves. But, despite of the Quakers successes, it was not until the first Great Awakening, in the eighteenth century, that the Black slaves began to

⁵⁹ Edward Wheeler, *Beyond One Man: A General Survey of Black Baptist Church History*, *Review and Expositor* August 4, 2016, vol. 70, issue 3. 70:311.

⁶⁰ David B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*. (Ithava, New York: Cornell University Press. 1966) p. 210.

respond in relatively large numbers to the preaching of the Gospel. During this time Blacks characteristically joined Baptist churches.”⁶¹ The question that stood out for me is why did the Africans respond in a way they had never before? Wheeler goes on to explain, “Africans slaves responded to Baptists because they could identify points of continuity between their African heritage and Baptist practices.”⁶² According to Melville Herskovits, “baptism by immersion drew a large numbers of slaves to the Baptist faith and claimed that this ritual resembled West African rites associated with the worship of river gods who were among the most powerful West African deities.

Ecclesial

Since the evangelism of African slaves into the Baptist Church, Blacks organized the First Black Baptist churches in American during the late eighteenth century. However, many of the churches were under White supervision even though were autonomous from the White churches. By the nineteenth century, Black churches began to organize their own conventions, which gave the Black churches a new growth and a place where talented Black men could also grow. In 1895, the National Baptist Convention, USA came into existence with it first Black president, Reverend E.C. Morris.⁶³ According to Wheeler, “not long after the establishment of the national organization, Black Baptists began receiving International recognition and unified Baptist churches.”⁶⁴ Since that time, more associations organized under the auspice of the National Baptist Convention in which, the Florida East Coast Association is a partner. The following paragraph outlines the history of the FECBA as delineated on their website.

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⁶² Ibid.,

⁶³ Edward Wheeler, *Beyond One Man: A General Survey of Black Baptist Church History*, *Review and Expositor* August 4, 2016, vol. 70, issue 3. 70:313.

⁶⁴ Ibid, pg. 317.

The Florida East Coast Baptist Association, founded in 1903 and is an Association comprised of Baptist churches throughout the state of Florida. We have churches within our District that range from Cocoa Beach, Florida to Florida City. Our Association has had for it focus Education, Foreign Mission, Home Mission, Evangelism and Benevolence. It our desire to see our member churches maximize their potential as the Association maximizes its potential. We desire to strengthen our churches, clergy, congregants and communities. There is greatness that lies within our Association and its member churches and we wish to tap into this great potential unleashing it by coming together and unifying our efforts to advance the mandate of our Savior. During the 1904 Annual Session held at Mount Bethel Baptist Church in Daytona Beach, the women marveled at the great work the brothers were doing and requested that they organize. Their request granted and the Women's Division formed.⁶⁵

⁶⁵East Coast Baptist Association website: <http://floridaeastcoast.org/history.htm> (Accessed June 22, 2016).

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

This section of Chapter 2 delineates the results of my qualitative research from interview formats describe above as organized and interpreted by me. From women in the Florida East Coast Baptist Association, data gathered to reflect the narrative voice of Black women in a particular region. I consider the response from the questionnaires to elucidate how the FEBCA women partake in the service of the church and if there are any concerns of women silenced in the church. Questionnaires given to individuals at a sampling of FECBA churches and not all completed at their monthly meeting. Questionnaires filled out on location, and given back to me. The questionnaire designed to identify any major concerns, problems, and challenges that may exist with women in the FECBA. Below I interpreted the qualitative data.

Question One:

What is your age group?

There were five age categories: See Appendix A. Out of the 20 people surveyed: Two were between the ages of 26 and 35, twelve 36 to 50, seven between 51 to 65 and 4 were 66 and above.

Question Two:

Are you a member of a local church and the Florida East Coast Association?

All twenty were members of a local church and a member of the FECBA.

Question Three:

How long have you been a member of the East Coast Association and (or) your local Church?

There were five categories for this question. See Appendix A. Out of the twenty participants, three were members 6 to 10 years and 17 were members more than twenty years.

Question Four:

What is your employment status?

Out of the twenty participants, twelve were employed full-time and 6 retired.

Question Five:

Do you pay Tithes? If yes how much?

Out of the twenty participants, nineteen answered yes to paying tithes. One participant had this to say:

But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth that he may establish his covenant which he swore unto thy fathers, as it is this day.” (Deuteronomy 8:18) I included this because I do not “tithes” according to the “formula” of Malachi 3:10. For over 20 years - I have made it a practice to “return to God” ALL that I am blessed with. I prayerfully “give” as God has directed me and not of necessity. My prayer is “God how do you want to establish your covenant with this wealth afforded to me?” Accordingly, my giving has hovered around 20 - 30% of my yearly income. I am a tax attorney, and on occasion, the Lord has directed me to give the entirety of a client’s payment – which was over \$2,000. On another occasion, I was living and working in Washington, D.C. While in the DMV I attended Ebenezer A.M.E. and the Lord directed me to send over \$900 of \$2,000 earned to my church in Miami. He has also directed me to give \$20 from every \$100 earned to a “special needs” adult. On another occasion, during a financial trial”, a client paid me \$3,000 “in the midnight hour”. From that payment, the Lord directed that I give \$600 to two families. So, there is no “formula” for me, and the Lord has been faithful. I have never advertised for clients. My clients include professional athletes with contracts at \$50 million+, music producers, and other “6-figure” professionals. All is the Lord’s and I give Him full recourse over the wealth that He’s entrusted to my hands.

There were categories in the second half of this question. (See Appendix A) Three participants answered less than 10%, sixteen answered 10%, and one answered does not apply.

Question Six:

Are you an active member? If yes, is your ministerial service ministry in your local church? Or in the FECBA.

All participants answered yes to active membership and yes to ministerial service in the local church. Three answered yes to ministerial in the FEBCA and seventeen-answered no to ministerial service in FECBA.

Question Seven:

Have you held a position in leadership in your local church or in the FECBA?

Five participants answered yes to leadership in the local church, three to leadership in the FECBA and fifteen answered no to leadership in local and FECBA.

Question Eight:

Is your Pastor Man or Woman?

All participants answered were man.

Question Nine:

Do you feel there are enough women exercising leadership in the East Coast Association and in your local church?

All participants in the survey answer was no.

Question Ten:

How many women from your local church are in leadership with the FECBA?

There are six categories in the question. (See Appendix A.)
One participant answered 10% and 19 answered none.

Question Eleven:

What percentage of women in your local church is in leadership position?

There are six categories for this question. One person answered 90%, one person answered 50%, four answered 10%, and fourteen answered none.

Question Twelve:

If you had to name a ministerial issue that concerns you most in your local church and the FECBA what would it be?

- The FECBA seems to have lack of vision for the Association.
- I would like the African American church to re-engage in “community”. The world today is at a crucial time in history. Now more than ever, it is important that the African American church reclaim our community on a local, national, and global level.
- I would like to see my pastor become more accountable to the members. He sometimes he acts as if he is Lord over the church and no one can hear from God but him. He and the FECBA are operating on an old system that needs to be changed.

- It has come to a time that the men need to allow women to help the church grow. What I mean by that is, the pastor does not want anybody in the pulpit but men. Some of them are outrageous. It does not matter if he is a criminal the pastor will accept him to preach before he will allow any woman to say a word. Same goes with the FECBA. They only allow women to operate in the Women's ministry and never addresses the full assemble at the conventions.
- The African American Churches need to get back to business. It seems as if we are too concerned with taking care of the pastor instead of serving God. If my pastor would humble himself and start looking to God for answers, then we can save lives for God. The world is beginning to look at the church in a horrible light because too many preachers are getting rich by using the church money.
- The African American Churches have come a long way. But, at my church it seems as if it is a falling away of people. They are not coming to church much like they used to. The Black Church was the bedrock of the Black community. Now the pastors are under so much pressure to please the world and cannot be about the father's business anymore. It seems as he is afraid to teach the bible anymore in fear of hurting someone's feelings. This goes for the FECBA as well.

If I had to name a ministerial concern in my church, it would be the fact that there is too much begging for money all the time. Our church is over 100 years old and it has been paid for over fifty years. What are we doing with the money? I don't see any hospital being built or colleges. Long ago, our ancestors did so much with the little they had. Now we make more money now and we do nothing for people. Every now and then, we may feed the homeless.

- I want to see the FECBA conventions close. It seems as if it has come to a point that it is a preaching contest.
- The ministerial issue that I am concerned in my local is the fact that the women to be ordained. Why is it that they allow them to preach now and not allow them to help with other areas in ministry? This issue needs addressing. Because there are other, Baptist churches who are ordaining their women.
- My concern is that the congregation needs to stop putting so much pressure on the pastor. He can see everybody that is sick or in the hospital and we have few men to help.
- My ministerial concern is that we have so many women in the church and not enough men to do the work. And they have to use the women to do the work that is supposed to be for the men.
- I am so sick and tired of the same old thing repeatedly. I was a time when the Black church use to run the Black community. The church helped people in need and made the

community change. Now we are so busy raising money, we have forgotten to build the community.

- God is still in charge.
- The Church belongs to God and whatever he allows is what he allows. We all need to continue to pray for one another. I can say I want to see one thing and if it's not God's will it will not happen.
- I am concerned about our young people. Many of them are not coming to church. Both the local church and the FECBA need to do more for young people.
- I am tired of women doing all the work and men getting all the credit.
- I am getting so afraid of this new style of worship in the church. We got praise leaders and praise dancers. We are getting too much like the world.
- We need to get back to ministry and stop being so concerned with raising money.
- Too much competition among these churches now days.

Question Thirteen:

If there was one ministerial issue, you could change in the East Coast Association and your local church, what would it be?

- I would curb the influence American Church, Inc. on the pulpit and the overall vision of the congregations. There has been the increased incorporation of flawed American business ideologies into the operations of the church, and they have managed to weaken the power of the church. For example, marketing IS NOT evangelism. The American Business Model is incompatible to God's Kingdom.
- In my church, I would change how they select leaders.
- I would stop purchasing fancy clothes and cars for the pastors.
- I would change the thinking of how women are viewed in the church.
- I would change the idea that women cannot be ordained
- I would change the 10% rule.
- If I could change anything in the church and the FECBA, I would do away with the security guard for the pastors. Everywhere he goes now, there is someone carrying his bags and guarding him as if he is a movie star.
- It has come to my attention that the churches are participating in a rating system. Now a church can be five stars rated. I would do away with this because this is not a hotel.

- I would like to do away with crossing domination and doctrine. What I mean by this is that the Baptist church are operating like a Pentecostal church. We are now referring to our Pastors as Bishops and Apostles. This is a Baptist church not a Pentecostal church.
- I would like to see the building fund. The church is debt free.
- If I had my way to get rid of anything in the local church and FECBA, I would do away with the praise team and praise dancers, who are most times, women.
- When the pastor allows a woman to preach, I would do away with him telling her what to preach.
- I will do away with the pastor love offering.
- If I could change anything in my local church and the FECBA it would be the male dominated hierarchy.
- If I could change anything in the local church and the FECBA it would be to do away with women speaking from the podium on the floor.
- In my church, we only have a few men and all of them are in leadership. Many of them do not have a high school education. Therefore, I would change unlearned men from teaching and being in leadership.
- If I could change one thing in leadership in my church and FECBA it would be the way management is set up. I do not believe that the pastor has to manage the church if he is unskilled
- I would change the fact that the pastor is the only one who benefit for the church.
- I would change the competition spirit among other churches.
- I would change the way women are allowed to serve in my local church and the FECBA. For example, if pastors do license a woman for ministry, he cannot ordain her to serve in other areas. She allowed only operate her gifting in the women's ministry.

Question Fourteen:

Is there any main ministerial issue concerning women in the East Coast Association that concerns you? If so, what is it?

- It is important that women fully utilize our unique power and authority given to us by God. That power does not necessarily look like the power and authority given to men.

Christian women - married or not -- are the high priestesses of the most sacred place of worship and practice- that is, at the altar in the posture of prayer. We are the core of the Christian world, the foundational pillar of worship practices. Traditionally, it has been us who have been entrusted with the fervent and effectual prayer to the Almighty God, the preservation of fundamental beliefs and truths, and the education of the next generation during its most vulnerable and formative years. Both male and female energies are necessary to make a complete church, and both energies are necessary to make a complete world. In fact, both energies are necessary to make anything complete – family, workplace, community, etc. As women, our feminine energy is that of receiving and expanding. It is the energy that makes things happen, that concretizes and transforms potential into reality. It takes time to process; it is often difficult and sometimes requires overcoming obstacles. This energy is often hidden in submission. Unfortunately, Christian women are seemingly more involved in seeking the assignment of men. Sisters have in many cases become myopic and very often limit their pursuits within the church to seeking a seat on the pulpit, and leaving our work undone. Where are the praying Church Mothers?

- There are too few women in leadership in FECBA.
- FECBA mandate says it is to strengthen our churches, clergy, congregants and communities. There is greatness that lies within our Association and its member churches and we wish to tap into this great potential unleashing it by coming together and unifying our efforts to advance the mandate of our Savior. However, whenever we come together cooperatively, the mandate seems to be as if the men are always trying to find what is wrong with our women and suggest ways to fix us. We are the ones who carry the church financially and productively. In their sermons, they are constantly preaching about our attire, or how we should behave, in our local churches as women. Most-times we are more educated and we do all the work anyway. I feel that they have forgotten to strengthen us.
- Our Women who are in leadership may as well not be in leadership. Because all they are doing with this leadership, position is serving man. I believe leadership means you should be able to serve the entire body. Until women are treated equally as men, the Association will remain stagnated.
- What concerns me the most is that there seems to be too much competition between the pastors and churches within the Association. Especially the women. It seems like the want to out dress each other all the time.
- There are always more women at these meetings. In addition, when there is an election, women are never on the ballot.
- Women have always played a vital part in the Church. However, she never given enough

recognition for all the hard work put into keeping the church and the association afloat.

- I truly do not believe that women should be in certain leadership positions in the Association because this brings about confusion. God said man is supposed to be head of a woman. If she is head of the church, then who is head of her.
- I am concerned about losing men in the Association. There are few men in attendance at these conferences. At least, less than that of women. If they refuse to allow women to play a more active role, we will soon lose the association and eventually the churches will close.
- My concern is for women who are in leadership, which are those that are over the women's ministry, they seem to be afraid to speak up for themselves and other woman.
- The FECBA has never allowed women an active role in the Association alongside the men because it has never been done this way. My concern is if we continue to operate in this manner, women will no longer want to serve in this association and just find another place that will be respective to her call.
- Some women in our Association are seeking to become pastors. This is not going to happen because you have to be ordained to become a pastor in this organization. My concern is, if these women are lead to pastor then why do they continue to be a part of this organization that will never ordain them for this office in the church.
- Women are licensed in the FECBA, but they are not offered ordination. My concern is why the Moderator do not teach more on the bi-laws of this organization.
- The FECBA is male dominated and women do all of the work. My concern for women is that she should ask herself if God is truly call her to be more active in leadership, then why isn't it that she is obeying God.
- As far as the FECBA is concerned, I can care less about how the men feel about me as a minister. My concern is about ministry outside of the church and the association. I get irritated about all the bureaucracy in this association. I look at the church differently. The pastor is so concerned about the upkeep of the building instead of the souls of his people. I feel that the Association has gotten away from saving souls. They have been caught up into stuff.

For the next part of the research, I met with five elderly women individually, and video recorded their answers. This video is located in the library at Barry University. I asked a series of eight questions of each participant. I video recorded, and transcribed the question and answers for the written information for the thesis project. As I move forward, I present these responses from the interviews.

Question 1:

When did you come to a religious knowledge?

- It seems like all my life I have always want to know God. As a child, I wanted to be spiritual. I remember when I was in the eighth grade I had written a prayer. I kept a notebook and I would read it in my quite time. One day a boy thought it was a love letter. He looked over my shoulder to peek and was shocked to see that it was a prayer. I always loved church. I would go to anybody's church, sing in the youth choir and I did not have to be a member. I remember Sam Moore, he was part of the group Sam and Dave, when we were children a woman in the neighborhood would gather all the children up and bring them to church to sing. Therefore, I am proud to say, I sang with him in the chorale with Mrs. Lela Williams.

Therefore, I can say the music and the preaching brought me. I love good preaching. You may have to hold me in the pew when they open the doors of the church. I may not be a member there, but I was quick, ready to join because the preaching was so good. I was six years old when I came to Miami with my mother and we joined the Ebenezer AME church Overtown. My mother sang in the choir and Reverend Bartley was the pastor. I remember when they were building the church and they were raising money. I was nine years old when they laid the corner stone. There was a white bus driver, (we did not have Black bus drivers at the time) he would sell peanuts on his bus to help Rev. Bartley build the church. However, when Rev. Bartley died for some reason the preaching was not as spiritual as it was. Even though he was not a fire and brimstone preacher, by his voice and the way he talked just sort of drew you in. As a child, I loved that.

So, when he died, I had a child at Liberty City Elementary, she was not even my classmate. I met here at recess. We had recess back in those times. We became friends and she asked me do I go to Sunday school. Then she asked if I would go with her some times. Children do not do that, not children. Nobody invites you to church, grow ups can, but not children. Therefore, I asked my mom and so was so happy, because I did not have to take the bus to Overtown. We lived in Liberty City and Ebenezer, our church, was in Overtown. Therefore, I started going to New Hope Baptist Church. I remember the second time I went there, Reverend Brown was preaching so hard and the junior choir was singing so beautiful. I had to come up to the church. I just got up and joined. When I got home, I told my mother I had just joined New Hope Baptist Church. She said what! Nevertheless, she did not stop me. My brother and I started going, she would give us our little offering, and we went. Mom worked on Sundays at the hospital in the dietary department at Mt. Sinai at the time. Every Sunday she would leave our money on the table and tell us to be to church on time and we did.

I always had a love for God and church. I did not know at the time it was necessary to ask the Lord to save me. I did not know at the time and because I had not heard of that. However, when I did hear, I did ask him to save me and create in me a clean heart, and he did. By that time, I was twenty-three. I was always in church. I loved church and a good

sermon would move me to tears any day or a good song. That is how I come to know about religion, God and the Church. Thank God, for my mother who always took us to church when she wasn't working. In addition, that was a blessing.

- As far as I can remember, I have gone to Sunday school. In our churches, we had the mourner's bench. This is where sinners sat and after a certain age, you expected to join the church and baptized. At an early, Sunday school is where we were schooled in religion and learned the alphabets and what A and B stood for. We progress from there to become church members and become active participants in the church rituals and traditions. I continued that still today. I believe in a living God. I do not believe I die and then go to see him. I believe that God is a living experience and that is what I enjoy being a part of, praising God, serving God, and being a participant in serving humankind, I think God is living being. He is a creative being, and he intends for us to live a good life. I know that he created heaven and earth. My emphasis is that God is the light of the world, light of my salvation. I believe in the word. I believe that the word has power and when we speak the word it has power to heal. It has the power to help others, the power to do something to call to action. He has the power to give us a good lifestyle. That is we are here in this earth, to help others. God is a living God that will help us to have a living experience.
- I grew up on Church in north Florida with my mother and father. We were indoctrinated in the church. I can say I was in the church before I was born. It was not by accident, we were required to go to BTT (Baptist Training Union) and to Sunday school. That is how I became a Christian. The church where I grew up in north Florida, we sat on the mourner's bench. During the month of August, we had revival and got religion. Then on the fourth Sunday, you were baptized in the creek. There is where I got my undergirding from. This history of my parents, grandparents, great grandparents and all of my family. Actually, my father was the founder of Freewill Baptist church in White Springs. My grandmother was the first mother of the church and my great grandmother, who was a slave, were all members of this church as well. We have what I call, church running through our DNA.

Question Two:

Did you have dreams of being in leadership in the church? If so, what was that like? If not why?

- No, I never wanted to be in leadership. I just wanted to be a layperson. I just wanted to get close to God. In fact, I did not know you could be a leader in the church if you were not a minister, a deacon, or somebody who led the choir. I never thought about doing those things and never thought about being a minister or a deaconess. I just wanted to be a good Christian person. When I was growing up, I did not see women in leadership. I did not have any mentors in that way. Nevertheless, I was happy being a good Christian and living for the Lord. When I was saved, I was twenty-three and I was happy just to be in the Church and live for God and be a light. I felt like if I could be a light in the community and people could see the way I walk and live for the Lord, I would be a

leader. I did not know that at the time. But, I believe I have led people to the Lord because of my walk with God.

I am sure I could have been a minister, if I had the calling. But, I never had the calling. I never had the calling to but to be a good Christian woman who would be an example to younger women and children; even older people. We do have women ministers in our church, but I never felt the call. I never felt God called me to be a preacher. Nevertheless, you know, ironically, I write a column in the Miami Herald twice a week, very often I write something inspirational, and that touch so many people. I get emails from people telling me how they were touched by my love for the Lord, my life and how I am living for him. Therefore, in a sense I feel that I have become a minister in a way, without being ordained. I feel like what I do in a secular paper is my ministry. I minister to the world, to whomever reads it. So, in a sense, I am a leader. I never tried to be a leader.

- Having been reared up in the Church, I started out attending Sunday school and was given an assignment. My first assignment was as secretary for Sunday school. Of course, that consisted of taking the role and the minutes. I understood at a very early age that I could easily get side tracked. I had a very bad habit of crossing my legs and shaking them. That was a no for your parents and church people. Frankly, I have always had leadership abilities. I am not a pushy person, but if I had the need to act and feel strongly, that I can and would act and has been very good in my growing up. In my living and in the life of the church, I have served our church in Missouri where I first started out as superintendent and when I moved to Miami to the Big Macedonia Baptist Church, it has been quite an experience. Therefore, I was a teacher in Miami. Having been a teacher by profession, I enjoyed working with the young people. Our church has experienced some troubles with ministry and we have lost pastors the same way I ended up being Sunday school superintendent. Later on, I was chosen to be on the board of director after we resolved the trustee board. I was also president of the Missionary Society. Since joining Macedonia in September 1951, those are some of the leadership roles I had,
- It is not in our Baptist guidelines to have women as pastor. We do not have women in the pulpit here at Macedonia. There are mixed emotions about that. The FECBA and the National Convention, not all of them go along with women as Pastors. I have had some thought about women as pastor because I have seen women that were very successful in preaching and they had leadership qualities. I believe if they are called, they certainly can pastor a church group. However, I have mixed emotions about it.
- I have been in leadership, even when I was growing up. I taught catechism in my church and I was the secretary of the Sunday school until I was 18 and went off to college. When I came to Miami in 1961, I joined Macedonia. I would come to church maybe twice a month. I had four children, and my sister used to bring them the Sundays. She told me that she was not going to bring them anymore because they were naughty. That is when I started coming to Sunday school every Sunday and eventually became Sunday school superintendent, that was in 1976 and I've been here ever since. I had been superintendent for about fifteen years. I thought I was called to preach. I do know that I am called to

teach and preaching, I think, is teaching. Having the capacity to teach and get the point over to people, that is what is missing in our African American Churches. The teaching aspect is gone out the window. If you think you are called to preach, you need to go to training. I do not believe God calls a person to preach, he calls them to preparation to preach. That is what we have to do, study by going to school and decipher what he or she is saying in the bible. However, I do not think at this time the church is open to having the pastor or any woman as pastor. My sister use to say, "If you know where your enemies are, then you would know how to treat them". You can't carry people to that level. This one of the churches that will not. Maybe in the sixties when I joined here in the 70's or 80's. However, not with the church we have now. I am and my church are a part of the Florida East Coast Association. I know of this association and the Seaboard Association where some of the churches have women in the pulpit. They are not pastors. They are Associate Pastors, Youth Pastors and Pastors of youth department. Each Baptist church has its own rules and regulations. St. Paul in Homestead is one who has women in the pulpit. They can carry on the church when the pastor is not there. Sweet Home and Second Baptist Churches also who have women in the pulpit. The reason I think men do not want women is leadership roles, such as minister or pastor because this is a paradise for Black men. This is their highest level of achievement for Black men in some instances. In addition, Black women are a threat to them as well. As you know, Black women are more educated than most pastors in the Florida East Coast Association.

Question Three:

Was there any time that you were denied your voice being heard in church, in your home, or in the work place? What was that about?

- For many years, I know in the Baptist church and in the Methodist Church, women are not allowed to preach. However, in the Holiness churches, women have always had that freedom to preach and become ministers. I do not know any women in the Holiness Denomination who are Bishops or Elders. I imagine there are some women who are consecrated Elders but I do not know of any women Bishops in the Holiness and Pentecostal faith. I do know of one woman, and that is Catherine Baskins, she and her husband are Bishops. Nevertheless, they are non-Denominational. They were consecrated together as co-Bishops of that church. I think that is a good thing. When you look at the word of God, it was a woman who gave the first message about Jesus rising from the dead. It was a woman. She put the message out there. She spread the good news that he was not there. That to me was a woman preacher back in the days of the bible. I know some denominations especially the African Methodist Episcopal churches for years have had women in leadership and as ministers. Now the Baptist churches are coming around. Ironically, Pentecostal denomination have had women minister and pastor for years but some of them will not let women in the pulpit. I was a speaker at a Pentecostal church once and I had to seat on the lower level because they would not let me sit on the pulpit with the men. I understand that. Moreover, it is going to take some time for some people to come around. God uses whomever he want to use. I always say, God, you used a rooster once, you used a dumb ass once, you can use me. That is the way I see it. Nobody should ever be silenced anywhere. Especially, when they are doing things to the glory of

God.

There was a time when I was silenced in my home. Back in the days growing up it was said that children should be seen and not heard. We took that literally. Mama said something to me, I would murmur under my breath before I would let her hear me. I would never talk back. Today, children not only talk back, they cuss their parents. That did not happen when I grew up. I am thankful for that. I am thankful for that type of home I grew up in. My mom trained me when I went out in the work place; she said hold your head up. Look people right in the eye. You are somebody. She encouraged me to do that, but it at home it was a different story.

There were also people in the work place who tried to silence me I had started in my profession. There were not many Blacks in this profession and hardly any in the south. What I would do, when I saw an injustice, I would write a memo and signed it, and passed it to my superior. They had so many memos from me that I thought when they called me into the office one time that I was going to be fired. Nevertheless, they called me in to give me a raise. I was complaining about things for instance: When I started working for the Miami Herald, Black women were called by their first name in the paper and white women were called Mrs. so and so. I would write a memo about things like that. I forgot what I wrote the memo about the day they called me in. I was cleaning my desk off, because I thought they were going to end me home. The Senior Editor said, "I want you to know we have decided to give you a raise. I said to myself, "Oh Lord thank you thank you." I went back to my desk and I was tickled. Because I thought, I was going to be fired. Because nobody wants to hear that. However, thank God for just white men who were leaders in the city room. Some white men believed in equality.

I worked for a man name Rodger Steven and he listened when other editors were sending me all over town for a non-story. I was tired of being played like that. Therefore, I went to him and said I needed this job. I got two children and I want this job. However, I cannot write if they keep sending me on a story that does not exist. In addition, you have never done a good job or a job of any kind covering the Black community. Why don't you let me do that? That is how we got to cover positive stories in the Miami Herald about Black people.

- Our church is evolving on how women are being are being treated in the Church. According to our by-laws and constitution in the Baptist Church, Pastors, Deacons and trustees govern the church. According to our doctrine, the members have the voting voice of the organization. However, it only work in theory. It does not work when you want to get rid of the pastor or someone in leadership. The members may want to vote the pastor out for some infraction, usually in the Black Baptist church that cause many problems. Many ministers feel that they are called and assigned to the church. Women in our church have a voice, but how affective is it, is the question. The Pastor and Deacons are male and usually they have the governing voice. Here at Macedonia we had to go further that that because we had trouble getting the pastor out of the church. Now, we had to

incorporate and a board of directors appointed by the members. Now women are on the board. Presently we have a woman chairperson of the board. We also have most of the board members who are women. Eleven members are on the board in which eight are women. We did not decide to have eight women on the board. We just did have any men who wanted to run. The men did not want to participate. That is what the problem was. The board would be okay a woman pastor, but it will be the pastor that would have a problem with it.

In my home, the man is the head of the household. Nevertheless, it is not as if I could not say anything. However, if it comes down to it my husband would make the final decision. In the work place, it was the same. But, I was the boss. I was the principal of a school. I was in leadership role and I had the last say so. Nevertheless, still it was someone over it and me, probably was a man. This is a male society. You can say what you want to say. Nevertheless, this is still a man's world.

- Woman are not silent to a certain degree. Because look at this church, it would not function if not for the women. I am now the Sunday School Superintendent and the Chairman of the board. I should not be that. It should be a man as far as I am concerned. Maybe it should be a man, but do we have a man that can do it? I doubt it. We have had mostly women for the last thirty years. The majority of women on the board of directors.

I have never been silenced in my home. I did not come from that. I have four sons. I am divorced. I did not come from that. I am not submissive at all. I think that part of the scripture is misconstrued.

Question Four:

Do you feel if there are any forms of prejudices in the church regarding Black women? What are they?

- Some pastors are prejudiced towards women and do not allow women to pastor. Nevertheless, in recent years, with the Full Gospel Baptist Fellowship, many changes made and they are allowing for co-Pastors of the church. An example is John and Joanne Money. The Full Gospel Baptist Fellowship has opened up to women and allowed them to pastor churches. That came into fruition about twenty-five years ago.

Gloria Henry was co-Pastor with her husband, Isaiah Henry, before he died. Now she is the pastor of that the church. Many things have changed over the years allowing more women in leadership roles in the church. In some denominations, such as the Catholic Church, they will not allow their nuns to become priest. Nevertheless, there are groups of nuns in St. Petersburg who are fighting to become priest. Once women in the Catholic Church and Episcopal Churches become priest, I feel many doors will begin to open for women in all churches.

- There is a prejudice in the Church organization among women. I think, it is the policy of the FECBA, and the General Baptist Conference, traditionally to accept men as pastors and deacons.
- Yes, there are more prejudices in church toward women than called for. Women for the most part are a threat to the pulpit and to the deacons. I can discern very easily. I can discern jealousy and a contrite spirit. From the men and some women too. I do not apologize for that. My father use to say is better to have a pencil behind you ear, than to have a hoe in your hand. What I have between my two ears is what count.

Question Five:

How do you feel about women's relationships with each other?

- I think we could be closer, have more compassion and companionship. I remember not long ago, about twenty years, I tried to befriend a woman. I had a group and this woman husband had died, but she did not see the friendship that we were trying to offer as genuine. There was a lot of jealousy and she said many awful things about other women. She did not want to be with a bunch of women for people to think certain thing about her. I think that is sad, very sad. A young girl invited me to church with her when I was in the sixth grade and we are still friends. I treasure my friends, women and men. I do not care what people say about me. If we are friends, we are friends. I do not care what they say. "Two women should not be that close." I do not care what people say because I know what is in my heart. They do not know what is in my heart. I know that I am a friend. I am a faithful and a loyal friend. There is nothing sexual about it. It is just pure womanly love. I think once a woman get beyond the fact of what people think about them. I think we will be closer together. If I am your friend, I will go through things to the end. I had a friend, who is deceased now; her husband said something derogatory about our friendship. Therefore, whenever I hear people talking about Oprah and Gayle saying, "I know they are sweethearts." I say that is not true, Oprah and Gayle are best of friends. I have friends like that. Therefore, I do not believe that. I do not want to let the lie get into my heart. Why can't women have friends without an ulterior motive? Women have to be strong. When people say something bad about the relationship, I would not shy away from my friend because of that.
- Black women are very "catty", not as supportive of each other in leadership. Yet, I would say there is some ambivalence there. Because, if it were not for Black women, there would be no Black church. We, hear at Macedonia, Black women are supportive of each other by coming to church and participating in the progression of the church. What the church mission is to educate, to evangelize and to edify one another. That should be everyone's goal, men and women. We all should work together, toward evangelism, education and edification would take place. If we follow the mission, everything would be working because we all would be participants in our religious responsibilities. In addition, to edify we would be caring for one another by caring for the special needs of our members. In addition, to have the members to feel that they are part of the church,

cared for and loved.

- It hard to have relationship with some women. If you have the same education level with some women, it is okay. However, if not it could be a problem because the level of comprehension.

Question Six:

In your opinion, are all women mad? Are you mad? If so, why. If not, why not?

- Some women look mad. It is because of what they go through and somethings they put themselves through. Many young Black women put up with men who just give them babies and just walk away. Then they are left to take care of the babies all by themselves. They have a reason to look angry or to be angry. However, many of them brought it on themselves. I say to them, “You don’t have to be mad, just stand your ground and say to the man, “I am not going to let you do this to me. I am not going to let you do this to my children.” They have to do that and do not have to be mad to do it. When you see Black women on TV or on the news, sometimes many Black women do not smile. When you see them. Most times, it is a sad story, someone has been shot in the family, a child has been killed. So they may be sad not mad. I do not think Black women are mad. I am not. I could be, but I am not. I am 78 years old and I have been through so much, I could be the angriest woman in this country if I allowed myself to be. First, I have the love of God in me. Secondly, God gives me perfect peace and thirdly, He give me joy. You cannot be angry if you are going to have joy. It is like oil and water, they do not mix.
- I really don’t understand the that term, “MAD” and I don’t want to put everybody in that same bag as, “we all Look alike”. However, there is, in my opinion a great need to have their appearance of a spirit that portrays kindness and love expressions on their face, demeanor, and conversation whether that is using language to put someone and calling them “MAD”. First, I think we should be very clear in our language in our conversation and expression that we use when we converse with one another as Black women and a group of people. I am concern about our language, the cussing, and the disrespect for our womanhood.
- I do not want to say I am mad. However, I will say that I am angry. Because my parents in the state of Florida owned land and we paid as much taxes in the state and I was not given the same opportunity that others were given and I feel that the state owes me money for that. The fact that I had to walk when white folk were riding the bus. I had to walk five miles to school. They closed my school down where I was attending. I was in the second grade, when I passed the beautiful white school to get there, we were having school in an old, musky, army barrack that the Germans used and stayed in World War. Yes, I am angry about that. I am angry at the fact that Black people do not have the same privileges as whites. It is not fair and it is not Godly. In addition, for the life of me, I do not know how congress can sit there and do what they do and sit up in church on Sunday morning. They owe me for my grandparents and my great grandparents. I can trace my roots all the way back to Africa. Yes, I am angry. That is not the thing I am angry with, I

am angry about how we Blacks do not get up off our knee. We do a lot of praying. When will we get up off our knees and do something about the situation? In the midst of the crime and all the killings, where is the Black church? I went to college in Maryland. But we got up and went downtown and did something. We did not just sit there and do nothing.

Question Seven:

What would you like to see for women in the church for the future?

- I would like to see our women in leadership in the Black church. Just as we need a woman President that would be good for this country. Women have a certain way of feeling and a certain amount of compassion that you hardly see in a man, except for President Barack Obama. God bless that man. He cries with you. Sings Amazing Grace with you. I do not know any other President who has done that and shown compassion for the people like our President has done. I would like to see women in the Black church have more leadership roles; if older women could mentor the younger women in the church. When I was younger, I was taught, not so much verbally, but by the way, women dressed and looked. You do not come to church with all of your bosoms hanging out and your back out. I think that the Church is a Holy place and you should dress appropriately. You do not have to dress up in big fine hats, but look presentable. I think women should lead in this area. When I go to church nowadays and see how these young girls come to church, nobody says anything to them. They do that because they do not know. Therefore, if someone in a leadership role can pull those girls aside and say, "Listen sweetie, I know the bible says come as you are, but if you can do better, you don't come in God's house looking naked and half dressed." I think if you go to them in the spirit of meekness, the young would realize when you walk into the house of God, it is hallowed ground. It is a Holy place and you should look like you respect God's house. I am not saying that emphasis should be placed on the way you look, it should be placed on the way you live your life too, most of all. It used to be in the Black community, the church was just about the only place you could go and get dressed up. We worked hard all week, and on Sunday, we put on our Sunday clothes and our Sunday shoes, then we went to church. It was beautiful. I would like to see those days come back again. We looked to the house of God as a special place. Then the young girls can see it. Even in our schools, our teachers were once our mentors. They all dressed nice. We looked and dressed like them and our mothers. When God's house turns back to a Holy place, then, we will see all the difference in leadership and the matter of women in the church will be in God's hands.
- I certainly would like to see the women continue to worship God, to work with one another, and build the Kingdom of God right here on earth. I would like to see people that enter the house of worship feeling good about themselves, looking at this as a lively and living God that we are serving. In addition, for the future of the church, we need to focus on our younger people, and make sure they are trained and educated with biblical knowledge. We need to start at home, bringing in families, and making sure the church members are reaching out more to the community. I think that would be a great

demonstration. Women of the future would feel total involved in the programs that are part of the church. They would get involved with evangelizing, education and fellowshiping with others. I see the church itself, which is on this corner; it seems to be dying from its lack of membership, being here that it can grow by reaching out to other ethnic groups who are not necessarily Black. It is going to take both men and women in the community to keep this church alive. We are having so many problems I our neighborhood. I would like to see that ministers taking our children and bless them, give them a fresh start, a new feelings about themselves, knowing whom they are and whose they are. I also want to see our church reach out to young men who must come back to the church and assimilate back into the church. Young boys that would be something and the girls will come.

- I want to see that we get organized and go back to our tradition that we had many years ago. Out of slavery, my grandparents and great grandparents built churches. They worship God and had traditions. The church today is going to hell in a basket. We follow anything we here on the radio. Instead of following when got us here in the first place. Prayer and hard work got us out of slavery. I would like to see the Black church as completely celebrated. Not just the women, but also the entire body. Just as the Jews do in their community. They have Passover and Seder meals every year.
- I like to see the Black church celebrate emancipation and pass it on from generation to generation. I like to see our churches really celebrate Watch Night not a fundraiser by a bunch of preachers who know nothing about what happened on Watch Night. That is what I like to see. Them become more educated in our history and be able to tell it to our young people. I am convinced if we told our stories to our young people and it plant in their hearts, they would be proud of themselves. That is what is missing, especially the generation under me, under me. The Church needs to go back to the old landmark. It was concerned about education. I will never forget, when I came home from college my first year, in order for you to prove to the people in the church that you were learning something, you had to read the first chapter of Matthews and that's the book with all the bigots. If you could not pronounce those names, they felt as if you were not learning anything in college. Therefore, we need to go back to our standards, our traditions and our beliefs as Black people.

Question Eight:

How can you respond to the women silenced in the church, work place and the home?

- Here we are in 2016 and the argument about women and her place in the Black church is still going on. I remember once in my early years of reporting, it was tough. I worked late hours. There was a minister in the church who not only tried to silence me at church; he tried to deal with me concerning my work place and my home. The minister thought it was awful for me that I came home late. Never once did he offer to help with my situation he just simply told said, "You should do better by your children and come home

early to be home with them at night.” I asked the pastor if I could say something. He gave me permission to address the congregation. I said, “I am a single parent with two, and that is by choice. My husband died when I was seventy-seven, and I had to provide for my family like any other man in this church. I have a mortgage; I have lights, water, phone and other bills. I have the same responsibilities as any man in this church. I do not hear anybody telling men that they should not come home late when they are making a living for their children and their families. So don’t tell me I should not have this job because I have to come home late.” Of course, the women stated to rock their heads clap and say amen. They were backing me up. My Pastor backed me up. If it means that I am a feminist if I want the same pay for equal, then I am a feminist. Women do the same work, on the same job, for the same company, why should not we get the same pay. I do not believe in putting people down. Jesus was a lifter and that is what I want to be.

- Certainly, I remember 1965 and prior to that. What was standing out prior to that was title 9. Title 9 denied discrimination of women of any kind in the school system. They could not discriminate in sports, which changed the whole dynamics of sports because girls could not compete on the basketball teams, were beginning to get those. Then the girls classes could mix. You could not deny girls to get an education up to that point. When young women who were up to 24 years old had a baby, she could not be discriminated against. That is the problem I had with the church. When a girl got pregnant out of wedlock, she had to come back to the church and apologize for having the baby out of wedlock and no one brought the male back. I spoke out against it vehemently. Because, I thought it was not right. When title 9 came in, it opened door for women in many aspects. I see the church have to take advantage of it as well because you could not discriminate against women as we had in the past. That is part of the civil rights movement. I knew the ERA is all a part of that as equal right for women. Prior to that, we were not given our rights, as we should have. Therefore, women were concerned about how they look, what they could do, how they were paid and what jobs they could hold. They had become more competitive and proud of themselves. That was the advantage of civil rights movement, title 9 and ERA.

I am living God in God’s World. Since it is His world and he created man and all kinds of creeds and any color. Not only with that creation, have I felt good about myself. Being a part of his creation. Therefore, I have not had any problem of being Black. I think I went through that evolution to before we had the civil rights movement when we had so many disadvantages that was connect with being Black at this point. Looking back at my growing up, where I am now. I feel as if I am blessed and I contribute it to God for me being a Black woman. God has created us and he made us for a special purpose. Whatever that purpose is, we need to try to fulfil it. That is to bring his kingdom right here on earth. That can be done if you are Black or white. I do not want to fight this battle over color anymore. I believe to be proud of who you are. Make the most of the gift that God has given you and share it with others.

- As Black women, we need our rights and I believe Black women need to describe what beauty is. I give you an example. Many Black people are putting so much emphasis what Michelle Obama wears. She is truly a Black woman doing her “thang”! I am just marveled at what she does and what she wears. Be yourself. Love your own beauty. Black women are beautiful. As the poet say, “we are phenomenal people”. I was born in the 1930. I never had a new book. I knew all the white kids in school because we got their hand me downs. I know all about segregation. I went to college on the train, in front of the train and in the back of the train. That meant you sat in front of the train where all the smoke was and you sit on the back of the bus where all the fumes were. When I came home for Christmas, we came home on the bus. We could ride the bus from Baltimore to DC, and you could sit anywhere you wanted to. Guess what? As soon as we got to DC, the bus driver said. “All you N... get to the back of the bus. He said it verbally and it was horrific. If we had to travel on Friday, we stopped drinking water on Wednesday. We did this so we would not have to go to the bathroom between Maryland and Miami. Because when you got to North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, there were no bathrooms for Negroes at night. Therefore, that is why you did not drink water. That maybe the reason for most people my age who went to college have kidney problems today. Again, they owe me.

You know, with all that were done to us to make us feel as if we were second-class citizens; you can make it in spite of that. Do not let nobody and no one determine your destiny. No man, no woman, you do it. You can do it yourself.

Data Analysis

After a thorough analysis of the data collected from the surveys, it is unanimous that all women interviewed were members of the FECBA and have been for more than five years. These women employed or retired. 19 out of the 20 were tithe payers giving at least 10% of their earnings. Many of the women are active in their local churches, but not as active in the FECBA. Most of these women have never served in leadership for FECBA and they believe that there should be more representation of women leaders in the association. There are several ministerial concerns among the group. However, the main concern is the integrity of the pastors and their concern for the community. It is acknowledged that the churches need finances to stay afloat, however money should not be the focal point of the ministry especially when the edifice is free and clear of a mortgage and their seem to be not too much ministry outside of the church going

on. As far as the FECBA, many of these churches are as well paid for and why is there so much money being raised at these conventions. A point raised, there are not any hospitals or universities built as in the olden days. So, what the money used for? It suggested by one of the interviewees, if there was no special use for the money collected, then this organization should cease to exist. It is evident that overall many women are dissatisfied with the structure of the FECBA and leadership. It is a concern that women in this organization support their local churches and the FECBA yet they only give access to women ministry while men can have access to both men and women ministries. Over all women are not silent to minister to other women they are silent ministry where there are men present.

In the interview process of the five elderly women, their idea of the church and leadership differ somewhat from many of the women who took the surveys. These women are not so concerned with the financial aspect of the church or the FECBA. They are mainly concerned with the growth and development of the church for the future. They also realize that it have been the women who have upheld the church regardless to being oppressed and depressed by men in the church, and they will continue to do so in the face of the demise of men presence in the church. These women look to the bible and their spirituality to strengthen their local churches and the FECBA alike. For them, women have always had a presence in the local churches and men are slowly drifting away from the church. They believe that it is viable that men come back to the local church in order for it to function as Christ intended for it to be. However, at the same time, they are aware that it is a possibility that women will one day have to take full charge of leadership because there will be no men who are interested in leadership. The fear and drawback the faces the church is the fear that women cannot get along together in order to carry out this

mandate. Black women have been derogated, dehumanized, and disrespected, for so long, that many have been immune to this type of oppression. As Maya Angelo puts it, “Still I rise.”

Overall, the church and the FECBA need to restructure by becoming more inclusive of women in leadership and becoming more transparent when it comes to the finances of the church. The Black church has always had to survive off little or nothing and still they built hospitals, schools and communities. If the Black church ever tend to regain its community it must get back to the mandate left to the church by Christ, it must take a panoramic view of where we have lead the church, repeat, and get ready to behold Christ face to face.

Conclusion

Chapter 2 continued a sociological analysis by listening to the stories of Black women, while examining the lived experiences of these women and by delving into the questionnaires results. Through this analysis, I have identified some of the needs of the Black church and the inclusivity of her Black women. In the next chapter, I engage in theological reflection by fleshing out the experience in conversations with the theological tradition of the community of Black women to bring understanding to where the living God is found in these stories and Christian tradition and how to begin wholeness to Black women in the Black Church.

CHAPTER 3: RESPONDING TO THE HERMNEUTICS OF THE WOMANIST MOVEMENT

INTRODUCTION

As stated earlier in the introduction of this thesis-project, the ministerial concerns it addresses are as follows: Black women in the Black Church are denied the opportunity and full access to leadership, and that they are silenced in the church in some areas of ministry. The stigma is that some black women are angry and are unable to work together without conflict with one another. For many years, the Black Church has tried to limit the work of its women to Women's Ministry.⁶⁶ However, the lack of, or limited presence of the men cooperating in Church leadership have relied on women for assistance to carry out the work that the community calls for. How will the Womanist succeed in the Black Church if women are limited to "Women's Ministry" only, and are silenced in other areas of ministry? In quest for a rehabilitated praxis that will address the ministerial concern that is set before us, I will now assert the theological hermeneutics of the Womanist movement for the Black Church.

In this chapter, with special emphasis on the women who are members of the Missionary Baptist Church, I will address the hermeneutical arbitrations of the Womanist movement and confront the task of debunking the social myths that denigrate black women. Additionally, I will examine the hermeneutical arbitrations to find the living God and the Christian tradition in the experiences of these black women. The chapter is organized in four parts. Part one challenges the physical appearance of black woman and how her complexion is viewed in the eyesight of others and how she is treated by her male counterparts, white men and women, and some black women

⁶⁶ Women Ministry in the Florida East Coast Baptist Church Association is a division of the Church that aims to impact the lives of women, inspire women to grow stronger in their faith and influence other women to attend and participate in the church activities. It strives to meet the needs of the whole woman. The mission is to educate women in the church through workshops and Seminars, outreach programs and retreats, while building sisterly relationships throughout the Association.

too. Part two confronts the attitude of black women and the stereotype that all black women are hard to get along with because they seem to be “mad.” Part three focuses on black women and their social classes: educated verses uneducated, financially stable verses poor, and married verses unmarried. Finally, part four engages in gender prejudices amongst black women specifically in the Missionary Baptist Church and delve into the biblical ecclesial documents of Baptist teaching and the inclusion/exclusion of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender in the black church.

Challenging the Prejudices Among Black Women and Their Many Shades of Skin

The struggle amongst black women in regard to skin color has been a social divider for black women in the Black Church for ages. This dilemma stems back to the slavery days when black women were judged by their hue. Many lighter skinned women were given easier tasks by working in the master’s homes as domestic workers and caregivers to children and the elderly, while darker skinned women worked outside the home or in the fields. Blacks began to judge each other as well, deeming lighter skinned Africans were favored among the slave owners. This issue has filtered into the church and religious life for Black Americans, especially her Black women. During one of the interviews that I conducted, one of the interviewees alluded to the fact, “it is high time that we, as black women, began to look at each other’s heart and not our skin color, grade or color of our hair, and eyes.” My thoughts are, how can we get past the outer appearance of a living person and look at the heart of that living person? I quickly realized that she was speaking spiritually not physically. However, the thought brought to my consciousness an essay that I had read by Mary Helen Washington, titled *The Imitation of Color*.⁶⁷ This essay

⁶⁷ Mary Helen Washington, *Black-Eyed Susan* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975), xiv. Books that exemplify this point are Maya Angelou, *J Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (New York: Random House,

highlights the pain and injustices that African American women have experienced in the area of color and complexion. According to Washington, “The distorted standards for African American women’s beauty occurs with such frequency in the writings of black women that indicates how deeply some black women have been affected by the discrimination against the shades of our skin and the texture of our hair.”⁶⁸ In my opinion, these are atrocities that women from other groups have not experienced or are unaware of the challenges black women face among themselves.

For so long, the imagery of beauty has been marketed to women on television, in newspapers and magazines, and other media as skinny, white skinned, and light long hair women. Some women, of all nationalities, young and old, try to strive to become these images. Black women have bleached their skin, used all sorts of processes to straighten and color their hair. Bleaching creams and hair straightening products became a massive industry not only in the United States, but all over the world for women of color. In 1900, Madame CJ Walker became the first African American woman millionaire in the United States from selling hair products and skin bleaching creams for black women. Since that era, the ingredients found in products used for bleaching skin and straighten the hair have been linked to the cause of fibroid tumors. “Scientists followed more than 23,000 pre-menopausal African American women between 1997 and 2009 and found that two to three times higher rate of fibroids tumors among black women

1970); Gwendolyn Brooks, *Report from Part One* (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1972); Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970).

⁶⁸ Mary Helen Washington, *Black-Eyed Susan* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975), xiv. Books that exemplify this point are Maya Angelou, *J Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (New York: Random House, 1970); Gwendolyn Brooks, *Report from Part One* (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1972); Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970).

may be linked to chemical exposure though scalp lesions and burns relating to relaxers.”⁶⁹ In recent years, black women are realizing these issues and are attempting to rectify the problem by embracing their natural hair and skin color. It would be remorse to mention Madame C J Walker in this work and not mention that Walker herself had been silenced in society and in the world. She owned as successful business and lived a successful life under a name that was not even her own. Walker’s real name was Sarah Breedlove. Charles J. Walker was her second husband’s name. It is noted that Sarah used this name because her husband said it was a more recognizable name.⁷⁰ Walker’s plight to change the image of black women is among many concerns that plague black women today. Acts as this one, caused many black women to be denied her womanhood and she became nonexistence as Sarah Breedlove was. During the celebration of black history month, the story of Madame CJ Walker is oftentimes praised and lifted up as a great accomplishment among Black American women. However, there has never been a time that this first African American millionaire woman has been given credit as being a black woman named Sarah Breedlove. Katie Cannon describes this condition as an ethical discourse of colorism. Margaret Hunter describes colorism to be “a form of discrimination based on skin tone that generally privileges lighter skinned blacks and penalizes darker blacks”⁷¹. Cannon notes that “this interiorized color consciousness enables us to see the various shades of our complexion, hair texture, and physical features as others see us. Colorism penetrates the soul of the African

⁶⁹Charlotte Evans, “Relaxers and Fibroids,”BlackDoctors.org <http://Blackdoctors.org>,October 9, 2017, "Relaxers & Fibroids?" Black Doctor. January 17, 2017. Accessed October 09, 2017. https://blackdoctor.org/2825/do-relaxers-cause-fibroids__trashed.

⁷⁰ Biography.com. Madame CJ Walker: Entrepreneur, Civil Rights Activist and Philanthropist (1867-1869) "Madam C.J. Walker." Biography.com. April 28, 2017. Accessed October 09, 2017. <https://www.biography.com/people/madam-cj-walker-9522174>.

⁷¹Margaret Hunter, The cost of color: What we pay for being black and brown. Racism in the 21st Century 2008. (pp. 63–76). New York, NY: p. 63.

American women's existence across the expanse of four centuries.”⁷² Cannon goes on to elaborate on the issues black women suffer because of hair and skin color. “The Color and hair problem has cut deep into the psyche of the black woman. It is that particular aspect of oppression that has affected, for the most part, only women.”⁷³ Cannon further mentioned what Toni Morrison brought out in *The Bluest Eyes* that “the concept of physical beauty is one of the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought.”⁷⁴

Until today, many black women are scrutinized because of skin color. If asked of darker skinned woman about the complexity of skin color, they more than often would answer that lighter skinned women gets the fair chance in life. And if asked of lighter skinned women they will more than likely reply that darker skin women get to go to the front of the line. Thus, in most cases, the prejudices among black women caused by skin color can cause contempt among many African American women in the home, work place, church and in society. The debate on who gets fair treatment among Black women has caused a myriad of oppressed living conditions among black women from all cultures. It indicates how deeply black woman have been affected by the discrimination against the shade of skin color and hair texture. According to Mary Helen Washington, “In almost every novel or autobiography written by a Black woman, there is at least one incident in which a dark shinned girl wishes to be either white or light shinned with ‘good’ hair.”⁷⁵ It is proven that many Black women carry prejudices among themselves because of how others have treated them because of the skin color and the texture of her hair. This tension can cause these women to fight among themselves over this issue. In the interview conducted for this

⁷² Katie Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*, Continuum, New York, NY, 1995, pg.71.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eyes*, Knopf, New York, N.Y. 2000, pg.173.

⁷⁵ Mary Helen Washington, *Black Eyed Susan* (Garden City, NY.) Anchor Press, Doubleday. 1975. P. xxiv-xvii.

research, one interviewee described this behavior as “catty.” She went on to say, “Black women are often looked to as “catty” when they disagree over skin color. The lighter she is the more power she thinks she has.

Many women who have darker skin fuss and fight lighter skinned Black women over the issue of skin color supremacy. However, once black women get beyond the fact of what others think about them they can become closer together as black women in the church and in her community.⁷⁶ The fear of “catty” behavior can cause the rejection of women in ministry by the male leadership. Some of them may think that black women will bring this kind of attitude and behavior in the church. For this reason, black women need to identify their qualities and embrace the power that being a black woman calls for. Cannon looks at it this way, she says, “we must identify the qualities of an “ideal” Black churchwoman and a “realized” Christian woman. We must be able to analyze how this genre is both sacred and profane, active and passive, life-giving and death-dealing.”⁷⁷ If Black women can wrap their heads around Cannon’s idea, maybe they can move forward and began the healing process that being silenced has caused them. In the first place, skin color and gender should not have a place in the church ordering of things. The emphasis should be placed on the sacred Word and its accuracy of the spoken Word. Cannon further addressed the issue by saying, “In order to present a coequal discipleship the preacher must reflect upon the sacred words that underrepresent the truncate women in the creation of African American women’s image, voice and agency.”⁷⁸ Regardless to the many shades that Black women have, this issue should never be a factor of how Black women should live out their

⁷⁶ Refer to question five page sixty three of the questionnaire found in the appendix.

⁷⁷ Katie Cannon, *Katie’s Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*, (New York, Continuum, 1995), pg.120.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*,

lives in the church and in the world. The job of the Black ministers should be to draw out the logic of liberation that can transform patriarchal oppression of Black women.

“Colorism” which Cannon talked about, has plagued the black community throughout the ages. It is often discussed but is seldom discussed in a way that can and will reconcile the problem. The Black community is well aware of its origins from slavery, colonialism, supremacy and the Jim Crow era, however it still finds its way to ravage a community that should be in solidarity and unity instead of self-segregation. In many black families, churches and communities, “colorism” is the reason for contention and misunderstanding. In today’s society there are not too many dark skinned African America women who claim they have been affected by the realities of “colorism” in one way or the other. In a research project conducted by JeffriAnne Wilder, a student at University of North Florida, titled “Revisiting Color Names and Color Notion,” she found that there are a wealth of negative words relating to lighter skin women and many derogatory words that describe a dark skin Black woman. Words that describe lighter skin women were terms like, Coolie, light, light bright, high yellow, red (bone), redskin, sexy red, dirty red, fair pretty skin, house nigga, yellow, mulatto, caramel, mixed, white, oreo, browning, vanilla, and French vanilla. The terms that were used to describe darker skin women are: jigaboo, black, burnt, darky, midnight, chocolate, blue black, purple, super black, African, darkness, tar baby, charcoal, sexy black, and watermelon child.⁷⁹ Reflecting on the history of language, the terms used to describe lighter skin women have for the most part always been positive while the terms for dark skin women are aggressively negative and inferior. Some Black women will use these words as leverage to describe themselves or others. This type of thinking is

⁷⁹ JeffriAnn Wilder, Revisiting “Color Name and Color Notions, *Journal of Black Studies* Volume 41, no. 1 (September 2010) 190.

embedded into the fiber of the culture and has caused dissention within the race. Because of their skin tone, many light skinned blacks historically look down on darker blacks distancing themselves through many social clubs and organizations.

In the early 19th Century black women began to organize themselves “intra racially” into social clubs and sororities based on skin color. This movement is recognized as the Colored Women Social Club movement which spilled over into academia as African American Sororities. Until today, these ancient practices form the African American community. Early colored social clubs were formed in the mid to late 1800’s. According to Gerda Lerner, in an article she wrote in the *Journal of Negro History*, “Black women organized, throughout the nineteenth century, at first on a local, later-on a state and national level, to undertake educational, philanthropic and welfare activities”.⁸⁰ Even though the intended work of this organization set out to be a good one, within the scope of this organization laid an element of intraracism. Lerner went on to say, “Membership in the club denoted a certain social standing in the community and was not infrequently used to enforce the snobbish and restrictive attitudes of the leadership. The welfare activities, as reported in club records, show strong class prejudices on the part of the club women and reflect a patronizing, missionary attitude in dealing with the poor”.⁸¹ Even though Black women organized themselves into social clubs for the common good of the communities in which they served, there still was a wealth of discrimination towards each other due to colorism. Josephine Ruffin along with Mary Church Terrell, with the help of white women, were first to organize a group for colored women. However, they chose to only allow women of light complexion to join the organization. In the late 1800’s Mary McCloud Bethune responded to the

⁸⁰ Gerda Lerna, “Early Community Work of Black Club Members”, *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (Apr., 1974), 158. Published by: Association for the Study of African American Life and History Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2717327> Accessed: 03-11-2017 18:25 UTC.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 160.

issue by organizing another social club for colored women she called the National Association of Colored Women, which allowed all black women of all skin tones to join. Never-the-less, the problem with colorism is yet alive and well in many groups where black women organize themselves.

The issues of colorism also find its way into to academia especially within historical black Universities. It is well known in the black community that many HBC accepted students according to skin tone. One adage among HBCUs is that lighter skinned students enroll at Xavier University in New Orleans Louisiana and the darker students attend Dillard University in the same city. In an article written by Marybeth Gasman, Colorism within The Historical Black Colleges and Universities, she writes:

Among all colleges and universities that perpetuates elitism, HBCUs have a pecking order that is named after the Ivy League. Coined the Negro Ivy League, the term refers to a select group of institutions that educate the upper crust of Black society—or at least did throughout the history of HBCUs. These institutions include Dillard University in Louisiana; Spelman College and Morehouse College in Georgia; Howard University in Washington, DC; Hampton University in Virginia; Tuskegee University in Alabama; and Fisk University in Tennessee. Spelman, Morehouse, and Howard, are the best of the best among these institutions, with their liberal arts curricula and esteemed positioning among Whites. Lighter-skinned Blacks frequented these three institutions, above the others, thus creating clusters of light-skinned Blacks and making their presence the norm on campus.⁸²

Even though colorism is a paralyzing ailment in the lives of the black community, all Black women need to practice solidarity to overcome alienation of other women and remember that we all are made in the likeness and image of Christ. They are all working for a common cause and that has to do what Kelly Douglas Brown highlights in a lecture to her womanist Theology

⁸² Gasman, Marybeth, and Ufuoma Abiola. "Colorism Within the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)." *Theory Into Practice* 55, no. 1 (2015): 39-45.

students, “Black women are to be a part of a long history of Black women trying to make do and do better. In general, through historical dialogue, Black females can discern "when and where" they enter the story of Black women's struggle for survival and freedom for themselves and their families.”⁸³ As stated by one of the interviewees for this study, “God has created, and he made us for a special purpose. Whatever that purpose is, we need to try to fulfill it. I don’t want to fight this battle over color anymore. I believe in being proud of who you are. Make the most of the gift that God has given you and share it with others.”⁸⁴

For the most part, some Womanist Theologian have view colorism as an issue that has been embedded in the Black culture since the birth of slavery and has caused many African American women to be left out, pushed aside and oppressed. According to Delores Williams in her book titled, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, she states, “In America skin color makes a difference. Thus African-American women’s skin color has had a lot to do with their enslavement and with the continuation of their oppression.”⁸⁵ She further notes, “Americans have been conditioned to hate and fear black, to regard it as evil and illegal and consider black skin indicative of intellectual and moral inferiority. The American consciousness is thoroughly saturated with the idea of bad black and good white, of inferior black and superior white.”⁸⁶ The whole world recognizes and agrees that there is racism and colorism everywhere and everyone is aware of its origin. However, when humans everywhere change their mindset about color a true debunking of these idiosyncratic ideas will occur. The notion of black/bad and white/good is rooted in fear and hatred for what was given to the world since the beginning of time. Black (dark) and White light)

⁸³ Kelly Douglas Brown, *Living It Out: Metalogues and Dialogues* 133 *Teaching Womanist Theology: A Case Study*, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 8. No. 2. (September 1, 1992): 135.

⁸⁴ See question number eight page 70.

⁸⁵ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God Talk*, (Maryknoll, NY. Orbis Books, 1993) p. 75.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 77.

can both coexist in the world without prejudices once humans begin to see color in its proper perspective. Before God formed the world darkness was all around.⁸⁷ When He made day, He also make night. Day is no more superior than night, and night is no less superior than day. Both darkness (black) and light (white) are needed to live in a world where people co-exist. With this thought in mind, I agree with Williams as she states, “African American women need to devise their own terms, express their own ideas, and garner their own support for describing black women’s reality so that their oppression by black men, their oppression by white men and their oppression by white-men-female-dominated social systems can be seen clearly.”⁸⁸

Challenging the Prejudices of the Mad Black Woman

In spite of Black women’s struggle with racism and colorism, they continue to experience a wealth of other prejudices. The myth of Black women being mad is another prejudice or stigma that has plagued black women and black girls for centuries. The mad black women stigma refers to Black women as being sassy, ill-tempered and rude by nature. Even during the hype of the campaign and election of the first Black elected President of the United States, many people labeled First Lady Michelle Obama with the unfair stereotype as an angry mad black woman. Plus, she endured this scrutiny for the entire eight years while her husband was President of the United States. Social media was bombarded with caricatures about her and people everywhere joined in on the charade of mocking and demeaning of the First Lady of the United States. Some even were convinced and tried to convince others that Michelle was transgendered. None of the people who scandalized the First Lady even knew her nor did they experience her close-up and

⁸⁷ Refer to Genesis 1:2.

⁸⁸ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God Talk*, (Maryknoll, NY Obis Books, 1993) P. 172.

personally. Just because she was a Black woman led to this form of prejudice and bigotry which deprived her of human dignity and respect as other First Ladies of the past.

Even Katie Cannon's explanation as to why some non-blacks used caricature to degrade blacks, was described in her book, *Katie's Canon*. She says, "During slavery, non-blacks on the American scene portrayed Black slaves to be dumb, or contented. They used caricatures to convince themselves that the human beings whom they violated, degraded, and humiliated or whose well-being they did not protect were unworthy of anything better."⁸⁹ Just as slavery casted a negative connotation on Black people, the same happened to First Lady Obama during her entire time in office. In an interview with Oprah Winfrey, First Lady Obama stated, "This is not who I am at all. I am not mad. The Mad Angry Black Woman" label is rooted in fear. We are so afraid of each other. Color, wealth, things that don't matter still play a role in how we see on another. It is sad because the thing that least defines us as people is the color of our skin and the size of our bank account."⁹⁰ Michelle Obama is not the only black woman who has been labeled mad and angry, there are countless others.

In the interviews conducted for this research, the questions were asked about whether in their opinion are all black women mad. Are you Mad? If so, why? One interviewee had this to say:

There are some women who look mad because of what they go through and some things they put themselves through. Many young Black women put up with men who just give them babies and just walk away. Then they are left to take care of the babies all by themselves. They have a reason to look angry or to be angry. But many of them, brought it on themselves. I say to them, "You don't have to be mad, just stand your ground and say to the man, "I am not going to let you do this to me. I am not going to let you do this to my children." They have to do that and don't have to be mad to do it. When you see Black women on TV or on the news, sometimes many

⁸⁹ Katie Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*, Continuum, New York, NY, 1995, pg.29.

⁹⁰ www.cnn.com/.../michelle-obama-angry-black-woman-nr-sot.cn... Dec 19, 2016.

Black women don't smile when you see them. Most times it is a sad story, someone has been shot in the family, and a child has been killed. So, they may be sad not mad. I don't think Black women are mad. I am not. I could be, but I am not. I am 78 years old and I have been through so much, I could be the angriest woman in this country if I allowed myself to be. First, I've got the love of God in me. Secondly God gives me perfect peace and thirdly, He give me joy. You cannot be angry if you are going to have joy. It's like oil and water, they don't mix.

This woman related the "Angry Mad Black Woman" issue to being self-inflicted with sadness and hardship brought on by a relationship with a partner and abandonment. It is almost as if she is giving legitimacy to the harsh treatment and as if it is normal for a black woman to feel that it is her fault that she is experiencing dehumanizing atrocities that are causing her to be sad or to look mad.

Just as Cannon stated, "Black people had to be completely stripped of every privilege of humanity. Their dignity and value as human beings born with natural rights had to be denied. Black Americans were divested so far as possible of all intellectual, cultural and moral attributes. They had not socially recognized personhood."⁹¹ In the situation of a Black woman looking mad while all the time she is sad is said to be a trained behavior dating back to slavery. Slaves had trained masked expressions. They were not allowed to laugh. Whenever they could not help themselves but to laugh, they had what is called a "laughing barrel," where they could put their heads inside to burst with laughter. You would never really know the true meaning of facial expressions. Maya Angelou wrote a poem describing the black woman's expression. She followed women on the New York City bus for nine months who were maids. One had a bag in both hands. Angelou noticed that when the bus stops the woman laughs, when the bus starts she laughs, and when it misses someone she laughs. She said that this is the sign of a woman in survival mode. So, in dedication of women who are in the survival mode, Angelou writes the Mask:

We wear the mask that grins and lies. It shades our cheeks and hides our eyes.

This debt we pay to human guile. With torn and bleeding hearts...

⁹¹ Katie Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*, (New York, NY, The Continuum Publishing Company, 1995). P39.

We smile and mouth the myriad subtleties. Why should the world think otherwise?

In counting all our tears and sighs. Nay let them only see us while

We wear the mask. We smile but oh my God our tears to thee from tortured souls
arise and we sing Oh Baby doll, now we sing...The clay is vile beneath our feet

And long the mile but let the world think otherwise. We wear the mask.

When I think about myself I almost laugh myself to death. My life has been one great big joke!
A dance that's walked a song that's spoke. I laugh so hard HA! HA! I almos' choke when I
think about myself. Seventy years in these folks 'world the child I works for calls me girl I say
"HA! HA! HA! Yes ma'am!" For workings sake I'm too proud to bend and too poor to break
so...I laugh! Until my stomach ache when I think about myself. My folks can make me split my
side I laugh so hard, HA! HA! I nearly died the tales they tell sound just like lying they grow the
fruit but eat the rind. Hmm huh! I laugh uhuh huh huh...Until I start to cry when I think about
myself and my folks and the children.

My father's sit on benches, their flesh count every plank, the slats leave dents of
darkness deep in their withered flank. And they gnarled like broken candles,

All waxed and burned profound. They say, but sugar, it was our submission

That made your world go round. There in those pleated faces I see the auction
block the chains and slavery's coffles the whip and lash and stock. My father's
speak in voices that shred my fact and sound they say, but sugar, it was our
submission that made your world go round. They laugh to conceal their crying,
they shuffle through their dreams they stepped 'n fetched a country and wrote
he blues in screams. I understand their meaning, it could and did derive from
living on the edge of death they kept my race alive by wearing the mask! Ha!
Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!⁹²

According to what Angelou is expressing in her poem, the Angry Mad Black Woman syndrome is only a negative expression that continues to oppress and silence Black women. Facial expression does not necessarily determine the true meaning of how a person, particularly a Black woman, is feeling. Just as Angelou alluded, these expressions can become a way to cover up the person's genuine feelings and emotions.

⁹² Maya Angelou, "The Mask, by Maya Angelou." Poeticous. March 03, 2018. Accessed March 21, 2018. <https://www.poeticous.com/maya-angelou/the-mask-we-wear-the-mask-that-grins-and-lies>.

On the contrary, another woman who I interview for this project answered the same question with a different experience. She said,

I don't want to say I am mad. But I will say that I am angry. Because my parents lived in the state of Florida owned land and we paid as much taxes in the state. I was not given the same opportunity that others were given and I feel that the state owe me money for that. The fact that I had to walk when white folk were riding the bus. I had to walk five miles to school. They closed my school down where I was attending. I was in the second grade, when I passed the beautiful white school to get there, we were having school in an old, musky, army barrack that the Germans used and stayed in World War. Yes, I am angry about that. I am angry at the fact that Black people don't have the same privileges as whites. It is not fair and it is not Godly. And for the life of me, I don't know how congress can sit there and do what they do and sit up in church on Sunday morning. They owe me for my grandparents and my great grandparents. I can trace my roots all the way back to Africa. Yes, I am angry. That is not the thing I am angry about. I am angry about we Black don't get up off our knee. We do a lot of praying but, when will we get up off our knees and do something about the situation. In the midst of the crime and all the killings, where is the Black church. I went to college in Maryland. But we got up and went downtown and did something. We did not just sit there and do nothing.⁹³

Again, anger is expressed because of oppression and internal and external bondage of Black people in America, especially her women. This bondage, to her, is caused by the inability to respond to the disenfranchisement of a community of people who could not do for themselves at the time. However, to her, Black people need to respond to bondage, harsh and unfair treatment. In communities where people of all nationalities co-exist, everyone must learn to leave behind those myths that have followed the Black community and its women for centuries and live together as one nation under God. As Karen Fletcher Baker stated in her article, *Tar Baby*, as she spoke about Black women in the Black community, she emphasized, "In communities with one another and black men, we must consider ways to resist internalized patterns of commodification and bondages in our relationships. This can be done in part by demythologizing or

⁹³ Refer to question 8 in appendix 2.

remythologizing the myths we have inherited regarding womanhood”.⁹⁴ Therefore Black women should began to demythologize how they interpret the stigma of the “Angry Mad Black Woman”. As Bim Adewinmi states in her blog, “For me, the fear of being labeled an angry black women makes me bite my tongue. It is designed to shut you up. It allows people to get away with the things they would never get away with anywhere else and then blame you and your reactions.”⁹⁵ Hannah Pool writes in her work *My Father’s Daughter*, “I have spent my life fighting the stigma of the Angry Black Woman because it is a handy way to put Black women down. It is modern day shorthand for telling her not to have ideas about her station. Black women are no angrier than white women, if anything we could do with being a lot angrier. But we get labelled because deep down everyone knows we have a right to be mad as hell”.⁹⁶ And Pamela Merritt agrees that Black women have a right to be angry, stating, “There is plenty to be angry about. The fact that Black women in America are three times more likely to die in childbirth than whites. Plus, the race baring anti-abortion campaign in America claims, that black women’s wombs are the most dangerous place for black babies, and the way that poverty is only worthy of discussion now that white middle-class people are feeling the pain. Yes, there is much to be angered by.”⁹⁷ Even though Black women are labeled as angry, they must understand as Patricia Hills Collins explains, “When the vocabulary used to describe Black women comes under attack, Black women’s self-definition becomes more difficult to achieve.”⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Karen Baker-Fletcher, “Tar Baby and Womanist Theology,” in *Theology Today* vol. L no.1. (April 1993): p37.

⁹⁵ Bim Adewinmu, yorugagirlndancing.com

⁹⁶ Hannah Pool, *My Fathers Daughter*, (New York, NY, Free Press, 2005). Pg. 178

⁹⁷ Pamela Merritt, *The Creepy ‘Big Data’ Crisis Pregnancy Center Group That Must Be Stopped* 08/11/2017 10:42 Am ET Updated Aug 14, 2017.

⁹⁸ Jean Wyatt Ph.D. (2008) Patricia Hill Collins's Black Sexual Politics and the Genealogy of the Strong Black Woman, *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 9:1, 52-67,

Never the less, many Black women in America claim if they are mad or angry that they have a right to be. As Andre Lorde points out in her womanist work, *Sister Outsider*, “Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potential useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional which brought that anger into being. Anger is loaded with information and energy.”⁹⁹ She continues to elaborate on the issue how black women are faced with racism, and sexism daily and she has a right to be angry and that anger, when used in service of vision and future liberation, is strength. Anger has been the foundation of many struggle for human rights. For Lorde, anger can be a medium of change and transformation.¹⁰⁰ Many times the pain, sadness, and hopelessness that many Black women feel is conveniently mislabeled as anger in the effect to dehumanize and dismiss her experience and distinguish her very existence. Lorde agrees that Black women being angry opposed to being depressed are steeped in how the community views mental illness or how anything she feel is dismissed as anger.¹⁰¹

The Black community has looked to mental illnesses as taboos and those who suffer from this illness as a problem. These factors weigh heavily on Black women who suffer from depression and are treated substandard even by those they love the most. It is worth noting that many crimes are committed by Black people who suffer from mental illnesses and the criminalization of Black people who struggle with these mental illnesses should alarm everyone. Lorde states that “irritability, headaches and stomachaches can be a symptoms of depression and anxiety. And depression and anxiety can often mistake as anger.”¹⁰² Yet Black women are encouraged to be strong and pray. The definition for being strong needs to be redefined. As Lorde states, “Be strong should mean crying, knowing how to ask for help, where to seek that

⁹⁹ Andre Lorde *Sister Outsider Essays and Speeches*. (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007). P.76.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid* p.83.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*

¹⁰² *Ibid*

help, how to accept the help and knowing that we are not meant to experience life in isolation.”¹⁰³ Black women have to become more accountable on checking in on one another as black women. When there are visible signs that a woman is struggling, there should be a haven of help. Black women are flesh and bones and feeling. They are not obsessed with meanness as is all too often the accusation.

Patricia Hill Collins calls for Black women to reclaim their voice. For her reclaiming Black women’s ideas involves discovering, reinterpreting, and in many cases analyzing for the first time the works of individual US Black women thinkers who were so extraordinary that they have their ideas preserved.¹⁰⁴ She further adds, “For many Black women, this task of reclaiming Black women’s subjugated knowledge takes on a special meaning, knowing that the minds, talents of our grandmothers, mothers, and sisters have been suppressed stimulates many contributions to the growing field of Black women’s studies.”¹⁰⁵ The only way that Black women can collectively reclaim their voice as Collins expresses, there must be a meeting of mind and conscious decision making to change the way they see themselves and how they live in the face of adversity. Collins says, “Just as fighting injustice lay at the heart of US Black women’s experiences, so do analyzing and creating imaginative responses to injustices characterized to the core of Womanist and Black feminist thought.”¹⁰⁶ This action calls for a “Sankofa”¹⁰⁷ effect. Lorde agrees that Black women should reach back to understand the present. Help seeking tends in the Black community are impacted by access to resources, general lack of mistrust for health

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ Jean Wyatt Ph.D. (2008) Patricia Hill Collins's Black Sexual Politics and the Genealogy of the Strong Black Woman, *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 9:1, 52-67,

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, P. 13.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, P.12.

¹⁰⁷ Sankofa is and African term that means to go back and fetch it.

practitioners and the influence of Black churches which stems from slavery and the history of marginalization and discrimination in this country.¹⁰⁸

Challenging the Prejudices Among Black Women and Their Social Classes

In America, Black women have had to deal with stereotypes since slavery. As she began to work towards her wholeness to survive among white people and Black men, she still was pushed back to the lower-class group because of reason beyond her repair. Divorce and single parenting has also aided to her oppression. According to Patricia Gill Turner, “The divorce rate among African Americans is around 50 percent with one of every two marriages ending in divorce. Many of these divorced mothers move into poverty when they can no longer depend on the income of the spouse.”¹⁰⁹ In America there have been many programs attempting to alleviate oppression of the poor. Divorce and births to unmarried mothers also result in families receiving welfare assistance. There has been a wealth of criticism of families receiving this aid. Most of the criticism has resulted from stereotypes and misconceptions that society has held about African-American women and children on welfare that African American and they are lazy and sexually promiscuous. Actually, according to Turner, “the majority of welfare recipients are not women of color.”¹¹⁰ Also, these types of criticisms and stereotypes are those who have kept the Black woman discriminated against and oppressed.

From the early settlers of Americans, there was some form of aid or welfare for the poor that was brought with them to the new world. One such program was the Elizabethan Poor

¹⁰⁸ Audre Lordes, *Sister Outsider Essays and Speeches*. (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007). P.83

¹⁰⁹ Patricia Gill Turner, “Another Look Another Voice: Reflection on Women and Money by African American Women” *Church & Society*, 83 no 4 Mar - Apr 1993, p 8.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

Law¹¹¹ that was designed by the Queen of England in 1601 for citizens of England and Wales who were too old to work, underemployed, disabled or those people who were worthy. But, it was not until 1935, during the great depression that President Franklin D. Roosevelt implemented social security and welfare as we know it today that was applicable to all citizens, black or white. Never the less, Blacks in the South were not given access to such program until the early 1960's. Prior to the 1960's, blacks had to migrate to the big cities to qualify for benefits of welfare or work for the welfare system.¹¹²

By 1976, Ronald Reagan coined the phrase “Welfare Queen.” In his 1970 race to the White House, he was relating this term to a woman who used the name Linda Taylor to defraud the government out of millions of dollars using the welfare system to do it. According to the 1930 census, Taylor was born white. She used 33 aliases and numerous addresses to carry out her deception. At the time of her arrest she had used multiple nationalities and formed a wealth of fictitious families. She had portrayed herself as Jewish, Hispanic, Asian, and Black. Even though Taylor was a white woman, this stereotype of the “Welfare Queen” continues being used to describe Black women all over America who are single and raising children alone, whether she is educated or uneducated, employed or unemployed; the stereotype has become another way of oppressing the Black woman in America. Kelly Burton, a Philanthropist for social change, stated that “the Welfare Queen had an impact on the Black woman’s psyche, it became a cultural bogeyman whose fate she would bound to share if she made the wrong choices.”¹¹³ The stereotype of being described as a “Welfare Queen” has caused the Black women to experience a

¹¹¹ Kimberley Collica-Cox., is an Associate professor in the Criminal Justice and Security Department at Pace University. “Why Retribution Matters; Progression not Regression, *Theory in Action*” Vol. 10. No2. April 2017.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Kelly Burton PhD, is an accomplished entrepreneur and Philanthropist

host of scrutiny. Diana Hayes explain that, “these polarizing definitions becomes firmly embodied in in American society, continuing today in the almost universal depiction of Black women as “welfare queens” and single mothers, while white women are more often seen as feminine role models of society.”¹¹⁴ Because of her inability to properly care for her children and household in the absence of her husband or baby father, she must turn to the social services for help and after she receives the assistance, she is scrutinized for participating in the program.

During Bill Clinton’s presidency, he reformed the welfare system and called it Aid to Family with Dependent Children (AFDC). This program required Black women to be single and unmarried with children, nor could she not have the companionship of a man in her home, nor anywhere else, at any time. It also led black women to believe that she could not have ownership of any valuables, was limited in fair wages, and was yet left in a state of poverty. Many African American women find themselves in the lowest paying jobs and they live on the margins of America’s economic system. As Turner points out, “African American women find themselves in jobs where they are very vulnerable with income too limited to provide for minimum necessities and without health and other benefits. Often they find it necessary to work at a second job outside the home in addition to the unpaid work that a mother does for her family.”¹¹⁵

African Americans make up the highest unemployment rate in the United States. According to Turner, “they are more vulnerable to the illegal drug industry and other social ills, and suffer from all the problems of economic deprivation.”¹¹⁶ The social stigma the Black community finds itself to be victims of also lends itself to grandparents and other family

¹¹⁴ Diana L. Hayes, *Taking Down Our Harps, Black Catholics in the United States*, (Maryknoll, NY. Orbis Books 1998), p. 103.

¹¹⁵ Patricia Gill Turner, “Another Look Another Voice: Reflection on Women and Money by African American Women” *Church & Society*, 83 no 4 Mar - Apr 1993, Pg. 8.

¹¹⁶ *ibid*

members becoming the extended providers for their unemployed and chemically dependent adult children and their dependents. However, Jamie Phelps recognizes that the extended family network is disappearing. She notes, “Black women carry heavier and heavier burdens while being made the target of public and interpersonal hostility, indeed hostility against welfare-recipient mothers are increasingly intense.”¹¹⁷ Additionally she adds, “Even those who have escaped the worst ravages of economic poverty by employment in mainstream corporations and academic institutions do not escape from subtle sophisticated forms of social domination, similar to that which oppresses their sisters who work as domestics.”¹¹⁸ The Church is called upon to bring wholeness to this oppressed situation only to find that many black women were faced with oppression and discrimination there as well.

Using questionnaires for this project, 20 women were surveyed, that are members of the Florida East Coast Baptist Association, about the church and where they stand socially in their churches and their ministries. Typically, these are ministries where women are gradually entering leadership positions because of the absence or nonparticipation of men in ministry. These women were either employed or retired. Historically, African American women always worked in some capacity. They were never able to stay home and raise children as the white women were. They either took the merger jobs that the white women would not do or filled in for the Black men who were away at war or just simply out of the home for one reason or the other. As Jamie Phelps explains, African American women “were often marginalized and dehumanized as domestics in household under control of white and other women, they continue to serve as surrogate parents to white or other women’s children.”¹¹⁹ Angela Davis, in her book, *Women*,

¹¹⁷ Diane Hayes and Jamie Phelps, *Taking Down Our Harps, Black Catholics in the United States*, (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1998), p.72.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Race and Class, points out, “Proportionately, more Black women have always worked outside their homes than have their white sisters. The enormous space that work occupies in Black women lives today follows a pattern established during the early days of slavery.”¹²⁰

It is noteworthy that all the women for this survey were either divorced or widowed and they all played an active role in the church ministry. However, some are in leadership roles but none of them were pastors of their congregations. The Missionary Baptist Churches are known to be male dominated when it comes to leadership. Never the less, as Linda E. Cross states, “we are mothers, partners, aunts, nieces, and we are two-thirds of the Black church in America. We are the church. The Church would be bankrupt without us and the church will shut down without us.”¹²¹ Historically, women have been the unheard voices in the church, seeking recognition and freedom of speech, especially African American women, who have suffered a great deal of oppression over the years. Never the less as Hayes points out, “Black women in the Black Church have held few recognizable roles of responsibility in leadership within them, especially as ordain ministers. As increasing numbers of the Black Protestant women earn doctoral degrees in theology and are ordained, their influence has begun to grow.”¹²²

The women who are member of these Baptist churches for this study, are women who work in broad range of occupations, from waitress to doctors. They show little or no concern for being ordain ministers. Even though some protestant churches have begun to open their leadership roles to women, it has been customary for the Missionary Baptist churches not to ordain their women, yet they license them. As far as the FECBA is concerned, there is a long-

¹²⁰ Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, (New York, NY. Vintage Books, 1983) p.5.

¹²¹ Linda E. Cross, “Womanist theology, epistemology, and a new anthropological paradigm”, *Cross Currents*, Vol.48, issue 4, Winter 1998-1999.

¹²² Diane L. Hayes and Cyprian Davis, *Taking Down Our Harps: Black Catholics in the United States*, (Maryknoll, NY Orbis Books, 1998). p.102.

standing policy not to ordain women because of power over men. Some of the pastors in the FECBA are ignoring this antiquated policy and are ordaining women for leadership to assist them with the growing demands and needs that the church requires because of the falling away of male membership. In reviewing the questionnaires, none of the women show interest in pastoral leadership and most of them believe that the role as pastor should be designated for the man.¹²³ Some Black women have been conditioned to need a man as leader over her decisions-making, reinforcing that she is nothing without a man. As Enobong Hannah Branch explains, “the gender order is stratified with men holding the highest position, men have an interest in justifying and maintaining the status quo.”¹²⁴ Therefore for a woman to have any recognizable status, there must be a men to lead her. This type of thinking has held her captive because of the stereotypes she has been labeled with for being a Black woman and single. For most Womanist theologians, and Black feminist, this is what they refer to as “intersectionality.”¹²⁵ And for the sanity of the Black woman we must do as Delores Williams alludes to, “make a way out of no way.”¹²⁶

¹²³ See Appendix A

¹²⁴ Enobong Hannah Branch. 2011. *Opportunity Denied: Limiting Black Women to Devalued Work*. Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2011. EBook Collection (EBSCOhost), EBSCOhost (accessed March 21, 2018).

¹²⁵ Black legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” in her insightful 1989 essay, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” The concept of intersectionality is not an abstract notion but a description of the way multiple oppressions are experienced. Crenshaw uses the following analogy, referring to a traffic intersection, or crossroad, to concretize the concept: Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in an intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. . . . But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm. Crenshaw argues that Black women are discriminated against in ways that often do not fit neatly within the legal categories of either “racism” or “sexism”—but as a combination of both racism and sexism.

¹²⁶ Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist Talk*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993). P.xi.

The Missionary Baptist churches, particularly those who are members of the FECBA, operates as a two-edge sword. Williams was right to describe it like this, “They sustain their Black women emotionally and provide ‘theological space’ for Black women’s faith expressions. But they suppress and help to make invisible women’s thought and culture.”¹²⁷ She further states, “Through their uncritical use of the Bible and through their patriarchal theology, many of the African American churches prohibit Black women from asking many critical questions about women’s oppression and about the support and reinforcement of that oppression by the Bible and by the Christian church in all its male dominated form.”¹²⁸ So for Black women in these churches with faith seeking understanding, Womanist Theology has been developed to bring about real insight concerning these matters. It does not matter how others view the social class of Black women. If she loses her job, becomes divorced, widowed or have children out of wedlock, her social status is just the same as if she had been a domestic worker. Education and Elitist status is out the window. For Fernis and Graham in their book titled, *Women in Higher Education* they states, “Most Elitistism is found in Higher Education. So, for that Black women who are apart of Higher Education to lose her job, she will no longer be considered among the elite.”¹²⁹

The Black church has also adopted a rubric for the Black woman elitistism and womanhood in the Black Church. According to Williams, this model became associated with the Black community in the late nineteen hundred and early twentieth centuries. It perpetuated a model of womanhood akin to the Victorian model of “true womanhood.” Williams further explains that the Victorian “true womanhood” was the exact opposite of the kind of womanhood

¹²⁷ Ibid. p.xiii.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ W. Todd Furniss and Patricia Albjerg Grant, *Women in Higher Education, American Council on Education*, Washington DC. 1974. P.11,

that Hagar in the wilderness and many poor Black women modeled. The “true woman” is described as one who, through Christ, blesses man and help make his home a joy and life a privilege.¹³⁰ She also points out that White ministers describe the ideal woman as by nature able to meet man’s wants. She is to be feminine, soft, tender, delicate, and her true sphere is the home. Her proper vocation is motherhood and wifhood.”¹³¹ This rubric was a tall one to reach for Black women, since she has had to work all the days of her life. If she was not working as a domestic worker, she was tending the fields alongside Black men.

Many Black men have and still are looking to this model of “womanhood” and “wifhood” for Black women as a form of class elevation. However, this did not work and will not ever work because it is well documented that the Black family income is far less than others in their communities and work place. Therefore, for a Black family to survive, both partners must work and share the load of responsibilities. Belle Hooks saw another reason for “true woman” model not to work in the Black community. She describes it as “the enemy within.” referring to our internal sexism.¹³² Hooks’ argument is that “we all know firsthand that we have been socialized as females by patriarchal thinking to see ourselves inferior to men, to see ourselves as always and only in competition with one another for patriarchal approval, to look upon each other with jealousy, fear, hatred.”¹³³ Therefore many of the women who are members of the Missionary Baptist churches have not completely come to grips with women being in authority in the church. Never the less they see and experience the change. Some even realize that a change for male dominated hierarchy is coming, but they do not think it will be anytime soon for some churches.

¹³⁰ Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God Talk*, (Maryknoll New York. Orbis Books, 1993). p. 123

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² B. hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. (Cambridge, MA. South End Press, 2000). p. 14.

¹³³ Ibid.

Challenging the Prejudices of Gender, Homosexuality or Heterosexuality

“We are big, vast, and diverse; a nation of people with different backgrounds and beliefs, different experiences and stories, but bound by our shared ideal that no matter who you are, what you look like, how you start off, or how and who you love, American is a place where you can write your own destiny.”

Those are the words from a speech of President Barrack Obama from June 26, 2015. He along with his staff made a historical attempt to expand opportunity and justice of all Americans whether they were gay, lesbian, transgendered, bi-sexual, homosexual or heterosexual. Nevertheless it caused a conflict in the home and in the church for some, especially the Black church and most of her Black women. Homosexuality has been taboo in the African American community. Many families have lost children, relatives and friends over the dispute of sexual orientation. Some pastors all over the country have stereotyped President Obama as the anti-Christ for his stance on gay marriage and passing laws that redefines marriage for lesbians, bisexual, gays, and transgendered Americans. Many Black church people have said that gays have no place in “God’s house,” meaning the church. Some Black preachers have declared to their congregations, that homosexuality is immoral,¹³⁴ and though we love the sinner we hate the sin. One Jewish Rabbi calls homosexuality an outright abomination.¹³⁵ Kelly Douglas Brown refers to this behavior as “Homophobic.” She says that “the Black community is potent with homophobia and it will continue to grow if it is not spoken about.”¹³⁶ Brown continues her discussion by recognizing the homophobia in the Black community is not simply a matter of

¹³⁴ Horace Griffin. "Their Own Received Them Not: African American Lesbians and Gays in Black Churches." *Theology & Sexuality* 2000, no. 12 (2000): 89.

¹³⁵ Jack Pine Radicals. "Jerusalem Chief Rabbi Calls Homosexuality An 'Abomination' – Jackpine Radicals. Accessed March 25, 2018. <https://jackpineradicals.com/boards/topic/jerusalem-chief-rabbi-calls-homosexuality-an-abomination/>.

¹³⁶ Kelly Douglas-Brown, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999) p.4

bigotry, it is more complex than that. She points out, “homophobia is but one of the systems of a problematic understanding of sexuality present within the Black community.”¹³⁷

During the interview process for this thesis project, the question was asked, “Based on your experiences how do you feel about women’s relationships with each other? One person answered this way:

I think we could be closer, have more compassion and companionship. I remember not long ago, about twenty years, I tried to befriend a woman. I had a group and this woman husband had died, but she did not see the friendship that we were trying to offer as genuine. There was a lot of jealousy and she said a lot of awful things about other women. She didn’t want to be with a bunch of women for people to think certain thing about her. I think that is sad, very sad. A young girl invited me to church with her when I was in the sixth grade and we are still friends. I treasure my friends, women and men. I don’t care what people say about me. If we are friends we are friends. I don’t care what they say. “Two women should not be that close.” I don’t care what people say because I know what is in my heart. They don’t know what is in my heart. I know that I am a friend. I am a faithful and a loyal friend. There is nothing sexual about it. It is just pure womanly love. I think once a woman gets beyond the fact of what people think about them. I think we will be closer together. If I am your friend, I will go through things to the end. I had a friend, who is deceased now, her husband said something derogatory about our friendship. So, whenever I hear people talking about Oprah and Gayle saying, “I know they are sweethearts.” I say that is not true, Oprah and Gayle are best of friends. I have friends like that. So, I don’t believe that. I don’t want to let the lie get into my heart. Why can’t women have a friend without an ulterior motive? Women have to be strong. When people say something bad about the relationship, I would not shy away from my friend because of that.¹³⁸

This interviewee answered the question with sexism and lesbianism in mind. She referred to how she thought her church community and other groups would refer to her if she had a relationship with other women. Even though she denies showing concern about how she is seen in the eyes of others, she is very much aware of the problem with homophobia in her community. As Douglas-

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ See Appendix B Question 5.

Brown explains, “homophobic attitude and practices stem from the complexity of Black people’s oppression at the hands of White Culture.”¹³⁹ She continues her explanations by saying, “There have been no persons more ardently homophobic than White Televangelists Pat Robertson, and Jerry Farewell or political commentator Pat Buchanan. They have launched a campaign urging homosexuals to “be cured.”¹⁴⁰ It is no wonder that women like the ones interviewed for this project was so adamant about not being lesbian nor caring how people see them. Never-the-less, homophobia has been highly prevalent in the Black community, even though, there have also been leaders in the Black community who have support gay and lesbian rights. Douglas Brown points out “the civil rights leaders such as Jesse Jackson, Joseph Lowery, and Benjamin Chavis have all publicly criticized discrimination policies and behavior against gay and lesbian persons. At the same time, they have supported agendas promoting gay and lesbian rights. In addition, the Congressional Black Caucus as a body, as well as individual members have consistently rejected legislation that would discriminate against gay and lesbian persons, and it has openly supported gay and lesbian rights.”¹⁴¹ Karen Fletcher-Baker added, “The voices of gays and lesbians are just beginning to get a more serious hearing than in previous eras. But the steps toward the full hearing of gays and lesbian’s concerns are still in the stage of infancy. Too many would rather not hear and discuss questions regarding legislation allowing same-sex marriages.¹⁴² Just as Black women and men are oppressed because of the color of their skin, so are gays and lesbian but it is worst in the Black community. According to Baker-Fletcher, “Social reform requires that Black women lift every voice to create a symphony that truly blends the voices of diversity

¹³⁹ Kelly Douglas-Brown, *Sexuality in the Black Church*, (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2003) p.88.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Karen Baker-Fletcher, *A Singing Something: A Womanist Reflection on Anna Julia Cooper*, (Lexington NY, Crossroads Publishing, 1994), p.98.

of Black women, standing in solidarity to resist oppression of every form. Heterosexuals must take seriously the human dignity and rights of Black gays and lesbians whom all too many would like to silence.”¹⁴³

It is virtually impossible to talk about the ills of homosexuality without discussing the atrocities that lies in heterosexual relationships. Black Feminist and Womanist theologians both look at women being included in work place, church, and in society. Never the less, there is a bigger evil that lurks behind the four walls of the home in the African American community. Some religious leaders teach that marriage between a man and women is perfect and is deemed to be ordained and arranged by God and this is the only perfect way of living within the will of God. However, many African American homes are run by single parents, most time the woman. In a perfect world husband and wives both run the household, however for many African American families this is not so. Even though both male and female are heterosexual, this do not guarantee that the marriage will stay together or that the will be a marriage taking place at all. Many African American parents have never been married or may never experience marriage. However, the church and society have placed heterosexual marriage as the perfect way of being and living. Either way, human sexuality is a vehicle in which the passion is expressed. According to Brown-Douglas, “Human passion must be seen as more than lust or desire for sexual activity.”¹⁴⁴ The Black woman has been dehumanized to the point that her sexuality has been reduced to that which is barbaric and promiscuous. Her passion can never be viewed as a way to know herself and others completely. She is simply equated as being careless ready to express her sexuality anytime and anywhere. These untruths about her have caused much undesired scrutiny

¹⁴³ Ibid. p. 149.

¹⁴⁴ Kelly Brown-Douglas, *Sexuality in the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*, (Maryknoll: Orbis 2003) p. 120.

that places her in a precarious situation of living under oppression and disrespect of both white and black. However, if Black women, as well as other people, began to see her passion as Brown-Douglas explains it as, “Divine energy within human beings, the love of God, that compels them toward life-giving, life-producing, and life affirming activity and relationships regarding all of God’s creation,”¹⁴⁵ then the healing of the entire human race can begin to take place.

Conclusion

It is God who has made us and not we ourselves who created us.¹⁴⁶ This is a passage taken from the biblical text to live by. Whether we are homosexual or heterosexual, we are in the hands of God and our souls belong to Him. If Black women could choose to be any other race than who they are then maybe she would in order to escape such aggressive scrutiny. But God has his plan for her and in “dew” season it will be revealed to the world His God-given plan for her. God does not make mistakes. Why is it that Black women suffer more than other humans yet to be revealed? She is enduring so much racism, classism, oppression and so much more from the hands of the other; who wish to live this way eternally? But, since she cannot change how God formed and fashioned her, she must continue to “make a way out of no way.” LGBT have always been a part of the Black community and have always been in the Black church. Some have even played an active role in leadership. As much as we have been done to include LGBT in the Black community and in the Black Church, there is still much more work to be done.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Psalms 100:3, King James version

Chapter 4

Critical Reflection for Womanist Hermeneutics in the Black Church

Introduction

Black women have experienced continuously a wealth of scrutiny in the church, in society and her home just because she is both woman and Black. In the earlier chapters, we have witnessed how she must undergo "double oppression" and "intersectionalism" all because she is black and woman. She has learned that she is the last to be hired and the first to be fired. But through it all, she has learned to "make a way out of no way." In this Chapter, the Whiteheads' movement of assertion is continued. It allows for dialogue, discussion, and self-evaluation. From the earlier evaluation of Womanist Theology, oral tradition is understood to be an essential aspect of this discipline. It is liberating for the "hushed" and oppressed Black women to come to voice. Also, this chapter responds to Stacy Floyd Thomas' third task of constructing religious ethics and theological discourse in the light of Black women's experience. Here we reclaim the voices of many Black women in what Patricia Hill-Collins states as, "Reclaiming Black women's ideas involves discovering, reinterpreting, and in many cases analyzing for the first time the work of individual Black women thinkers who were so extraordinary that they managed to have their ideas preserved."¹⁴⁷

Furthermore, seven categories for reclaiming the legacy of Black women will be implemented in this discussion for self-evaluation. The first category to discuss is Our Living Legends. This is an organization that was started six years ago to honor women who have been helpful in their communities and have added value to the lives of people they encounter. For this section, I will use the first generation of mothers of Womanist theology. While researching this topic, I noticed a common thread. These women's work has not been brought forward by other

¹⁴⁷ Patricia Hill-Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, (New York NY. Routledge, 2000) p.13.

Black writers, nor is their work easily accessible in the local libraries. This section is dedicated to give them accolades for contributions to "unhush" Black women and to bring exposure to their plight. The second section of this chapter concerns regains the Oral History of Black Women's experience. How can a group of people flourish if they do not know where they came from to get to where they are now and to excel towards a better tomorrow? The third section of this chapter is to bring to light Postmodernism, and Postmodernism relates to the renewal of Oral Tradition. As we excel towards a better tomorrow, it is our wish to remember the early Postmodern period of the 70's and the changes that were taking place in the lives of the African American woman and her family and renew the Oral traditions that may be long forgotten by the younger generation. The fourth section will *Acknowledge the Past Oral Tradition in the Black Culture* as we look again at the Blacks culture through the Black Women's experience. The fifth section *Acknowledges the Current Oral Traditions in the Black Culture* while the sixth sections examine the *Biblical Text as an extension of Oral Tradition*. Lastly, the seventh section uncovers the *African American Experience and the Biblical Text* for better clarity.

Our Living Legends

Our Living Legends is an organization that was formed to acknowledge elderly citizens in the African American community who have helped others along the way. Our Living Legends is a non-profit organization that I created and founded in 2012 in Leesburg, Georgia. I was compelled to come together with a group of my peers from High School to appreciate and celebrate the elderly in our community who were a part of the village that helped in our upbringing. Some of the people we honored and celebrated were our parents, and others were people from our community who were so instrumental in our care-giving. They may have been our teacher, next-door neighbor, our best friend's parent, or merely a person we noticed from

afar. We take time each year to show them our appreciation by honoring and celebrating them with a formal banquet, which is held in Leesburg, Georgia at the High School the first Saturday in June each year. Our Motto is to thank them for giving us an example to live by, and for that, we are grateful. They may have been teachers, preachers, mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles or just someone that has been accompanied others from afar and that has added value to the lives of other people in the community through an exemplary lifestyle. For this project, we bring forward the mothers of the first generation of Womanist theologians to acknowledge them for their work for the inclusion of the Black women voice's in our churches, in our world, and in our homes.

The first Alice Walker to honor is for coining the phrase "Womanist." Even though she is not a womanist theologian, she has contributed to the discipline. She is honored because of her work in civil rights and for helping to be clarity and wholeness to a misunderstood and misguided community of Black people. Through her novel *The Color Purple*, she brought an awareness to the mistreatment of Black women by her counterpart. She demonstrated how Black women have had to survive through almost anything. Fletcher-Brown honored her in her book titled *A Singing Something*, saying, "I first learned of the value of women's everyday creativity through Alice Walker, whose writing I value."¹⁴⁸ She further noted, "Woman seminarians, religious scholars, and clergy found Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mother's Garden* as a unique name to describe the distinctiveness of Black womanhood. For Walker, Womanist is a Black feminist or feminist of color who passes on the wisdom of Black women's cultural heritage from mother to daughter. Walker derived the term "womanish from the Black folk expression "womanish," which means to act grown up, be grown up, in charge, responsible."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Karen Fletcher-Baker, *A Singing Something*, (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1994). p.12.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pp.106-109.

Renita Weems honors Walker in her book, *Just A Sister Away*, as she pays homage to Walker's contribution to women's work and her term "womanist" that defines a black feminist to be a courageous woman who is committed the whole people, both men, and women. Cheryl Kirk-Duggan also honors Walker for coining the word womanist in the early 1980's, which she said, "Provided framework that gave birth to a spiritual, theological movement that continues to develop to this day."¹⁵⁰ Kirk-Duggan further noted how Cheryl Townsend Gilkes honored Walker by saying:

Alice Walker introduced the word womanist in 1982 when she sought an alternative word for organizing our thinking about black women's self-definitions, relationships, activities, and history and their meaning for the Black experience. To my mind, her dictionary-style definition offered a grounded theory of black women's culture that was constructed out of the dialogue within the fundamental female-female relationship, of any religion, mothers and daughters, and the characteristic values ("love") that she observed in the world of Black women. Walker's definition asserts the existence of a black woman's culture that values not only women and women's relationships but the men and the entire community male and female. Walker identifies a fundamental commitment to the survival and wholeness of this community as a hallmark of this womanist idea.¹⁵¹

Kelly Douglas-Brown also honored Walker by acknowledging that there is, perhaps no better novel for penetrating Black sexuality than Alice Walker's much-discussed work, *The Color Purple*. She notes, "Walker ingeniously reveals how white hegemony has imposed upon the lives of Black people and set in motion a cycle of pathological and parasitic sexuality. Walkers succinctly captured the comprehensive nature of human sexuality – it is that which puts one in "right" relationship to oneself, hence to others, and ultimately to God."¹⁵²

Emilie Townes honors Walker in the introduction and acknowledgments in her book, *In a Blaze of Glory*. She points out, "In 1982 Alice Walker gave us the definitive understanding of

¹⁵⁰ Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, *The Sky is Calling: Race Class and Natural Disasters*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), p.76.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid, p.135.

womanist. Her four-part definition begins with the origins of the term, the Black folk expression "womanish" or accurately the expression, "You're acting womanish." Most young Black girls in my part of the South who were precocious, inquisitive, stubborn, and ornery or any combination thereof were accused of being womanish."¹⁵³ As a young girl, no one wanted to be called womanish because it had a negative connotation. However, it is notable for Walker to bring this cultural term to the forefront in Academia in order for many to understand the thinking of the African American woman and her cultural code words. Townes also points to a further understanding of the meaning on womanist as communal. For Walker,

The womanist cares about her people contemporary and historical. She challenges us on the nature of how Black folk is with one another. We are sexual beings who are to be loved, sexual or not. We are oppressed people who had saviors in our midst – sometimes women. We cannot divorce ourselves from one another without killing ourselves and signing our death warrant for our future generation. We must; womanist must recognize her location and responsibility in a community.¹⁵⁴

Townes further notes Walker's understanding of womanist not only from its origin and communal standpoint, but she turns to the individual as one who is grounded in love. "Love of self, love of community, love of the worlds of Black women, love of Spirit. These are all held together for the womanist – regardless."¹⁵⁵ Finally, Townes understands the fourth part of the Womanist experience to mean belief. "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender. This signals the move, so many Black feminists have made away from the feminist preoccupation with gender inequalities without adequate attention and analytical reflection insight into the inter-structured nature of race gender, and class oppression and other forms of oppression as well."¹⁵⁶ Walker deserves this honor because she has initiated a spirituality that is working out

¹⁵³ Emile M. Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory: Womanist Spirituality and Social Witness*, (Nashville, TN. Abingdon Press, 1995), p.9.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p.10.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

what it means for Black women to seek justice, compassion, worship and devotion in the wholeness of spirit, mind, body, and soul. She broke the silence that has held Black women captive for so long and is aiding in setting the captive free.

Regain Oral History

Often we may wonder how we begin to do the things we do or say the things we say. It may seem as if it just came natural, right out of nowhere only to realize our actions and thoughts have been handed down to us for ages, from what we may have seen or heard. For most Black families, there are so many secrets among family members that it becomes hard at times to tell which are fictions from those which are nonfictions. Never-the-less, these stories are being told at night or on raining days. Family members gather around to hear what older members have to say about life in their younger years or to understand of tales that had been handed down to them over the years. This information is vital to the Black community because here is where we gain strength from one another. Much of the history of Black culture is being lost, or misplaced by pop culture, and is slowly dying. It is essential that the Black community regain its oral account and start to document it for our future generations.

In early 2014, the Smithsonian Museum started to gather remnants of relics from African Americans eventually to open an African American Museum in Washington D.C. in 2017. They collected old photographs, Bibles, obituaries, birth, marriage and death certificates, old books, oral history and all kinds of artifacts that awakened the memory of Black people all over the United States and other parts of the world. Many Blacks began to think of the old times and began to reminisce about the previous generations. This event prompted many blacks to write their memoirs and share them with others. As a momentum to my family, I began to reflect on

my childhood and reflect on the oral stories that were handed down to me and wondered if I had done an adequate service to my off-spring and the current generation, to give back the information which was given to me.

I began to reminisce about the narratives of my great grand and grandparents handed down to me. There was an old cemetery at the end of the road where my mother grew up in Leesburg, Georgia. She purchased land, built a house, and raised my five siblings and me on the same street. My grandmother, Mattie Arnold, told me that my great-grandfather and other relatives were buried in that cemetery. The cemetery is getting smaller and smaller because people are building houses over the graves. My daughter, Miya Spence, and I went to the city council meeting in that town to petition them to restore the old cemetery, and it is a work in progress. The new people who have moved to this town do not seem to think saving the graveyard is relevant because they do not have family buried there, nor do they know about the importance of this burial site for those who were born in this town.

As a child, every time we passed the cemetery, my grandmother would say, "your granddaddy Jake Arnold is buried out there, and so are his father and mother and most of his siblings." She continued to say; Jake Arnold was not my grandfather Charlie Arnold, your real daddy. My great grandmother Josephine Jordan (Grandma Jo as we called her) had two children when she married granddaddy, Jake. "Charlie's real daddy last name is Stewart. So we should be called Stewart" she would say. But, for granddaddy, Jakes Arnold is the only man he knew as a father because he never met Mr. Stewart. As a child, I never thought of the consequences of having children in those days without a father. I am told that women who had children and was husbandless endured a great deal of pain by white men and women, black men, and some black women too. Women who had children out of wedlock were shunned and considered to be good

for nothing. Since Grandma Jo's two children did not carry the father's last name, it is assumed that she was not married to the father. During the lives of many Black families in America, children being born out of wedlock are prevalent and cause many women to experience another level of oppression. E. Franklin Frazier viewed the female-headed black family as both a symptom and source of family disorganization and a variety of other social ills.¹⁵⁷

This type of prejudiced thinking against black women has caused and left an indelible stain against all women of color who, for no fault of their own, are raising their children alone or who have had children out of wedlock. I can only imagine the pain my grandma Jo must have suffered before marrying great grandpa Jake.

During that time, many people were experiencing the great depression and new forms of oppression after the abolition of slavery. In my mind, I can see this once slave girl trying to figure out how to live an adult life in a place where Black people in America were treated as sub-humans, and black women were doubly oppressed by being Black and woman. Grandma Jo was eighty-two years old when I was born. I have fun memories of her stories about “Haints.”¹⁵⁸ She said since we lived so close to the cemetery that the “haints” could travel the streets among us even though we may never see them. There was a lynching tree in our neighborhood, at the other end of the street, in the fork of the road. Grandma Jo told stories about it and said this is where she saw most of the “haints.” She said, when people were hung, their spirits were unsettled, and they traveled the neighborhood day and night. Our community was called Cats Alley. It got its name from a man name Wiley Bradley (they called him Cat Bradley). Grandma Jo often told stories of how he was hung on the lynching tree and did not die. She said when those who

¹⁵⁷ E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States*, (Chicago, Ill. University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 639

¹⁵⁸ Haint is a word that refers to ghost or spirits.

lynched dropped Mr. Cat, he was still alive and his tongue hung out of his mouth. He had anger problems, could not talk, made grunting sounds to communicate and walked the streets with a rag tied around his neck to hold his tongue. Grandma said when Mr. Cat died, for a long time you could still hear him walking the streets in the neighborhood making grunting sounds. Most of our haints stories were told at night or on rainy days. I believe Grandma learned to tell her “haint” stories to escape her real reality of life. Daily life had to be a struggle for her because those were times when women could not work jobs - if there were any for Black women. All they could do were to work for white women in their homes or babysit their children. If the women were robust enough, they could work in the field. Grandma Jo was only about four feet tall and weighed less than one hundred pounds. She was happy to share her oral history with me. But, when she was tired from answering as a rash of questions I asked, she merely would turn to me and say, "Hush Gal, you talk too much." Grandma Jo died in 1974 at the ripe age of ninety-nine, and I can still hear her haint stories in my mind.

It is important that we regain this oral history because today's youth do not have lived experiences like the ones that helped many Blacks learn how to make a way out of no way. Young girls do not understand the roads that have been paved for them to get an education, employment and live without having the massive oppression that comes along with single parenting and having children out of wedlock. Even though we have come a long way since slavery, there are many more mountains to climb and burdens to bear.

Postmodernism and the Retrieval of Oral Tradition

Postmodernism is a movement that developed in the mid to late 20th century in many genres. Nevertheless, much of postmodern experience can be characterized through the retrieval of lost and forgotten traditions characteristic of particular people. In this section, I will address the late modern context of Black women's experience and their recovery of oral tradition through business, medicine, and song. For Black Americans, especially black women, she has begun to find her reality. Even though many white people and some of her counterparts once put her to shame, she is now looking to herself for self-motivation. Black women have learned to work and create their jobs where otherwise they had been turned away in other areas of commerce. She has educated herself to excel to a higher degree in places where many thought she would never surpass.

Black women have learned from their mothers to persevere in hard places during hard times. As Rachel Harding states in her book *Remnants*, "I learned from mom to pay attention to what was going on around us: to see the changes that were not always for the best."¹⁵⁹ As things begin to change in the communities where Black women live and engage in ministry, it behooves us all to pay attention to what is happening. As Black women become more accepted in the world, and in the church, there must be a keen understanding of which position the women are allowed to serve freely. Black women are coming to teams with how and where the doors are open that enables access point for black women today. As we revisit our oral traditions and culture, it is essential to hold fast to what we know. As urbanization took place in the 60's and 70's, black women learn to capture some of the ideas that were meant for her counterparts and

¹⁵⁹ Rosemary Freney Harding, *Remnants: A Memoir of Spirit, Activism, and Mothering with Rachel Harding*. (Durham, NC. Duke University Press, 2015) p.93.

strived. During the white flight in the early 80's, Black women were about to purchase homes and create business and other streams of income by the renewal of the oral history that helps Black women cultivate their families and home. Many Black women learned to become midwives and root doctors.

Some Black women are retrieving oral medical remedies and traditions. They are using these remedies to help the industry that many are now calling organic or holistic medicines and taking a little and making a lot. My Grandma Mattie Arnold planted gardens for food and healing. She would take herbs and rub them on our skin to cure poison ivy and give us tea that she made from a weed that she called rabbit tobacco for colds. When any of us got cuts, she would take fat meat from a cow or pig and mix it with spider webs, then tie it to the wound with a rag. When the cut heals, there will be little or no scars. I recall the time where some women in our neighborhood were fire healers. If someone got burned, they would talk the fire out of it. The practice of speaking the fire out meant that the burn was no longer stinging. I have personally witnessed this practice. My sister, Theresa West, was burned on her chest by an iron. My mother took her to the doctors, and she still was in pain after they had treated her and gave her medication. Not until my second-grade teacher, Ms. Coachman, noticed Theresa' burn begin to get better and the pain from the fire was gone. Ms. Coachman got close to Theresa's chest and started to talk silently, and I notice the blisters began to burst. Later on that same day Theresa was up playing and was not complaining of pain anymore.

Another retrieval of the tradition that needs to be transformed is that of the old Negro spirituals or the "power of Black singing." Many Black women can attest to the fact that whenever they were down, feeling left out or kicked out, they could always turn to the "power of singing." There has always been an unexplainable force when Black people sing black songs.

Harding says. "The thing that got me through is what has always gotten me through, Black songs. Singing those songs and hearing those voices. I sang. Calling on those old songs linked me to a tradition of sustenance in trauma much older than myself."¹⁶⁰ Many new gospel musical artist today has introduced a unique sound that can get a person to move. However, these songs cannot reach down in your soul and access where you are and bring wholeness to your dying situation. Songs of old have gotten many women out of trouble and caused them to stay in touch with their spirituality. Black songs kept families together. In my family and almost all southern families I knew growing up, children and adults of various ages spent a great deal of time together. Often at least three generations lived in the household, or next door and the young people benefited from the loving presence and guidance of grandparents and older relatives and the tradition of song handed down to them.

Consequently, the older generation would count on the energy and vitality of the younger ones and do not have to worry about being abandoned in the final years of their lives. Children were taught to respect their elders and recognize that there were spaces and times that they could not get into "grown folk" business. The lesson was a tradition that was rooted in respect for the elders in a way that it was expressed in the salutation towards one another. When older people were present, there was always a time to give homage to them so that they could share a nugget of wisdom for us. Unlike today's youth, many were particular with the language they used, especially in the presences of the elderly. Nowadays, many elderly grandparents have pushed aside and disrespected. Religious values have left most families. Fathers are moving away from home more frequently. Mothers are abandoning their children by being out of the house working jobs to care for the children yet giving them the authority to care for themselves. Women have

¹⁶⁰Ibid, pg. 123.

progressed in many ways. However, there has been so much abandonment that the children have not learned the hospitality and respect that was taught at home, mostly by the women.

Acknowledging Past Oral Traditions in Black Culture

Traditionally, women have spent more time than men in the home as guidance and caregiver to children and their elderly parents. Such time spent home in the house was an opportunity to teach the culture and traditions to the growing family. Children were taught to say "yes ma'am and no sir" to their elders (unless they were relatives, then, you would address them as the uncle, aunt, or cousin). The teaching would show that the child has had good home training. It has become a trend today that children leave home after high school to either go to college or to go on their own. This structure leaves the family circle broken, and without a healthy foundation to maintain family harmony and values. One can claim that the family should acknowledge the need for cohesion to maintain the culture and keep the tradition alive. The idea of three or more generations living in the same neighborhood or close by has been downplayed so badly, that it has almost become taboo for children to live at home after a certain age, especially the boys and men.

In some homes, there were men present and many children witnessed leadership, working while the women cared for the home. Even though some fathers may not have been in the home, other men in the community were examples. Even though oral history states that men are often out of the home, there were men in the neighborhood that set a standard for boys to follow without them being the biological father. Some single women were able to rely on men in the neighborhood to help them with chores that they could not do without a man. As Harding says, "In the Black community, there was often a kind of status quasi-ceremonial care in the way they

reacted towards each other. In some respect, this must have been an antidote to the indignities these men and women regularly suffered."¹⁶¹

It is almost impossible to bring back the days when one paycheck could suffice to care for the family. However, the tradition of how the older women and men pulled the family together to tell the oral history is being lost. Our past ancestors had to hold the family together and teach younger members how to be and live in this world. Another tradition, as this one needs renewal. If the grandparents lived close by or within the home, both parents could work to bring back some stability to the Black family. There are many hypotheticals, however, as we all know, cohesiveness in the Black family is slowly becoming a thing of the past. Many Black parents are encouraging their children, who are above eighteen years of age, to move out the home to work or go to school in hopes of them finding their way of life. For the Black family to become whole and strive again, this type of thinking and behavior must cease.

Acknowledging Current Oral Traditions in Black Culture

Today the Black community is evolving and going through some form of metamorphosis. Black culture and Black life is changing rapidly by the pop and hip-hop culture. Even some churches are finding ways to add an element of the pop and hip-hop culture within its worship service. From the early beginning of the Black community, the church has always been the nucleus of and strength of the Black neighborhoods. Almost every critical event and development that happened in the Black community started in the church. The Black church set the tone for the black community. As James Cone explains it, "In African traditional beliefs, the reality was viewed as a single system with no sharp distinction between the secular and the

¹⁶¹Ibid. p. 23.

sacred."¹⁶² In the past, the church held its music and worshiped sacred. The slave spiritual had messages filled with symbolism to obscure its meaning. Cone further pointed out, "When it was not possible for slaves to steal away into the woods at night, they often camouflaged their language with biblical and apocalyptic images."¹⁶³ He also added, "Blacks would use their songs to express God's judgment against slavery as well as their political intentions to fight for freedom."¹⁶⁴ During that time, Black churches tradition allowed for a distinct difference in how the church received people who were not part of the body than they do today. If a person were a rhyme and blues singer, he or she would not be allowed to take part in the worship services. Today, the tradition enables its church members to work at nightclubs and led praise and worship services on Sunday morning. Secular music has found its place in the Black church. Whereas in days of old secular music was kept out of the church. It seems as if the current trends have switched roles when it comes to music. Never-the-less, many of the traditions that were of old that have been left out for the sake of keeping up with the times. Nonetheless, many of the myths that restricted women in the church ironically are still prevalent today.

And yet women, in some of the East Coast Baptist Association churches are beginning to have a place in leadership. But, as I stated in a previous chapter, these women are not allowed to pastor the church. When it comes to following rules concerning the restrictions of women, they are the first ones to be enforced. Many of these rules are "off the books" but strictly enforced. One speaks to the women in the church and the community in several ways. First, the tradition holds fast to the attire of women in the church and yet allows its women to have secular attire when they are not attending church. In days of old, women who were apart of these churches,

¹⁶²James Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology*, (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1999), p. 85.

¹⁶³ Ibid, p. 144.

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

were not allowed to wear pants at all. Katie Clark Blakesley pointed out in her article, *A Style of Our Own*,

Historically, the modesty of dress has had important symbolic meaning for leaders and members of the Church. Male leaders of the Church, often warned women against following the "indecent" fashions of the world, challenging them to separate themselves from women of the world and dress accordingly. Independent thought was heralded as a virtue, as long as it led women to shun the world and secular dress. Miniskirts were not the only new fashions that concerned Church authorities; many leaders in the late 1960s and 1970s equated appropriate dress for women with "feminine" dress. Popular women's fashions in the mid to late 1960s included collarless jackets and bellbottoms, and "women's fashion increasingly favored the 'boy look; full breasts and hips [fashionable in the 1950s] go out of style as women try to make themselves look as androgynous as possible. Women of the world began to wear pants, jeans, and more casual clothing, adopting a unisex look, but Church leaders pled with women to retain their feminine charm."¹⁶⁵

Not only was this demand for black women, but it was also amongst some white churches too.

As years progressed, many congregations allowed women to wear pants but not to wear them to church. Today many of these church traditions do not let women wear pants inside of the churches during service. Pastors use Deuteronomy 25:8 to substantiate his request that women refrain from wearing pants to church. "The women shall not wear that which pertain unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment for all who do so are an abomination unto the Lord your God."¹⁶⁶ Many East Coast Baptist Association churches hold fast to this scripture and forbid women from entering the church wearing pants. Never-the-less, many of these women wear pants at other venues. Most of the churches who enforce "the no-pants" rule have no restriction on the length of the dresses and skirts for women. Most times the pastor simply encourages all women to come as they are except "no pants."

¹⁶⁵ Katie Clark Blakesley, "A Style of Our Own: Modesty and Mormon 1952 to 2008", *Women Source: Dialogue*, 42 no 2 Sum 2009, pp. 26-27.

¹⁶⁶ New King James Version, Deuteronomy 25:8.

Another way that the current oral tradition speaks to Black women is that of the "super-woman Syndrome," which reflects a definition formulated by Michelle Wallace and Lynn Hayes. According to Barbara Huddleson Mattai, "It describes a woman who is to be everything to everyone, juggling family life, social life, and commitments outside the home."¹⁶⁷ Whether a Black woman is married or single, she is required by the culture to be nourishing and take care of the home at the same time assisting in "bringing home the bacon." When the tradition says, "A woman's work is never done," it means that Black women do not have time for self-care without suffering the risk of abandonment of some area of her life and family's life. Having to work eight or more hours a day away from home, then come home, clean, cook, and assist children with what is going on in their lives; what time is left for self-care? Regardless of all of the busyness that comes with the work of Black women, she needs to find room for self-care. Self-care leads to self-love. According to Melanie L. Harris, in a compilation of articles in Stacey Thomas Floyd's *Deeper Shades of Purple*, she says, "The presence of self-love in womanist thought, it is the most well-known value exclaimed in a three- word phrase of the womanist definition. The phrase Love herself regardless, implies a strong tone, encouraging Black women who identify with the term womanist, to embrace and love their whole selves, despite external circumstances and interrelated social oppression."¹⁶⁸

Black women have been ostracized and dehumanized for so long that womanist's call for black women to have a relational communion with self. Self-love captures the womanist's primary goal to empower black women and women of color everywhere. Harris further notes, "In the Black culture, the link between knowing the self, self-autonomy, and owning authority

¹⁶⁷Barbara Huddleston-Mattai, "The Black Female Academician and the "Superwoman Syndrome." *Race, Gender & Class* 3, no. 1 (1995): 50-51. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41675346>. Accessed 4-16-2018.

¹⁶⁸Stacy M. Floyd Thomas, *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, (New York, New York University Press, 2006) p. 218.

over one's self-dates back to encounters of existing as a people whose humanness was not always assumed. Throughout American racial history, arguments for the dehumanization of black women and men were used to scientifically prove the inferiority of Blacks and the superiority of whites."¹⁶⁹ So, black women must practice self-care to assure self-love which is a vital part of what make the womanist thought work and women of color everywhere come to be empowered.

Next, in acknowledging the current oral tradition in Black culture, there is a call for Black women to educate themselves to compete in a world where white men control and white women and black men dominate. However, it is reported by the National Center for Education Statistic/ US Census; Black women are now the most educated group in the United States. Unfortunately, while Black women may be the highest knowledgeable, they make up just 8% of private sector jobs and less than 2% of leadership roles.¹⁷⁰ Obviously, this is problematic, and there has to be a great injustice in the hiring process. As stated earlier, African American women are the last to be hired and the first to be fired. So, if they are hard workers, skilled and educated, what is the problem in the hiring process in America? The tradition calls for women to educate themselves and they do, only to find out when all of the education is completed, they are just left with high student loans and low paying jobs (if they have not over-qualified themselves in the process of training). I concur with the finding of this report because I too am a product of this injustice. After all the hard work and labor, the institutions refuse to subrogate one person for the other. Thousands of dollars are spent on education only to offer an Adjunct position or jobs where degrees are not required. It is very discouraging to have a potential employer view your resume and transcript and say to you that either you are not qualified for the job, or the school

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 219.

¹⁷⁰ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2017). Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2017 (NCES 2017-051, (Degrees Awarded).

you attended is not accredited to deny you the privilege of employment. And if you are offered the job, you are provided less pay and more extended hours. For the educated Black woman to get ahead, she still has to put in more hours and be better than her male or white counterpart. She must be willing to take the meager wages and task and do her job, and someone else's too to be respected as an equal. This also feels dehumanizing. When you look at your White and Black male classmates, and the white women classmates too, and see they have excelled, it makes you wonder if this is indeed God's plan for the life of a Black woman.

Biblical Text as an Extension of the Oral Tradition

When Jesus met the woman at the well, he found her working. She came to the well to fetch water. The Bible did not say how far of a walk it was to get the container of water and return to her home. I can only imagine that the water must have been heavy for her to carry and the trail may have been a far distance. Jesus spoke to her and asked her to change. I believe she was motivated to change when she was so excited about her experience with Jesus that she started a marketing campaign to tell all she came in contact with to "come see a man." It was if Jesus had given her another job to do. The woman was never mentioned again going to the well. Black women are called to work at an early age. Some are not given the privilege to only stay at home and work. She must work outside and inside the house to help support the family, or she just may be the sole breadwinner and others depend on her for their livelihood. But whatever it is, just like the woman at the well, many Black women are willing and ready for a change. The community looks down on her when she is single, widowed, or childless. I believe that the woman at the well was all three, and she also had a companion at home that was not her husband. It could only be imagined the criticism she followed this woman for being in the state

she was in. Some commentaries describe her even as being a prostitute. The Bible never referred to her as a prostitute; it merely called her the woman at the well.

Just as the woman at the well endured an enormous amount of scrutiny for being single, many Black women experience the same or more examination with or without children for just being whom they are, black. Many womanist theologians look to Hagar as another example of a biblical comparison to black women who have suffered oppression. She is a crucial feature in the hermeneutics of black religious women and their cultural traditions being forced to do things that she did not desire or had no control over. As Delores Williams sees it, "Hagar's story is a route to black women's issues."¹⁷¹ This is the story found in Genesis 16 of women who have been oppressed on every level. She was forced into slavery, made to become a single parent and liberated herself from the snares of her oppressors. First Hagar, a slave girl was the answer to problems confronting a wealthy Hebrew slave-owning family composed of Sara, Hagar's owner, and Abraham, Sara's husband.

The biblical text illustrates for us a slave woman's story of being forced into inescapable bondage that was shaped by problems and desires of the slave master. Sara was barren and bore no children for her husband. But she had an Egyptian slave girl named Hagar. So, as the story tells us, Sara said to Abram, "God has kept her from having children so go into my slave girl Hagar so that I may have children through her. And Abram did as Sarah suggested."¹⁷² Motherhood is introduced early in this text. Obviously, Sara believes that God had the power to give her a child however since she was old in her body and she felt that it had to be another way. It is interesting to note that the text refers to Hagar as Abraham's wife and not his concubine. I

¹⁷¹ Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-talk*. (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books 1993). p. 19.

¹⁷²Genesis 16:1-2.

can only imagine that Hagar was a young virgin that Abraham who was well in his nineties did not have a problem with making his wife. The text never gave Hagar's age; it says she was a young slave girl; therefore maybe she was in her teenage years and forced to marry an old ninety plus year's old man. From Sara's point of view, she had no concern for how this may affect the young girl, being taken by an old man, and made to be a parent. All Sara had in mind was her status as Abraham's wife. Because motherhood was a privilege that granted her that status. For the Israelite woman of that time, there was no greater sorrow than to be childless.¹⁷³

The story of Hagar reminds many African American women of the oral tradition taught to us by our grandmothers of how women during slavery became "wet nurses." This meant that a woman who had milk would share her milk with the white woman's child. As long as she produced milk the longer, she nursed the child. Even though Hagar was the biological mother of the child, Sara was the owner of both Hagar and the child by law at that time. Hagar could only do for the child as Sara wished. Wet nursing slave women were allowed to nurse the white child and her child too, as long as the children did not nurse from the same breast.

The Hagar story is one of the most liberating stories of all times and is being called upon today to motivate and liberate women of color from any mental and physical oppression. Delores Williams calls Hagar "the first woman in the Bible to liberate herself from oppressive powers structures. Though the law prescribed harsh punishment for runaway slaves, she took the risk rather than endure brutal treatment from Sara."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³Israel 54:1.

¹⁷⁴ Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-talk*. (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1993). p. 19.

Many times, at no fault of her own, Black women inherit oppression by just being in the midst of people whose only concern is to have their desires met. A biblical example of this is the story of Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, one of King Saul's concubines, and the mother of Armoni and Mephibosheth.¹⁷⁵ After the death of King Saul, a dispute arose between Abner, the cousin of Saul and the commander in chief of his army, and Ishobeth, Saul's son and assessor. He was King of the Judah. The dispute was over the accusation that Abner was having an affair with Rizpah. The disagreement led to Abner defecting to King David, the downfall of Judah, Ishobeth's Kingdom, and the rise of David as king of a United Kingdom of Israel.¹⁷⁶

During Saul's reign as King, he made a wealth of enemies, especially the Gibeonites. King David tried to make peace with his allies by offering restitution. He asked the Gibeonites what satisfaction they demanded compensation for the wrong Saul caused. They answered and said nothing would compensate for the wrong Saul had done to them but the death of his seven sons. David delivered unto them Rizpah's two sons, the five sons of Merab, and Saul's eldest daughter. The Gibeonites put them to death and hung their bodies at the sanctuary of Gileah. Rizpha took her place on a rock and for five months watched the suspended bodies of her children, and waved a big sack cloth to keep them from being devoured by birds and beast. When King David heard of her desperate act, he retrieved the bodies and gave them a proper burial.¹⁷⁷ Rizpha's act is that of every Black woman who sees her sons and daughters prematurely killed for reasons of the state, be it at war or the lack of police protection in our urban centers.

¹⁷⁵ 2 Samuel 21:1-14.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

African American women's suffrage continues unpredictably, if it is not in the hands of others causing grief to her person, then it is others causing her pain by exploiting her children. Subrina Fulton, the mother of Trayvon Martin, can be viewed as a modern-day Rizpha. She continues to seek justice for her child who was killed by an angry white man. Fulton steps up and assists many other Black women who suffer from broken hearts after the wrongful death of her child. Just like Rizpha, her children did nothing wrong. Instead, her child's death stems from an act of revenge. Just as Rizpha's two sons, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Cameron Tillman, VonDerrit Myers Jr., Laquan McDonald, Carey Smith Viramontes, Jeffery Holden, Qusean Whitten, Miguel Benton, Dillion McGee, Karen Cifuentes, Sergio Ramos, Roshad McIntosh, Diana Showman, and so many others, finds there Black mothers living with indescribable grief, oppression, and pain.

African American Experience and the Biblical Text

In many cases, Black women can be looked upon as the stone that the builder rejected. Over the years they have persevered through hard times. There is a crisis today in the leadership of men in America across social, political, religious and economic spectrums. The moral failures are at the highest level in our government, and other senseless atrocities are being played out in our streets all over the world. Women of all ethnicities are crying out for help. They are beginning to feel the pressures of life that was once only afforded to Black women who cried for help and no one listened. However, womanist biblical and theological interpretation may be the most useful at the beginning of the discussion of leadership among African American women. The Bible has functioned as the highest source in developing this moral praxis and theology. The stories of Jesus' encounter with women has empowered Black women to refute traditions in the western culture that depicts Black women as "doomed" to a life of servitude. There are three

critical events in the presence of Jesus where women can be interpreted in a way that is uplifting and motivation for Black women to follow.

First, we see Jesus' first encounter with women at his birth. He had to use a woman in this case because a man cannot bear a child. Plus, the girl (Mary) was an innocent virgin girl that knew no man. We see the nine months of pregnancy and the pain and agony of childbirth. This kind of pain is only specific to a woman. At the same time, many people of that day did not believe that a woman could have an immaculate conception as Mary did. I can only imagine how they must have spewed malicious gospel all over her community that she had a child out of wedlock. When Black girls have a baby out of wedlock, they are called all kind of names and put in a class all by themselves. They are "dis-fellowshipped" from their churches and ostracized by family members and neighbors.

Secondly, we see women with Jesus on the cross in his dying moments. The women were dedicated and committed to him until death. Just as some African American women, they give their all to the mission of the church. Because, as Jacqueline Grant explains, "Black women understand God in two sources: God's revelation directly to them and secondly God's revelation as witnessed in the bible and as read and heard in the context of their experience. Jesus' encounters with women were liberating. Even though, in his time, it was not customary for men to accompanied women anywhere if they were not in a relationship with him as a family. It was against the social norms of the times. Never-the-less, of Jesus' ministry Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna accompanied Jesus and supported him out of their private means.¹⁷⁸ Jesus gave no specific teaching about women. He treated every woman he met as a person in her

¹⁷⁸ Luke 8:1-3.

rights. This is why the teachings of Jesus remain relevant to how Black women's survival in the struggles of being Black in a white man's world. Womanist and feminist theologians have built their entire method on how Jesus responded to women in the bible.¹⁷⁹ He said, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: ye are all one in Christ."¹⁸⁰ According to Karen Baker-Fletcher, "this verse affirms the equality of the races and nations and women and men. Historically this verse has been popular among Black women, and women especially those claiming a call to preach."¹⁸¹

To get through tough times, many Black women sang their way through. As Cheryl A. Kirk Duggan puts it, in a chapter in Emilie M. Townes book *Embracing the Spirit*, "African American women live, compose, and sing spirituals, hymns, Gospels, and Blues. Sometimes, they sing because they were happy, sometimes they sing because they're free, sometimes they sing from plain old misery. Black women sing what they experienced."¹⁸² There is something mystical about the songs that Black women sing to express what is happening with them spiritually. Any given time that you hear many of them sing it will make your hair stand on end, especially if it is a spiritual song. It is almost as if they can reach heaven with their voices. Black women have a gift of conjuring spirits. Rosemarie Freeney Harding tells of her understanding of conjuring.

Conjure, and healing is both forms of transformation, the process of change
As is activism. I recall a story that Bernice Johnson Reagon has told on
Many occasions about the alchemy of singing in the mass meeting,
Demonstrations, and marches of the Southern Freedom Movement.
Bernice, an extraordinary musician, organizer, and scholar, describes the
experience of marching out of the movement church into the streets of

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Galatians 3:28.

¹⁸¹ Karen Baker-Fletcher, *A Singing Something; Womanist Reflection on Anna Julia Cooper*, (Lexington, N.Y. Crossroads Publishing, 1994), p.168.

Albany, Georgia, and toward the particular store or public facility that was the object of the day's demonstration. Raising their voices with freedom songs in the cadence and spirit of the church, Bernice, and her fellow marchers could feel the songs swell into the air around them and transform space. The songs changed the atmosphere, becoming an almost palpable barrier between demonstrators and the police, giving the marchers an internal girding that allowed them to move without fear. Music and particular the sacred music of the Black experience has long been the alchemical resource for struggle; a conjured strength.¹⁸³

The conjured singing is how many African American women survived the tortured lifestyle. From the cotton fields of Georgia to the Oval Office in the Whitehouse, African American women have had to depend on the spirit to guide her through her pain. Many are still using this method today as they experience abuse in their homes, on their jobs, and in the church too. If a Black Christian woman or girl is ever seen singing or humming her song, it is more than likely that she is conjuring her spirit to reach a sense of security and wholeness that only God through Jesus Christ can give. I have come to understand that when Black women are in pain, have been disappointed, depressed or oppressed, they go quickly to God, or someone else who they think will help them with their grief. Since many Black women are private with their personal lives, they mostly escape to space in God where they can be transparent with their feelings and try to become spiritual by spending time with God for directions to regain strength and voice.

Conclusion

Womanist hermeneutics in the Black church is still a work in process. Many East Coast Baptist Churches are unfamiliar with this type of theological hermeneutics. However, more and more Black women are embracing their call to ministry and have begun to matriculate in seminaries and universities in order to get a better understanding and training in how to minister

¹⁸³Rosemarie Freeney Harding, *Remnant; A Memoir of Spirit, Activism, and Mothering* (Durham, Duke University 2015), pp. 122-123

in today's churches if given access. Never the less, many churchwomen have a misconception about Womanist theology and theologians. They misconstrue what is meant to be black and feminine at the same time. Emilie Townes explains, "Womanist theology takes old religious language and symbols and gives them new meanings. This form of theological reflection cannot be termed, "Womanist" simply because the subject is black women's religious experience."¹⁸⁴ Townes understanding of Womanist theology is that the "key for Womanist theology is to the use of an interstructural analysis, employing class, gender, and race. This type of analysis is both descriptive and prescriptive."¹⁸⁵ The primary purpose of the development of Womanist theology was to give voice to the oppressed and voiceless Black women to bring wholeness to her their situation, and to address the shortcomings of Black and Feminist theology. Townes continues her critique of Womanist theology by saying, "most Womanist theology has been Protestant, although Catholic voices have been strong from its inception."¹⁸⁶ Many Black men have also written about their view on Womanist theology and have declared that it is a theology for women who are lesbian or who are scorned by their husbands or men and it not viable. Adam Bond points out in his book, *The Imposing Preacher: Samuel Dewitt Proctor and Black Public Faith*, that Samuel Proctor never acknowledges Womanist theology. He continued to say, "Proctor could not see a Womanist Theology as a viable option for sustaining genuine community. He looked to them as offering a hyphenated theology and a reflection of the divisive spirit in the Black community."¹⁸⁷ The true essence of what Womanist theology stands for, and what it means, need to be taught in all Black churches by women and for women. However, how can this

¹⁸⁴ Emile M. Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory: Womanist Spirituality and Social Witness*, (Nashville, TN. Abingdon Press, 1995), p. 163.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Adam Bond, *The Imposing Preacher: Samuel Dewitt Proctor and Black Public Faith*, (Minnesota, Fortress Press, 2013), p. 8.

happen, if the pastors are limiting the messages of what the women in their churches should and should not teach? If Black women get the teaching on this subject, I am sure that they will come to an understanding of what Alice Walker meant when she coined the phrase Womanist.

Appendix 1

Flyer to recruit for questionnaire:



Looking for black women to participate in a Research Study about the plight of black women in the church and in the world.

Are you a woman who is a member of the Florida East Coast Association?

Are you Black?

Do you serve in your ministry?

Please call Gwendolyn West, a Doctoral Student at Barry University, (786) 287-8582 or email me at gspence45@aol.com for more information. No Minors are allowed to participate.

For more information about this study you may contact my thesis mentor Dr. Alicia Marill at (305) 899-3442 or amarill@barry.edu, or the Barry University IRB point of contact Barbara Cook at (305) 899-3020.

Appendix 2

Barry University Cover Letter

Your participation in a research project is requested. The title of the study is Hush Gal No More: A Ministerial Approach to Integrating Womanist Theology in the Black Church. The research is being conducted by Gwendolyn West, a student in the Philosophy and Theology department at Barry University, and is seeking information that will be useful in the field of Theology. The aims of the research are to create access points and ideal settings, the voices of black women laity in the church, whose stories have contributed to a meta-narrative of a struggling community, can be captured and heard in meaningful ways. Giving voice to this part of the community will be beneficial to the whole community, since sharing an articulated way of being will allow for growth among trained womanist theologians, laywomen, and black men together, the Black Church.

In accordance with these aims, the following procedures will be used: an anonymous questionnaire. We anticipate the number of participants to be 20.

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to do the following: Answer a questionnaire or interview questions, which will take about 20 minutes of your time.

Your consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary and should you decline to participate or should you choose to drop out at any time during the study, there will be no adverse effects on your health care, employment, or church affiliation.

There are no known risks of involvement in this study. Although there are no direct benefits to you, your participation in this study may help our understanding of black women in ministry and in the world at large.

As a research participant, information you provide will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Any published results of the research will refer to group averages only and no names will be used in the study. Data will be kept in a locked file in the researcher's office. All data will be destroyed after five years.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your participation in the study, you may contact me, Gwendolyn West, at (786) 287-8582, my supervisor Dr. Marill, at (305) 899 3442, or the Institutional Review Board point of contact, Barbara Cook, at (305) 899-3020. If you are satisfied with the information provided and are willing to participate in this research, please signify your consent by completing this survey.

Appendix 3

Barry University Informed Consent Form

Your participation in a research project is requested. The title of the study is Hush Gal No More: A Ministerial Approach to Integrating Womanist Theology in the Black Church. The research is being conducted by Gwendolyn West, a student in the Philosophy and Theology department at Barry University, and is seeking information that will be useful in the field of Theology. The aims of the research are to create access points and ideal settings, the voices of black women laity in the church, whose stories have contributed to a meta-narrative of a struggling community, can be captured and heard in meaningful ways. Giving voice to this part of the community will be beneficial to the whole community, since sharing an articulated way of being will allow for growth among trained womanist theologians, laywomen, and black men together, the Black Church.

In accordance with these aims, the following procedures will be used: face-to-face interviews. We anticipate the number of participants to be 5. If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to do the following: Answer interview questions while being audio and video recorded, which will take about an hour of your time. If you and I agree that further time is needed, a second hour-long interview may be arranged.

Your consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary and should you decline to participate or should you choose to drop out at any time during the study, there will be no adverse effects on your health care, employment, or church affiliation.

There are no known risks of involvement in this study. Although there are no direct benefits to you, your participation in this study may help our understanding of black women in ministry and in the world at large.

As a research participant, information you provide will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. You have the choice of allowing me to use your real name in any published results of this research, or to use a pseudonym. Data will be kept in a locked file in the researcher's office. The interview video will be held indefinitely in Barry's Library for further use if other students wish to continue the study of black women and the church or in the world. Your signed consent form will be kept separate from the data.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your participation in the study, you may contact me, Gwendolyn West, at (786) 287-8582, my supervisor Dr. Marill,

at (305) 899 3442, or the Institutional Review Board point of contact, Barbara Cook, at (305) 899-3020. If you are satisfied with the information provided and are willing to participate in this research, please signify your consent by signing this consent form.

Voluntary Consent

I acknowledge that I have been informed of the nature and purposes of this experiment by _____ and that I have read and understand the information presented above, and that I have received a copy of this form for my records. I give my voluntary consent to participate in this experiment.

Signature of Participant Date

Use my real name? Yes _____
 No _____

Researcher Date

Appendix 4

Questionnaire

In effort to gather data for a Doctoral Research in Practical Theology, I am distributing an anonymous questionnaire to Black women, who are members of the East Coast Baptist Association of South Florida. If you fit these criteria and would like to freely participate in a survey it would be greatly appreciated. There is no self-identifying information in this questionnaire and there is no risk or reward to the responder for her participation.

Survey Questions:

1. What is your age group?
 - a. 18 to 25
 - b. 26 to 35
 - c. 45 to 50
 - d. 51 to 65
 - e. 66 and above

2. Are you a member of both a local church and the East Coast Association?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

3. How long have you been a member of the East Coast Baptist Association and (or) your local church?
 - a. 1 to 5 years
 - b. 6 to 10
 - c. 1 to 15 years
 - d. 15 to 20 years
 - e. More than 20 year

4. What is your employment status?
 - a. Employed: full _____ part time _____

- b. Unemployed: How long _____
- c. Self Employed
- d. Business Owner: How many employee _____
- e. Retired
- f. Disabled

5. Do you pay tithe? _____yes _____no

If yes, do you pay?

- a. Less than 10%
- b. 10%
- c. More than 10%

6. Are you active in ministry?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes, is your ministerial service: ministry in your local church:

- a. Yes
- b. No

Or in the East Coast Baptist Association:

- a. Yes
- b. No

7. Have you held a position in leadership in the East Coast Baptist Association?

- a. Yes
- b. No

8. Have you held a position in leadership in your local church?

- c. Yes
- d. No

9. Is your Pastor
 - a. Male
 - b. Female

10. Do you feel that there are enough women exercising leadership in the East Coast Association?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

11. Do you feel that there are enough women exercising leadership in your local church?
 - c. Yes
 - d. No

12. How many women from your local church are in leadership with the East Coast Association?
 - a. 80%
 - b. 50%
 - c. 30%
 - d. 20%
 - e. 10%
 - f. None

13. What is the percentage of women in your local church in leadership position?
 - a. 90%
 - b. 50%
 - c. 20%
 - d. 10%
 - e. None

14. If you had to name a ministerial issue that concerns you the most in your local church and the East Coast Association what would it be? _____

15. If there was one ministerial issue you could change in the East Coast Association and your local church what would it be? _____

16. Are there any main ministerial issues concerning women in the East Coast Association that concerns you? If so, what is it? _____

Appendix 5

Interview questions for Our Living Legends.

1. Under what circumstances did you come to a religious knowledge?
2. Did you have dreams of being in leadership in your church? If so, what does that dream look like? If not why?
3. Based on your experience do you believe that women are silenced in the church, work place and the home? Please provide examples?
4. Was there any time that you were denied being heard in church, in your home or the work place? What was that about? Explain the circumstances.
5. Based on your experiences what forms of prejudices do women endure in the churches in America?
6. Based on your experience how do you feel about women's relationships with each other?
7. In recent years the word "mad" has been used to refer to black women, In your experience what does it mean to you? Do you consider yourself mad? If so, why. If not why not?
8. What would you like to see come to be for women in the Black church in the US for the future?

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