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# Why Does the Caged Bird Sing? A Phenomenological Analysis of the African American Clergywoman and Her Plight in Black Churches: An Ethical Dilemma

## Abstract

This qualitative analysis with a phenomenological approach seeks to address the fact that the Black Churches fail many of its members, specifically the female segment, which encompasses at least eighty-five to ninety percent of the churches population. Despite the historical evidence of how the Black Church championed causes/issues of discrimination, while being considered the bastion of liberation, African American females historically have been disregarded, disrespected and denied leadership opportunities, by the patriarchal leadership. This deleterious, ecclesial episteme (the churches system of understanding) and the ideology of African American male clergy, toward clergywomen, have developed strategies of containment, designed consciously and subconsciously to keep women out of senior ecclesial leadership positions; through the denial of ordination, preaching opportunities, leadership roles, and misogynistic sermons and theologies, are problematic. It is imperative to deconstruct the ideology related to the male knowledge and power percepts, given the claims of liberation from all forms of oppression by Black churches. By suggesting that indicators of disregard and disrespect can be interpreted as sociocultural problems in the Black Church generally. Whereas the prevailing notion that the paramount objective of the African American church is liberation for all; It is argued that several factors ingrained in the very fabric of Black Theology work to perpetuate oppression of African American clergywomen as well as their subsequent complicity. This dissertation develops from the findings, supporting facts needed for the transformation of institutional, community and individual ways of governing in Black Churches in terms of strategies of resistance, while establishing explanations for revolutionary thoughts and behaviors.

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**WHY DOES THE CAGED BIRD SING? A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS  
OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGYWOMAN AND HER PLIGHT IN  
BLACK CHURCHES: AN ETHICAL DILEMMA**

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the University of Denver

and the Iliff School of Theology Joint PhD Program

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Andriette Jordan-Fields

November 2017

Advisor: Dr. Miguel De La Torre

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Author: Andriette Jordan-Fields

Title: **WHY DOES THE CAGED BIRD SING? A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGYWOMAN AND HER PLIGHT IN BLACK CHURCHES: AN ETHICAL DILEMMA**

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This qualitative analysis with a phenomenological approach seeks to address the fact that the Black Churches fail many of its members, specifically the female segment, which encompasses at least eighty-five to ninety percent of the churches population. Despite the historical evidence of how the Black Church championed causes/issues of discrimination, while being considered the bastion of liberation, African American females historically have been disregarded, disrespected and denied leadership opportunities, by the patriarchal leadership. This deleterious, ecclesial episteme (the churches system of understanding) and the ideology of African American male clergy, toward clergywomen, have developed strategies of containment, designed consciously and subconsciously to keep women out of senior ecclesial leadership positions; through the denial of ordination, preaching opportunities, leadership roles, and misogynistic sermons and theologies, are problematic. It is imperative to deconstruct the ideology related to the male knowledge and power percepts, given the claims of liberation from all forms of oppression by Black churches. By suggesting that indicators of disregard and disrespect can be interpreted as sociocultural problems in the Black Church generally. Whereas the prevailing notion that the paramount objective of the African American church is liberation for all; It is argued that several factors ingrained in the very fabric of Black Theology work to perpetuate oppression of African American clergywomen as

well as their subsequent complicity. This dissertation develops from the findings, supporting facts needed for the transformation of institutional, community and individual ways of governing in Black Churches in terms of strategies of resistance, while establishing explanations for revolutionary thoughts and behaviors.

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I dedicate my soul's work, to the my mother Willie M. Jordan, my grandmother Hazel T. Jordan and my late Auntie Alwena Sample, they were always believed I could do anything I put my mind to. Also to my children Jordan, Alana and Brittany and cousin Dr. Reginald Sample and best friend Rev. Dr. Valerie L. Jackson you all have been an inspiration to keep working, keeping believing, keep doing all that I believe in.

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# **Why Does the Caged Birds Sing? A Phenomenological Analysis of the African American Clergywoman and Her Plight in Black Churches: An Ethical Dilemma**

## **Introduction**

Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference – those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are black, who are older – know that survival is not an academic skill ... For the master's tools will not dismantle the master's house. They will never allow us to bring about genuine change.<sup>1</sup>

~Audre Lorde

*Unbought and Unbossed* like the title of Shirley Chisholm's book written in 1970, my grandmother, Mrs. Hazel Jordan taught me the importance of independent thinking, and instilled in me the courage to exercise my voice and agency.

As a young girl growing up in Augusta Georgia, my grandmother was and is my shero. She moved, with intentionality, from working as a domestic to owning her own business. Once she shared the story of working for a family as a housekeeper, and around one Easter the family went on vacation; the woman she worked for told my grandmother that a friend of hers, could use some help during the week that they were out of town. After working a long and hard week for this particular woman, prior to leaving, my grandmother went to get her pay for her weeks work. She recalled the woman flippantly stating, " Oh, Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ told me that I didn't have to give you anything, since you would normally have worked for her." My grandmother said for all the work that woman

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<sup>1</sup> Audre, Lorde. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 2007

had her doing, when she could have been home making her daughters' Easter outfits and now she exhausted, not paid for a weeks work, she was so angry that she could have killed that white woman. She stated, "she never had any intentions of paying me for the work." My grandmother had the temperament of Miss Sophie in the *Color Purple*; she did not play and demanded respect from all. That day she declared, "I will never work for another soul like that ever again." She quit the domestic work and began to work out at Fort Gordon, a military base in Augusta, Georgia, in the cafeteria with the goal of saving up money to start her own business. She wanted to be a beautician, owning her own salon, which she named Ideal Beauty Shop.

Now after years under my grandmothers' spoken and unspoken tutelage as early as the age of five; I can remember exercising my skills in reasoning and logic, of course I did not know that was what I was doing at the time. I questioned my grandmother and retorted with what my young mind thought was a reasonable way of doing whatever the task was and her response was, ok you being "*womanish*" which I heard as "omanish", you getting a little to grown for your pants. I remember my heart skipping a beat and the feeling of confusion because I was only doing what she had taught me, to think and speak for myself. Ironically, not until forty years later did I realize that she was speaking powerfully in my life; she was talking about what Alice Walker defined in her book, *In Search of Our Mothers Garden*, the first definition: *womanish*: from the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "you acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown

up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." I had stepped out of my place and was perceived as acting grown.

Now some forty plus years later, I am proud to declare that I am a Womanist ethicist committed to critically engaging the canonical, theological and philosophical assumptions of agency existing free from oppression. Womanist ethics provides a unified framework by which one can critically analyzed moral agents, actions, and relationships of social oppression. My observation of the treatment of African American clergywomen

The impetus for this dissertation stemmed from my experiences as a former wife of a preacher and observing the treatment of clergywomen by their fellow male clergy. Having insider information on how clergywomen were treated or mistreated or valued and devalued. I asked the question: Are African American clergywomen faced with strategies of containment preventing them from obtaining primary leadership positions in Black Churches? Women's historical presence in the discourse on racial and gender inequity has prevailed; evidence of this notion, is the realization of the vast number of women's movement groups/social organizations providing a platform for their voice, visibility and moral compass. In the twenty-first century women remain the central force in the Black church, despite the persistent traditions, rules of decorum and hermetical efforts to silence women, both as laypersons and clergy. What are the sexist attitudes and behaviors clergywomen experience and endure while navigate the ecclesial settings? Why do these women stay in these unwelcoming environments? I will examine how African American women have negotiated their religious identities, social action, political and economic standing; while developing strategies to navigate the stained glass ceiling. The Black Church has failed many of its members, specifically African American

women, who encompass at least eighty to eighty-five percent of the churches' population.<sup>2</sup> African American women have played a crucial role in making the church a powerful institution for social and political change in the black community.

Despite the historical evidence of centuries of how Black Churches championed causes and issues of discrimination, while being considered the bastion of liberation, African American women historically have been disregarded, disrespected and denied leadership opportunities, by patriarchal leadership. Notwithstanding, this stance, the way dominance is enacted in the Black Churches, which is part of a social, historical and political context, includes the misappropriation of power. Authority, both constructive and destructive, is accepted by African American women congregants as unchallengeable because of the influence of African American males and support by patriarchal interpretations of scripture.

In order to answer these questions; a phenomenological qualitative analysis will assist in addressing the fact that Black Churches fail many of its members, specifically women, which encompasses at least eighty-five to ninety percent of churches population. This is not a phenomenological philosophical approach to this dissertation, it is a

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<sup>2</sup> Women worshipers are described by their demographic characteristics (e.g., age, education, marital status), participation patterns in congregational life, worship preferences and experiences, and most valued aspects of the congregation. The profile of women in congregations is presented in terms of congregational size and denomination or faith group. It is hypothesized that the gender ratio in congregations (i.e., percentage of female worshipers) is related to ten indicators of congregational vitality and numerical growth. Women worshipers are demographically different from male worshipers. Women have higher levels of participation in congregational activities and tend to get more out of their worship experiences. While larger proportions of women worshipers are positively related to a greater focus on the local community, the gender ratio of congregational worshipers is unrelated to numerical growth. Generations of Women in the Church-US Congregations [www.uscongregations.org/pdf/sisr-cw](http://www.uscongregations.org/pdf/sisr-cw)

qualitative analysis which will have philosophical assumptions written into this qualitative study, which is discussed in the methodology chapter. The patriarchal ecclesial episteme (the churches system of understanding) and the ideology of African American male clergy, toward clergywomen through the denial of ordination, preaching opportunities, leadership roles, and misogynistic sermons and theology is problematic. It is imperative to deconstruct the ideology related to male knowledge and power percepts, given the claims of liberation from all forms of oppression by churches, but more importantly to understand how clergywomen navigate patriarchal ecclesial settings. In an effort to understand sociocultural problems in Black Churches, the qualitative analysis will provide empirical knowledge by the narratives collected from the senior pastors' interviewed.

I propose to develop strategies of resistance from my findings, supporting facts needed for the transformation of institutional, community and individual ways of governing in the Black Churches, utilizing a phenomenological qualitative methodology of research that will allow me to establish explanations for revolutionary thoughts, and behavior of the participants in the clerical positions.

The voices of twelve clergywomen elucidate the experiences of women attempting to respond to what they consider a divine call on their lives. The interviews ask women about their lived experiences of their journey in ecclesial settings, their educational training, their call story and their faith – with consideration on how these aspects of their lives intersected.

The introduction will articulate my thesis for the dissertation providing a brief overview of the method and theoretical background for this project. I will contextualize

the Black Church and its relevance in this conversation. I will also outline the format for the dissertation with two components: **Part 1**–Womanist Constructive Ethics: In this section, I will articulate methodological contributions that womanist ethics have made in the field of Christian Social ethics, distinguish the works of womanist ethicists and build on forms of liberation ethics that evaluate life under oppression in order to empower self-directing agency. Finally, I engage black women’s moral struggle at the intersections of race, class and gender as an essential context to inform ethical inquiry and new possibilities for social justice.<sup>3</sup> **Part 2**–Qualitative Methodology: I focus on interviews of the African American clergywoman pastoring in the African American community. This phenomenological qualitative analysis of clergywomen’s experiences and stories assist in understanding their effort to pursue their calling and elucidate their experiences.

### **Overview of Chapters**

This dissertation engaged the lived experiences of twelve African American clergywomen, answering the question: As African American clergywomen navigate ecclesial settings, are they experiencing strategies of containment preventing them from attaining senior pastoral positions or ordination in patriarchal structures within Black Churches? The deleterious, ecclesial episteme and ideology of African American clergymen, toward clergywomen through the denial of ordination, preaching opportunities, and leadership roles, is reinforced through sermons and theological interpretations, which support and create such strategies of containment. It is imperative to deconstruct the ideology related to the African American male clergies and their

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<sup>3</sup> Stacey Floyd-Thomas. *Mining the Motherlode*. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2006.

knowledge and power precepts given the claims of liberation from all forms of oppression by the church. By identifying sociocultural problems in the Black Church, my findings posit institutional, community, and individual group changes. The outline of the dissertation is as follows:

## Chapter One - The Historical Dilemma of the Black Church

In Chapter One, I expound on the particulars that historian, Gayraud Wilmore, posits about the Black Church tradition and its radical nature which is defined by three major influences: the quest for independence and from white control; the revalorization of the image of Africa [and African peoples], and the acceptance of protest and agitation as theological prerequisites for Black liberation and the liberation of all oppressed people.

<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, the historical and social perspective of the black women's club movement is engaged recognizing black women's commitment to their religious life and the larger community sustains them. Insight is provided of the effective, normative, social and psychological resources for black women in their economic and political roles.<sup>5</sup>

## Chapter Two – The Outsider Within —African American clergywomen experiences: Womanist and Black Feminist Converge

In Chapter Two, an examination of womanist ethics and black feminism and its development within Black Churches and the community, assist in providing a foundation

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<sup>4</sup> Gayraud S. Wilmore. *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of Religious History of African Americans*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Cheryl Townsend, Gilkes. *If It Wasn't for the Women: Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000, pg.96-96.

for theoretical framework. This review includes the background and context of the problems, of the treatment of women in general and clergywomen in ecclesial settings specifically. The primary purpose of a womanist ethical approach is to determine how to eradicate oppressive social structures in Black churches<sup>6</sup>, which limit and demarcate the agency of African American women in general and clergywomen specifically.<sup>7</sup>

### Chapter Three – To Be or Not To Be: African American clergywomen experiences

Chapter Three outlines the methodology used to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of African American clergywomen. Specifically, this study used a phenomenological qualitative research approach to examine their experiences and cognitive representations of pursuing their call, be it through pastoring or other forms of ministry within the Black Churches; addressing the ways in which African American clergywomen develop leadership strategies and navigate ecclesial settings, despite the barriers to actualizing their call.

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<sup>6</sup> The use of the terminology Black Churches is to signify that there's no monolithic Black Church, therefore the choice to add (es) encompasses all Black denominations, and cultures within cultures, which spans the range for those that are govern by specific rules, policies and practices and those with no specific policies and appear to make it up as they go along.

<sup>7</sup> Stacey M.Floyd-Thomas. *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics*. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2006.

## Chapter Four – We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For<sup>8</sup>: African American Clergywomen Experiences

In Chapter Four, the research findings are presented. These findings illustrate that African American clergywomen have struggled under a Eurocentric masculinist worldview that has proven divisive, demeaning, and disconcerting and has contributed to Black women's subordination.<sup>9</sup> In this chapter the actual interviews are analyzed, themes emerged and interpretation of their experiences as they related to the themes were discussed, reflecting the participants' perspective and experiences from said interviews.

## Chapter Five – Why Does The Caged Bird Sing?

In chapter five, the caged bird symbolizes the African American woman in Black Churches in general and African American clergywomen specifically. African American women experience gender oppression through the larger society's subordination, and through sexism in Black communities, the participants in this study point to the urgency to disrupt, deconstruct and construct a new way of being and doing church that provides equal opportunities to men and women. The screening of inductive, interactive and recursive data collected and analyzed, from the interviews of African American clergywomen will assist with the objectives of this qualitative research; facilitating an

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<sup>8</sup> The title from June Jordan's book *Passion* (1980) and from *Directed by Desire. The Collected Poems of June Jordan*. Copyright 2005 by the June M. Jordan Literary Estate Trust. *Poem for South African Women Commemoration of the 40,000 women and children who, August 9, 1956, presented themselves in bodily protest against the "dompass" in the capital of apartheid. Presented at The United Nations, August 9, 1978. The resistance to the Pass Law led to many thousands of arrests and was the spark that ignited the Sharpeville Massacre on March 21, 1960, and led to the arrest of Robert Sobukwe that day. Colloquially, passes were often called the dompass, literally meaning the "dumb pass."*

<sup>9</sup> Patricia Hill Collins. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York, New York: Routledge, 2000, pg. 221-238.

understanding of the sociocultural problem in Black Churches. By identifying sociocultural problems in Black Churches, proposed strategies of resistance were developed, to utilize findings to suggest institutional, community and individual group changes.

In the tradition of womanist analysis, black women's literary sources are utilized in this dissertation starting with Maya Angelou's seminal book, *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*, the inspiration for this dissertation title and the narrative direction. The story line of the book is analogous to the experiences of African American clergywomen, recognizing the cage being equivalent to Black Churches and the bird symbolizing African American clergywomen.

Angelou's traumatic youth caused her to stop speaking, believing that she was the cause of the death of her abuser. Her family initially accepted her silence as post-rape trauma; as time went on, they became frustrated and angry at what they perceived as disrespectful behavior. Like Angelou, many of the clergywomen's behavior of self-protection were perceived as disrespectful versus self-preservation. Just like Angelou's teacher Mrs. Berta Flowers - a kind, educated woman - told her to read, read literature out loud, and provided Angelou with books of poetry that assist her in regaining her voice. Similarly, these clergywomen had mentors at various stages of their lives that assisted them through tough times, encouraging, admonishing and challenging them to withstand the adversarial foes and to stand firmly on their knowledge and ability to do the job. Angelou endured several appalling incidents that taught her about the insidious nature of racism. A couple of the clergywomen equated sexism to racism: both have the capacity to diminish the person's esteem and sense of worth; impeded access to resources and

opportunities and fortify the domination of patriarchal structures. Angelou notes that she not only fell victim to a hostile, racist, and sexist society, but to other social forces as well, including the displacement she felt from her family and her peers - all similar if not exact feelings and experiences of these clergywomen.

### **I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings — Analogous to the Caged African American Clergywoman**

Angelou's book<sup>10</sup> *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* conveys the difficulties associated with the mixture of race and gender discrimination endured by a southern, Black girl. At the same time, she speaks to many other issues, such as the relationships between parents and children, child abuse, and the search for one's own path in life. Angelou's book mirrors the life of the African American clergywomen. The themes that emerged in the book are racism and segregation, displacement and resistance and most importantly naming, which can be associated with one finding their identity, in an unsympathetic world that objectifies and stereotypes blacks – often obliterating their individuality and identity.<sup>11</sup> The clergywomen, likewise, found themselves combating thematically similar issues to those which emerged in Angelou's book. These oppressive

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<sup>10</sup> Katie G. Cannon the progenitor of womanist ethics, according to Stacey Floyd Thomas has been the leader in selecting from Black women writer's literary texts the sacred values and ethical norms reflective of the community's sociocultural practices. Cannon states, "the Black woman's literary tradition delineates the many ways that ordinary Black women have fashioned value as mastering, transcending, radicalizing and sometimes destroying pervasive, negative orientations imposed by the mores of the larger society. To read more about womanist ethics, see Katie G. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 76.

<sup>11</sup> SparkNotes Editors. "SparkNote on I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings." SparkNotes LLC. 2002. <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/cagedbird/> (accessed May 10, 2017).

forces (discussed in subsequent chapters); become the impetus for clergywomen naming their calling and claiming their voices, which becomes the initial acts of resistance to combat repressive structures both secularly and spiritually. The act of disrespect and objectification can and will lead to resistance, a requirement for African American clergywomen to successfully achieve their calling.

### Racism and Segregation

Angelou learned how patronizing and unjust social realities could confine you often relegating you to a caged mentality, stifling one's ability to move, speak and sing. Learning to live in a racist and sexist society profoundly shaped the character of Angelou and congruently many if not all of the study participants. They continue to strive to surmount the obstacles/strategies of containment, placed consciously and subconsciously in their paths on a daily basis. These women, like Angelou, are constantly at the epicenter of intersectionality, where as Patricia Hill Collins says, the aspects of identity are not "unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but rather...reciprocally constructing phenomena."<sup>12</sup> These intersecting identities include: gender, race, social class, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age, mental disability, physical disability, mental illness and physical illness as well as other forms of identity. Ministers must contend with all of these identities in their congregations, Sunday after Sunday, week in and week out, as they attempt to reach and heal a hurting world. The systemic injustices and social inequalities are a never ending story for African American clergywomen who do not act independently of each other; rather, these forms of oppression interrelate, creating systems of oppression that reflect the "intersections" of multiple discriminatory practices.

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<sup>12</sup> Patricia H. Collins, *Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas. Annual Review of Sociology.41:1-20*

These identities are often overlooked, therefore rendering oppression a cyclical perpetuation, which must be stopped.

### Displacement and Resistance

Angelou moved to seven different homes from the age of three to sixteen: from California to Stamps, from St. Louis to Los Angeles, from Oakland to San Francisco, from Los Angeles to San Francisco. The young Angelou, living in an age of racial, political and social upheaval, was not afforded the opportunity to settle down in one location. Angelou's personal displacement resonates with the societal experiences that Blacks across the country realized. African Americans descended from enslaved people, who were displaced from their homeland, finding it difficult to establish a place and space in a land that continues to be hostile to their heritage. Similarly, African American clergywomen continue to find it difficult to establish their footing, when attempting to break the stain glass ceiling, where the new gatekeepers, African American male clergy, stand guard committed to prevent safe passage to anyone of the opposite sex.

### Resistance

In *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, there are several examples of resistance to systems of oppression: from the revival sermon, where the preacher criticizes whites' charity, and the church celebrates the idea of white people burning in hell for their actions, to Angelou breaking her white employer's heirloom china, in response to the constant disrespect she was shown. Angelou's big brother, Bailey, expressed his defiance

by buying fancy clothes and cars and gallivanting around with women to proclaim his worth and assert his masculinity in the face of dehumanizing and emasculating racism.

## **PART I – CONSTRUCTIVE WOMANIST ETHICS**

I assert most unhesitatingly, that the religion of the south is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes, — a justifier of the most appalling barbarity, — a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds, — and a darker shelter under, which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders find the strongest protection. Were I to be again reduced to the chains of slavery, next to the enslavement, I should regard being the slave of a religious master the greatest calamity that could be fall me. For of all slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst, I have ever found them the meanest and basest, the most cruel and cowardly, of all other.<sup>13</sup> ~ Fredrick Douglass

### **CHAPTER ONE – THE HISTORICAL DILEMMA OF THE BLACK CHURCH<sup>14</sup>**

The Black Church is based on the cultural, social and spiritual experiences of Black people. C. Eric Lincoln states, Black Church served in several capacities for its people, the church “was their school, their forum, their political arena, their social club, their art gallery, their conservatory of music. It was the lyceum and gymnasium as well as sanctum sanctorum.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, Black Church was the epicenter of the Black

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<sup>13</sup> Frederick Douglass. Narrative of *The Life of Frederick Douglass*, Boston, MA, Dover Thrift Editions, 1845; 1995 Chapter 10

<sup>14</sup> Anthony H. Pinn notes, in *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. The use of the phrase “Black Church” denotes the collective reality of black Christianity across denominational lines. Also, the adjective “black” will be used interchangeably with African American. The nomenclature “Black Church” is used in the first chapter honoring the historical reverence given, with the understanding that there is no monolithic Black church. In the chapters following chapter one black church will be noted as Black churches.

community. This chapter is an exploration of black Churches' derivation, drawing on sociopolitical methods and womanist ethics, which focus on race, gender, and class; challenging positional stances of social, religious and political justice in the world. In an effort to understand African American clergywomen experiences of navigating ecclesial settings, a survey of the genesis and development of the Black Church, since antebellum slavery to the present is offered. There are three aspects that historian, Gayraud Wilmore, considers the radical nature of Black Church<sup>16</sup>: first, by deconstructing the quest for independence from white control; second, by the revalorization of the image of Africa and African people and those of African descent, and third, by the acceptance of protest and agitation as a theological prerequisite for Black liberation and the liberation for all oppressed people. Exposing the tragedies of enslavement, segregation and the persistence of racism all through which the historical development of the Black Church stems.

### **The Historical Trajectory**

In *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, Anthony Pinn posits, traditionally the term "African American" is commonly utilized, however it might be more appropriate to use "black" as opposed to African American given the development

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<sup>15</sup> C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1984, 222.

<sup>16</sup> In *Plenty Good Room*, Marcia Riggs joins established scholarship in using the term black or African American church "as a kind of sociological and theological shorthand after reference to the pluralism of black Christian churches in the United States." Also, the terms black and African American will be used interchangeably. Riggs posits using the term African American is to bring to mind the idea that African psychological, cultural, and ethical residuals in the collective consciousness of black people in the Untied States are part of creative and conflictual sources of identity and behavior of black people because of the history of slavery and white racism.

of the church in response to racial tensions and injustices. According to Pinn, the use of the terms “black” and “white” keeps the racial conflict in the forefront of the discussion better than the terms “African American” and “European American.” Also, he suggests that we refer to enslaved, black Americans before emancipation as Africans and white Americans as Europeans, to denote the center of their history. After emancipation we should use the phrase, “those of African descent” or “black Americans,” and “white American.”<sup>17</sup>

Conversely, it is impossible to talk about the Black Church without talking about race, gender and class. Evelyn Higginbotham contends that race like gender and class, must be seen and understood as a social construction, predicated on the recognition of difference and signifying the simultaneous distinguishing and positioning of groups’ vis-à-vis one another. Henry Louis Gates states in *“Race,” Writing and Difference*, “race is the ultimate trope of difference,” and artificially and arbitrarily contrived to produce and maintain relations of power and subordination.<sup>18</sup> Historian, Barbara Fields, argues that race is neither natural nor transhistorical, but rather, it must be analyzed with an eye to its functioning and maintenance within specific contexts.<sup>19</sup> Race is a highly contested representation of relations of power between social categories by which individuals are identified and identify themselves according to Higginbotham. This recognition of racial

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<sup>17</sup> Pinn, Anthony B. *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Henry L. Gates, Jr. *“Race,” Writing, and Difference (A Critical Inquiry Book)*. Ed. Henry L. Gates Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

<sup>19</sup> Barbara J. Fields, *“Ideology and Race in American History,” in Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 143-47.

distinctions emanates, from and adapts to multiple uses of power in society; perceived as “natural” and “appropriated”; such racial categories are strategically necessary for the functioning of power in countless institutional and ideological forms, both explicit and subtle.<sup>20</sup>

One of the fundamental principles of slavery is the dehumanizing and demoralizing act of enslavement, where bodies were displaced, assaulted, raped all under the guise of political and economic soundness. Eric Williams, author of *Capitalism and Slavery*, posits those seeking to maximize individual, class, and national wealth had to sustain slavery. Moreover, slavery provided nothing less than the export demand and trade network for the British industrial revolution.<sup>21</sup> The carefully calibrated shift of British shipping interest from indentured British islanders to enslaved African in the mid-seventeenth century proved lucrative.<sup>22</sup> The enslavement of approximately ten million Africans, spanning four centuries in the Atlantic slave trade, is an incomprehensible historic atrocity. Brought to slavery, for the sole purpose of working in mines, plantations and households, torn from their political, social, cultural and spiritual systems, which sustained their lives, proved devastating but not conquering of the spirit of the enslaved.

There was a deliberate effort to separate tribal and linguistic groups, a staunch effort to disallow the preservation of family or kinship ties. Slave control was grounded

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<sup>20</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham. *African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race*. Chicago Journal, Signs, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Winter, 1992), pp. 251-274 Published by: The University of Chicago Press, 253.

<sup>21</sup> Eric E. Williams. *Capitalism and Slavery*. Chapel Hill, NC 1944, Chapter 2-5

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, Chapter 1, 7-9.

on the eradication of all forms of African culture because of their power to unify the slaves, enabling them to resist or rebel.<sup>23</sup> Despite the efforts to disassociate the enslaved from their beliefs and customs, they were transmitted to their descendants albeit; these beliefs and customs were shaped and modified by a new milieu. As a result of the resilience of the African people, components of African folklore, music, language, and religion were transferred to the New World by the African diaspora; a bricolage of indigenous Native American cultures and colonial Europeans, coupled with aspects of the African heritage, produced the “black Americans” (those of African descent) culture.

According to Raboteau, one of the most durable and adaptable elements of the enslaved culture, linking African past with American present, was religion. In the Americas, the religions of Africa had not been merely preserved as static “Africanism” or as archaic “retentions.” The religion has “continued to develop as a living tradition putting down new roots in new soil, bearing new fruit as unique hybrids of American origin.”<sup>24</sup> The African styles of worship, forms of ritual, systems of belief, and fundamental perspectives have remained vital on this side of the Atlantic, not because they were preserved in a “pure” orthodoxy but because they were transformed; this adaptability, was based on the respect for spiritual power.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Albert J. Raboteau. *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Albert J. Raboteau. *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, 4. The formation of “slave religion” created out of African religions openness to syncretism with other religious traditions and for the continuity, established a distinctively African religious consciousness.

## The Conversion Process

Raboteau's *Canaan Land A Religious History of African American* offers the perspective that thousands of African from diverse cultures and religious tradition, forcibly transported to America as slaves, retained many Africa customs even as they converted to Christianity. Charles Colcock Jones, a Presbyterian minister, called the religious instruction of Negroes, which evaluated efforts to convert slaves during the period 1790-1820. They believed that it was their duty to bring religious instruction onto the plantation, with intermittent showers of revival, and planting of evangelical preaching, establishing a systematic effort of conversion.<sup>26</sup> The catechism<sup>27</sup> process

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Prior to the eighteenth century expansion of christianity, there existed a diversity of religions in the rich continent of Africa; this vast territory stretched along the coast from Senegambia in the northwest to Angola in the southeast; incorporating societies and cultures as diverse as the Mandinke, the Yoruba, the Ibo and the Bakongo to name a few. Raboteau reminds us that it is essential to remember that no individual African culture or religion, once transplanted in foreign territory, could have remained intact; it was inevitable that the slaves would establish new societies in the Americas, which would be structured in part from the experience of enslavement in a new environment. A common religious heritage then resulted from the blending and assimilation of the many discrete religious heritages of Africans in the New World.

The missionary zeal from England, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands and France was the motive for colonizing the New World. The responsibility of Christianizing slaves as well as Indians, was urged upon the Council for Foreign Plantation by Charles II in 1660:

And you are to consider how much such of the Natives or such as are purchased by you form other parts to be servants or slaves may best be invited to the Christian faith, and be made capable of being baptized thereunto, it being to the honor of our Crowne and of the Protestant Religion that all persons in any of our Dominions should be taught the knowledge of God, and be made acquainted with the ministries of Salvation.

This decree to colonial governors to do all within their powers to "facilitate and encourage the conversion of Negroes and Indians" to Christianity appeared success; those with the most opportunity to become church members were house servants, artisans and urban slaves, while those in remote rural areas were less likely to attend church.

<sup>26</sup> Albert J. Raboteau. *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, pg. 149-150.

<sup>27</sup> Catechesis or religious instruction comes from the Greek *katechesis*, and it verb *katechizo*, which means, "to resound or echo, to celebrate or imitate, to repeat another's words and deeds," or "to make hear, hence instruct." According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops catechesis is the act of handing on the Word of God intended to inform the faith community and candidates for initiation into the Church about the teachings of Christ transmitted by the Apostles to the Church. Also, it's a summary of all the

served to emphasize the Southern worldview, each segment effected the enslaved, promoting “Southern Christian principles,” that were either embraced or rejected, in part or entirely. Raboteau examined catechization focusing on the role of planters, missionaries, and slaves in the conversion process. There were nine catechisms written by ministers, missionaries, and slaveholders that represented the Protestant churches of that period – Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Methodist and Baptist. Those in control found it their duty to convert the masses, exerting another form of control and power over those enslaved in the name of Jesus.

Despite the geographical and historical challenges, African derivatives of spiritual traditions developed with unique expressions; for example Voodoo in Haiti, Obeah in Jamaica, Santería in Cuba and Candomblé and “Black American christianity.” Each of these African diasporan traditions shares a common history of enslavement, disenfranchisement, exploitation, and dehumanization in the New World, each serving as a site of refuge. These religious expressions they engaged in, while enduring extraordinary struggles for survival, resulted in ultimate victory, over the brutality of inhuman bondage, in its countless forms, proved beneficial.<sup>28</sup>

It is clear that the underestimation of the capacity of those enslaved to reason and discern their circumstances, often worked in favor of those in bondage. The question of service and fidelity, for an entity that does not respect, value or honor them as human

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beliefs of the faith that is used as a teaching tool. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/>

<sup>28</sup> Juan M. Floyd-Thomas. *Making It Plain Liberating Black Church History*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014, pg. 25

beings became troubling; yet the enslaved endured and survived, what often appeared to be insurmountable odds.

A prevailing question continues to be, to what extent did religious heritage, continue to live in the experiences of Africans enslaved in a New World? In *Candomblé, Voodoo, Santeria, and Shango* “the acceptance of Christianity by the African slaves and its transmission to their descendants, by no means cause the disappearance of African beliefs or patterns of worship,” but to a larger extent has led to their continuity in a new “unified system of belief and ritual.”<sup>29</sup> There are two conflicting responses to whether the enslaved brought their religious tradition to the New World. One is that African retentions in the United States were negligible because the African was almost totally stripped of his culture due to slave system, yet it did not destroy the slaves’ African culture, a considerable number of Africanisms continue to define Afro American culture in the United States. E. Franklin Frazier supports the former and Melville J. Herskovits the latter.<sup>30</sup>

In *The Myth of the Negro Past*, anthropologist, Melville Herskovits’ intent was on destroying the belief that the American Negro has no past except a history of primitive savagery in Africa from which he had been delivered by contact with European civilization in America.<sup>31</sup> Herskovits believed that destruction of this myth was imperative in order to deal with the struggle against racism. He posits,

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<sup>29</sup> Albert J. Raboteau. *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, 47-48.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

To deny that the Black American has a culture and history of significance and sophistication in African and to suggest that the African culture was not advanced enough to endure contact with superior European cultures was to imply that Negroes were an inferior people.<sup>32</sup>

These suppositions have been the foundation of the Western cultures assumptions and mythical narrative, which sustained, supported and rationalized their treatment of those on the margins.

Herskovits recognized the historical relevance of African retentions in order to evaluate cultural differences between white and black Americans. He was particularly interested in the study of cultural contact and acculturation.<sup>33</sup> He divided the myth into five statements, or sub myths with a rebuttal to each statement:

*The first myth:* “Negroes are naturally of childlike character, and adjust easily to the most unsatisfactory social situation, which they accept readily and even happily...”

*Herskovits argues,* African and Afro-Americans are neither childlike nor naive, but have developed a sophisticated worldview, the worldview has allowed them to “adapt to everyday situations of all sorts.” Contrary to beliefs blacks were no content with slavery, they resisted individually and rebelled collectively.

*The second myth:* “Only the poorer stock of Africa was enslaved, the more intelligent members of the African community raided having been clever enough to elude the slave’s nets.”

*Herskovits argues,* that the slave trade was not selective of the dregs of African society; there were instances where there were those who belong to royal or priestly ranks sold into slavery by wary rulers attempting to safeguard their thrones.

*The third myth:* “the Negroes were brought from all parts of the African continent, spoke diverse languages, represented greatly differing bodies of custom, and, as a matter of policy, were distributed in the New World, so as to lose tribal identity,

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<sup>31</sup> Melville J. Herskovits. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1941.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Melville J. Herskovits. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1941.

no least common denominator of understanding or behavior could have possibly been worked out by them.”

*Herskovits contends* that the majority of slaves came from the “areas lying in the coastal belt of West Africa and the Congo.”

*The fourth myth:* “enough Negroes of a given tribe had the opportunity to live together, and that they had the will and ability to continue their customary modes of behavior, the cultures of Africa were so savage and relatively so low in the scale of human civilization that the apparent superiority of European customs as observed in the behavior of their masters would have caused and actually did cause them to give up such aboriginal traditions as they may otherwise have desired to preserve.”

This belief was based on a biased ethnology and a simplistic understanding of acculturative process. The culture of the West Africa was neither savage nor low and was automatically overwhelmed by contact with supposedly superior European culture. Africa was an active partner in the acculturative relationship according to Herskovits.

*The fifth and final myth:* “The Negro is thus a man without a past.”

*Herskovits asserts* that the Negro does have a past, a cultural history, which makes them distinctive participant on the American scene. It is important to understand that Herskovits’ goal was to attack spoken myths.<sup>34</sup>

Conversely, E. Franklin Frazier posits that the existence of African culture is found in Latin America and the Caribbean, yet Frazier denies that African culture was able to survive the conditions of slavery to any significant extent in the United States.<sup>35</sup> Frazier’s position is the process of enslavement and passing of earlier generations born in Africa destroyed the culture of slaves. Deculturation began, according to Frazier, on the other side of the Atlantic, before the Africans even set foot on the slave ships. His assessment that to meet the needs of plantation owners, young males were captured and they proved to be poor bears of the cultural heritage of a people.<sup>36</sup> Coupled with the trauma of the

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<sup>34</sup> Melville J. Herskovits. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1941, pg.1-2.

<sup>35</sup> Albert J. Raboteau. *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, 52.

Middle passage, where various tribes with different languages and customs and traditions were forced together; while on the other side of the Atlantic the enslaved were not allowed to speak their mother tongue, and those born in Africa were looked down on by those born on the plantation, they were all forced to adopt the white way of doing things, the process of acculturation was slow. The rule prohibiting the gathering of five or more slaves without a white observer were universally enforced. Frazier concludes, "It is impossible to establish any continuity between African religious practices and the Negro church in the United States."<sup>37</sup> Frazier took Herskovits to task on the base of what he called weak evidence, mainly due to his failure to "refer African survival in the United States to a specific tribe or definite area."<sup>38</sup>

Finally, Raboteau's position is that the

distinctiveness of the slave's religious culture reside in not in their preservation of "Africanisms" but in the African perspectives, habits, preferences, aesthetics, and styles with which Africans and their American descendants shaped their religious choices in the very diverse situations and circumstances of slavery.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Albert J. Raboteau. *Slave Religion*, 53. Herskovits insisted on placing the issue in hemispheric perspective, his previous work as an anthropologist; done in Dahomey, Haiti, Surinam, Jamaica and Trinidad proved insightful.<sup>36</sup> As a result of Herskovits and others work Raboteau concluded that the inaccuracy of the ethnic identifications supplied by slave traders and slave masters and the anachronistic designation of modern concepts of ethnicity and nationality to pre-colonial Africans made confident identifications of specific African slave populations seem implausible.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>38</sup> Albert J. Raboteau. *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, 54.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 330. Albert Raboteau's *Slave Religion*, dissertation revision and expansion, sought to prove "that slave narratives could serve as valid and valuable sources for examining the slaves' experience of slavery." He believed the reclamation of African-American history became a model for the recovery of the pasts, stories neglected in American history. The poignant statement referring to the neglecting of black history, distorted the history of black and white American perceptions. "For a people to 'lose' their history, to have

The concept of cultural agency is to demolish “the myth of the Negro past” by displaying the adaptability and resilience of enslaved Africans, as demonstrated in their materialization of a distinctive culture. Raboteau argued that the political effects of religion were complex and contradictory; he attempted to render a plausible account of religious life itself as a form of slave agency, not entirely reducible to the political. Particularly, a religious reading of slave agency might escape the categories of rebellion or accommodation to include a dimension of reciprocity between slave and slave master.

### **Black Church’s Significance**

The fact that Christianity took root among African American from 1619 to 1750 is not due in any appreciable measures to missions. There were three contributing factors according to Henry Mitchell, which were overlooked: First, “the open, eclectic character of African traditional religion” was overlooked; the typical West African town was a faith community, with no missionary ambitions; second, they were even more anxious when they found (often stolen) and interpreted the Bible for themselves. There were the parallels between African traditional religions. Third, the impact of the commonality between the expressive culture of Africa and the unprecedented (for whites), free expression and emotion of the First Great Awakening.<sup>40</sup>

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their story denigrated as insignificant, is a devastating blow, and exclusion that in effect denies their full humanity.”

<sup>40</sup> Henry H. Mitchell. *Black Church: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years Beginnings*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans, 2004, 33.

The First Great Awakening and the Second Great Awakening caused a proliferation of African, both enslaved and freed, making public confessions and formal commitments to the Christian faith.<sup>41</sup> This was considered the new beginning, the processes by which African Americans achieved separation and a measure of self-governance which varied from church to church, city to city and region to region, with major significance given to the ratio of white to black or slave to free.<sup>42</sup>

“The First Baptist of Richmond had the following proportions of black and white in the following years: 1800, 150 black and 50 white; 1838, 1,600 black and 350 white. In 1841 the 387 white members sold their building to the 1,708 black members (mostly slaves) for \$6,500, half the appraised value. It was therefore renamed First African Baptist Church. Members of the “Supervising Committee” had to be appointed by the Baptist Association, and also came from three white congregations. This white committee chose as first pastor of the separated black congregation Dr. Robert Ryland, President of Richmond College.”<sup>43</sup>

Interestingly, it was believed that these churches, although they were separate, required supervision; according to Mitchell, early supervision encompassed appointing white preachers in most cases, and often at times only for the monthly service of Holy Communion, as with Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia.<sup>44</sup> The reasoning behind such acts was the presumption that “Black exhorters were considered

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>43</sup> Henry H. Mitchell. *Black Church*, pg. 47.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 50.

incapable of serving as full pastors, and were denied full ordination.”<sup>45</sup> Ordination was under the control of a white dominated “association” of churches. Masters punished worshippers, accosted and/or severely flogging them on their way to and from services. Despite the effectiveness of black preachers, arbitrary low assessments were placed upon black preachers, providing white churches with the justification for attempting to maintain tight control over Black churches.<sup>46</sup>

In the last half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, mixed churches separated by race, due to racial antagonism and prejudice; coupled with the differences in class, culture and control, especially the latter two, confronted and hindered every effort of different races to worship and work together.<sup>47</sup> The control issue persisted in the South after the Civil War, and the post-World War II era. Ethnically and racially transitional congregations faced these “control” issues; which resulted from those white churches that provided financial resources. The financial support was accompanied by conditions that prevented the black churches from complete independence; denial of equality in voting, which also included them to be legally compelled to have a white pastor, in essence a religious overseer, like on plantations of old. After the Civil War the black church began to realize their independence, with an increase of African American pastors.<sup>48</sup> The early black church

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Henry H. Mitchell. *Black Church*, pg. 51

<sup>48</sup> Henry H. Mitchell. *Black Church*, pg. 57

endured and thrived as an “invisible institution” during slavery despite the pressures of a society opposed to its existence; also, the church was a strong leader in the quest for black empowerment and independence.<sup>49</sup>

### **Black Church Tradition and Radical Nature**

Despite the fact that it appears religion was utilized to further enslavement of the body and spirit of the black person. The religious teachings of the slave, attempted to convince the enslaved that their bondage was a declaration from God.

“White derived their rights to rule over blacks from God. To question this right was to question the will of God and to incur divine wrath. Catechism for the instruction of slaves in the Christian religion often contains such instructions as:

Q. Who gave you a master and a mistress? A. God gave them to me.

Q. Who says that you must obey them? A. God says that you must.”<sup>50</sup>

The desire for freedom and liberation was one of the principal motives for the rapid growth of the church. The enslaved rejected their captors’ gospel, and believed that with all their heart, “with God on our side nobody going to turn me around.”<sup>51</sup>

The enslaved proved resilient, living in a society that treated them less than, and considered them as creatures, less than human; this treatment and other ideologies, were the impetus for black church participation in the liberation struggle.

The alliance formed by Richard Allen and Absalom Jones in 1787, created an awareness that they were no longer obliged to agonize over the indignity of segregation

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<sup>49</sup> Benjamin Mays and Joseph Nicholson. *The Negro's Church*. New York: Russell and Russell, 1969. 53.

<sup>50</sup> Major J. Jones. *Christian Ethics for Black Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1974, 20.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 53.

and the lack of opportunity for progression in white churches despite the fact that there appears to be no end to the denial of freedom and equality in the secular society.<sup>52</sup>

Gayraud Wilmore, historian, ethicist, educator and theologian, posits *In Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, that the formation of the Black Baptist and Methodist Churches are the foundation for the genesis of the Black Church.<sup>53</sup> “The earliest black Methodists church was the African Union Church Incorporated in Wilmington Delaware, in 1807 – before the general conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church; they claim the honor of being the first black denomination.”<sup>54</sup> Wilmore cites that Philadelphia was the center of ecclesiastical insurrection. The protest against segregation in St. George’s Methodist Church began with Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Interestingly,

Allen desired to continue a relationship with St. George congregation, trusting in the evangelical theology and policy of Methodism. The latitudinarian or low doctrine of the visible church, was embraced by Allen; he believed that sanctification came to those who lived a pious life, rather than through adherence to rites and dogmas.<sup>55</sup>

Allen’s vision for a church combined secular relevance with deep spirituality in a context of simplicity and spontaneity. He shared Wesley’s, Asbury’s and other Methodist

“fathers” of the 18<sup>th</sup> century’s bias for personal, noninstitutional religion.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>53</sup> Wilmore, Gayraud. *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Book, 1998.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid,105.

<sup>55</sup> Wilmore, Gayraud. *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, pg. 105.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned facts, Allen adopted the discipline of white Methodism with minimal change; he was interested in neither a legalistic nor a socially fashionable church.<sup>56</sup> The aspiration for independence and social evolution with the fellowship of the black populace was the definitive ambition, without reference to the creeds and confessions used in most of the mainline white churches.<sup>57</sup>

Wilmore contends that although Allen entertained the promise that a “preaching-house” would come out of the endeavors to work with the white churches, he did not intend to be a church as such; Allen simply wanted to serve the religious needs of the black community.<sup>58</sup> A broad sphere of rebelliousness of African Methodism spread swiftly through Philadelphia; in 1787 white members of the Log Meeting House, Lovely Lane, in Baltimore, denied to blacks to occupy the same pews or participate in Holy Communion. Blacks withdrew and organized the Baltimore African church; they joined Allen’s group. In 1816, sixteen representing several different communities met at Bethel church in Philadelphia, creating an Ecclesiastical Compact and adopting a resolution: The people of Philadelphia, Baltimore, and all other places who unite with the, shall become one body under the name and style of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>59</sup> Several new groups joined by 1818, including the Methodist Church in Charleston, South

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> Wilmore, Gayraud. *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 105-6.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 108

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 109

Carolina; a strong organization was developed, the first national institution organized and controlled by blacks in the United States, evolved of spontaneous proliferation in several communities of the Free African Society concept.<sup>60</sup> In 1834, congregations continued to meet, until all-black churches were outlawed, however several continued meeting in secret until the Civil War ended, and eventually built a new church building in 1891. The federal court struck down the law as unconstitutional, because it violated a U.S. treaty with Britain, sparking resentment over federal usurpation of states' rights.<sup>61</sup>

According to "Allen's observation: The purpose in mind of the founding father of African Methodism... was, among other things, to exemplify in the black men the power of self-reliance, self-help by the exercise of free religious thought with executive efficiency."<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, Allen's development of this free religious environment was founded on the very patriarchal principles that Allen and others fled from; that oppressive environment that did not allow them to fully participate in the worship services as agents of God or simply children of God. The omission of women's participation in ecclesial settings set an unfortunate precedent that has not been broken for centuries. Anna Julia Cooper stated, only the Black Woman can say 'when and where I enter, in the quiet

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 109

<sup>61</sup> Wilmore, Gayraud. *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Book, 1998, 110.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 110

undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me.<sup>63</sup>

Cooper understood the full emancipation of black women as the key to America's greatness and as the nexus of a struggle involving the intersection of class and labor status, ethnic experience, and the special perspective of the femininity that had transcended the harem-like demands of the dominant culture.<sup>64</sup>

### **Burgeoning of Black Women's Clubs movement 1890s**

The Black women's consciousness about the intersection of work (and therefore class), race-ethnicity, and gender in their experience led to political activism that was self-consciously female.<sup>65</sup> According to Sociologist and African American studies professor, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, the black women's club movement consciously reached across social classes to create networks between women "in profession" and "in industry." The movement was fervently antiseparatist; the leaders made it clear they were "neither alienating nor withdrawing" but simply "coming to the front" seeking to offer leadership.<sup>66</sup> These clubs were the training ground for black women leaders who learned the language and the politics; these movements spread to churchwomen who sought to

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<sup>63</sup> Anna Julia Cooper. *A Voice from the South by a Woman of the South*. New York, New York: Negro University Press, 1969, pg. 151.

<sup>64</sup> Cheryl Townsend Gilkes. *If It Wasn't For The Women*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001,pg.32.

<sup>65</sup> Cheryl Townsend Gilkes. *If It Wasn't For The Women*. pg.32.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 33.

develop grassroots leadership training of urban and rural women to be public speakers also. The institution of “Women’s Day” by Nannie Helen Burroughs’s in Black Baptist churches in 1907, spread to every predominantly black church denomination and to “black congregations within predominantly white denomination such as the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, the United Presbyterian Church and the Disciples of Christ-Christian.”<sup>67</sup> This was the burgeoning of the black women’s clubs movement which transcended churches, to social clubs, missionary societies, fraternal organizations, and unions like the National Association of Colored Women, which all began to meet socioeconomic needs of various communities.<sup>68</sup>

Karen Blair, the author of *The Clubwoman As Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined*, provides insight into the white women’s club movement; this account provides a framework for where the notions of what constitute a lady and womanhood. My goal is not to privilege these ideals but merely to provide researched insight on how African American women were not included in such concepts, therefore having to establish and support them selves without the assistance/support of white women who were similar situations.

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<sup>67</sup> Jualynne Dodson and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes. *Something Within: Social Change and Collective Endurance in the Sacred World of Black Christian Women, in Women and Religion in America*. Edited by Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller. Vol. 3. San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1986.

<sup>68</sup> In 1913 in Washington D.C. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated members participated in the woman suffrage, fighting for women’s right to vote. It was believed that the ability to vote for elected officials was the key to assuaging every aspect of women’s inequality. “If white women needed the vote to acquire advantages and protection of their right,” stated Adella Hung Logan, the leading suffragist of the Tuskegee Woman’s Club, “then Black women needed the vote even more so.” As Black women were more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and stereotypes of immorality, the vote was seen as a means of protection. Nannie Helen Burroughs believed that Black women required the ballot to reckon with men who place no value in her virtue. To read more on sorority See *ΔΣΘ In Search of Sisterhood*, by Paula Giddings.

In the early 1800s and during much of the previous century, the definition of an “ideal lady” applied only to the upper classes in society and resembled a type that existed among the aristocracy of Western Europe for several hundred years. Blair found that wealthy young women (which meant white women only) learned to dance, sing, embroider, make wax flowers, paint china and play the harpsichord.<sup>69</sup> According to Blair, the majority of the women were farmers’ wives, or factory workers for whom life was never easy; even the middle class women those Victorian ladies appear exceptional in fiction and image. The understanding of the clubs demands a familiarity with the ideology of the “lady,” according to Blair; this belief that every woman was a moral and domestic creature who embodied the desirable traits of loving maternity, intuition, and sensitivity.<sup>70</sup> This notion of a “lady” again only pertained to white middle and upper class women.

The extensive acceptance of this ‘ideal lady’ ideology was ensured by the sermons and popular literature that justified and explained women’s role. God—said clergymen, medical men, and popular writers—created woman with natural or biologically moral superiority over man. Her ability to create a happy and wholesome environment for her family grew from her instinctive sanctity and sweetness. Therefore, woman’s ability to dispense goodness uniquely qualified her as a moral caretaker.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Karen J. Blair. *The Clubwoman As Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914*. New York, New York: Holmes and Mieser Publishers, 1988, pg.1.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid,1. Blair claims that during the first half of the century industrialization momentum increased and individual wealth increased and the application of the “ideal lady” concept broadened. Blair states as some men’s capacity to provide economically for their wives, these women became inconsequential homebodies. They were expected to “work hard in the home— cooking, gardening, canning, sewing, and raising the children, but unlike their husband, she did not earn a wage for her labors.” Women (white) were defined by their natural qualities of domesticity and morality. “The lady’s function of embellishing her family’s environment was expanded into being the moral guardian of the home.” There was a distinction between the upper class ornamental, ideal lady and, the middle class lady was judged not just by her amusing charm.

Blair found that there was a small group that reinforced the ideology of what is a woman:

Doctors told women that they could not expect to be successful at extra domestic tasks because of their biological deficiencies; there were ministers that insist: “Women cannot compete with a man in a long course of mental labor. The female mind is rather quiet and timid than fiery and driving. It admires rather than covets the great exploits of the other sex.” There were writers on female conditions who justified the restrictions of ladydom by asserting that a woman should be sufficiently gratified by her indirect ameliorating influence on her husband and children.<sup>72</sup>

The notion that women were in charge of the home, while men commanded the public realm, stemmed from the fact that women were considered emotional beings and men were thought to be more prudent in their business dealings, were all justifications to restrict participation from women. Blair says,

In order to understand the true nature and extent of 19<sup>th</sup> century feminism, it is necessary to look closely at women’s domestic sphere. The boldness of the suffrage movement limited its appeal; only a small percentage of women were strong enough to ignore the teachings of the sermons, popular magazines, novels, beauty guides, health manuals, fashions, and even phrenology, which women were instructed to stay home and practice meekness, passivity, and subservience.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee* (New York: Harper, 1961) and Glenda Riley, “Origins of the Argument for Improved Female Education,” *History of Education Quarterly* (Winter 1969) provide more insight into the moral characteristics that established that which is to be found in the makeup of a woman.

<sup>72</sup> Karen J. Blair. *The Clubwoman As Feminist*, pg.2.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*,3.

Women in both the political, militant suffragist world and domestic world of the homemaker responded with anger to the limitations placed upon them; they differed, however, in their approach to the solutions.

Jane Cunningham Croly organized the first white professional women's club, Sorosis<sup>74</sup>, in March 1868 with twelve other women, which included Josephine Pollard, a children's author and Fanny Fern Parton, a popular columnist, who was insulted and angered when attempting to attend an honorary dinner for author Charles Dickens at the New York Press Club, as a columnist. Parton and other women were prevented from attending the event because the New York Press Club was a "men only" organization; despite the fact that Parton was a popular columnist, it was her gender, which caused her to be excluded from this momentous event.

Black women's club movement emerged out of the growth of women's organizations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the women's club movements in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century were considered nonsectarian and autonomous (not an auxiliary of male organizations) and suggest that this critically distinguishes it from precedent groups in the earlier part of the century.<sup>75</sup> Black women organized the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) by merging The National Federation of Afro-American Women and the League of Colored Women in 1896; they became a *socioreligious* movement against race, gender, and class oppression while working for the advancement of all black people.

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<sup>74</sup> Sorosis was incorporated January 1869 with 83 members. Sorosis meant "aggregation"; its goal was to further the educational and social activities of women, and to bring together for reciprocal effectiveness, representative women in art, literature, and science.

<sup>75</sup> Riggs, Marcia Y. *Awake Arise and Act: A Womanist Call for Black Liberation*. Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1994, pg. 61.

The black women's club movement was a social and religious movement. As a social movement, NACW was a sponsor of national programs and the "first cohesive national network of black women;" a social reform organization whose very structure constituted support networks. The structure of the organization facilitated communication; local clubs at the base then state federations, regional federations, and at the top the national body; information flowed freely from bottom to top as well as in the reverse direction. The NACW would affiliate with organizations in Canada, Liberia, and Madagascar and with the National Council of Women and the International Council of Women of Darker Races; they also participated in the national suffrage and temperance movements.<sup>76</sup> Equally, the black women's club movement was a religious movement with respect to the training for leaderships obtained in and continuing congenial ties with the church (i.e. social local member clubs were, in fact, church groups).<sup>77</sup>

According to Riggs, the club movement embodied the black women's existence as a distinct sociohistorical group, and a comparative look at a few aspects of the black and white women's club movements is instructive with regard to this point. The national black women's club movement developed during the time of between 1892 and 1894 and even parallel to the white women's club movement; however, the formation of a separate black women's club movement was more than a defensive reaction because of racist exclusion determination to address the particular concerns of black women and all black people. The primary interest of the black women's club movement included:

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<sup>76</sup> Riggs, Marcia Y. *Awake Arise and Act*, pg. 62-63.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

commitment to political, social, and economic reforms, such as housing, job training, health care, childcare and anti-lynching campaign to name a few.

White women's movement promoted activism outside the home in terms of the morally superior values, which they believed that women could transmit to society.<sup>78</sup> The concept of "virtuous womanhood" and an "ideology of educated motherhood," served as the bases for their social reform activism. Social problems were seen as moral problems, and voluntary social reform efforts (e.g. temperance unions, mission societies, aid associations, women's club) were designed to eliminate corruption. Social problems were recognized as deriving from external conditions such as industrialization, urbanization, and immigration; social reform programs were preventive programs.<sup>79</sup> The black women's club movement also maintained a concept of "virtuous womanhood" and "ideology of educated motherhood." But because black women as a group confronted a white supremacist society, which placed them outside of the social and moral community they sought to reform, their club work had to be intrinsically political and economic as well as ethical. In other words, the black clubwomen's interpretation of the concept and ideology of womanhood was construed by their experience as women who were treated as anomalies in the society from which they were seeking justice.<sup>80</sup> Although primarily

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<sup>78</sup> Jane Cunningham Croly, *The History of the Woman's Club Movement in America* (New York: Henry G. Allen, 1898) and Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Hoes and Meier, 1980).

<sup>79</sup> Sheila Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), p.5 chapters 2 and 3

<sup>80</sup> Riggs, Marcia Y. *Awake Arise and Act*, pg. 64.

middle-class women led both the black and white women's club movements, there are clear differences. For white women, their middle-class status led them most often to concern themselves with issues from occupations for which their education had prepared them; issues of limited relevance to poor and working-class women's lives. However, for black women, the fact that their middle-class status was attained in spite of and maintained under conditions of racist caste-class oppression led them to view issues more systemically.<sup>81</sup>

Riggs suggests that the black club movement's leaders manifested a less classist attitude toward the masses of black people than did some black elite and the society in general. However, the critical difference was that the elitism of the black women's clubs emphasized social reform priorities that included upward social and economic mobility for everyone, whereas the classist elitism of white club women showed little concern for needs and aspirations of poorer classes.<sup>82</sup> Theoretically, that concept of upward mobility for all everyone is a tactic that has always fallen short when it came to or comes to those on the lowest echelons of society. Riggs interpretation of the club movement:

The black women's club movement was a socioreligious movement against race-gender-class oppression. It was a social movement because through it black women created a milieu in which they were empowered to reinterpret the dominant racial, sexual, and class ideologies which oppressed them as women, while providing programs that addressed the oppression of black people. It was a religious movement because 1) its leaders were largely trained within the church, 2) a continuing religious influence existed through the participation of church-affiliated clubs as the leadership's ties to the church and 3) it institutionalized an ethical perspective which emanated from the faith of black women (i.e. a belief in

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 66

<sup>82</sup> Ibid

both the justice of God and justice for Blacks as a command of God). The Black women's club movement was a mediation of social and religious movements.<sup>83</sup>

Riggs concludes that, the ethic of the clubwomen was a relational ethic of responsibility that made both black individuals and the community the subject of moral agency. Acts of oppression against or within black community were thus interpreted from the universal perspective of God's justice. Moral agency and action on the part of oppressed Blacks were critiqued as well as continually subjected to reinterpretations from this perspective.<sup>84</sup>

Riggs came up with three elements for a mediating ethic of black liberation are:

1. An understanding of the liberation of the oppressed is a part of God's justice that must be discerned within the oppressed community
2. An assumption that intracommunal accountability is a necessary prerequisite for intercommunal reconciliation; and
3. Processes of moral response that mediate between the tensions intrinsic in oppressive realities and the creative vision and praxis required for and generated by living with those tension.<sup>85</sup>

Riggs quotes James Cone in her developing a mediating process of the clubwomen's ethic pushes us to recognize that:

The ideals of integration and nationalism are insufficient for the problems we now face and for the issues with which we will have to deal in the future. We need to do more than try to be assimilated into white American society or to separate ourselves from it. Neither alternative is possible or even desirable. We need a broader perspective, one that includes the

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<sup>83</sup> Riggs, Marcia Y. *Awake Arise and Act*, pg. 78.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 86

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 87

creative values of both but also moves beyond them to an entirely new vision of the future.<sup>86</sup>

Riggs' perspective calls for a new way of functioning in society; this new way of being and knowing in the black community is not just for black women. It is not only incumbent upon women, but our male counterparts must acknowledge, the necessity for a change in our communities, which majorly includes relinquishing patriarchal mindsets, with a goal of equity for everyone. The need for reconciling the differences among the genders is a must, socially, politically, economically and religiously. Possibly the black women's clubs devoid of classism is a viable model for reconstructing and reconciling of how Black churches should function, with the goal of liberation for all people.

The black church itself as an institution must take seriously the challenge to be more a socioreligious movement along the lines of the paradigm of the black women's club movement. It must renounce its claims to be the institutional bulwark of black freedom struggles and engage more purposefully in coalitions with others within the community who do not share certain theological points of view.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> James Cone. *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984. 193

<sup>87</sup> Riggs, Marcia Y. *Awake Arise and Act*, pg. 90.

**CHAPTER TWO – THE OUTSIDER WITHIN —**  
**AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGYWOMEN EXPERIENCES: WOMANIST AND**  
**BLACK FEMINIST MEET**

A free bird leaps on the back of the wind and floats downstream till the current ends and dips his wing in the orange sun rays and dares to claim the sky. But a bird that stalks his narrow cage can seldom see through his bars of rage, his wings are clipped and his feet are tired so he opens his throat to sing. The caged bird sings with a fearful trill of things unknown but longed for still and his tune is heard on the distant hill for the caged bird sings of freedom...<sup>88</sup> ~ Maya Angelou

**Introduction to Literature Review**

An examination of womanist ethics and black feminism and its development within Black churches and the community, will assist in providing a foundation for theoretical framework. This review includes the background and context of the problems, of the treatment of women in general and clergywomen in ecclesial settings specifically. The primary purpose of a womanist ethical approach is to determine how to eradicate oppressive social structures in Black Churches<sup>89</sup>, which limit and demarcate the agency

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<sup>88</sup> Maya Angelou. *Caged Bird*. In Shaker, *Why Don't You Sing?* New York: Random House, 1983.

<sup>89</sup> The use of the terminology Black Churches is to signify that there's no monolithic Black Church, therefore the choice to add (es) encompasses all Black denominations, and cultures within cultures, which spans the range for those that are govern by specific rules, policies and practices and those with no specific policies and appear to make it up as they go along.

of African American women in general and clergywomen specifically.<sup>90</sup> A secondary point discuss the difference and or similarities of womanist and black feminist thought, by engaging womanists such as Marcia Riggs, Kelly Brown Douglas, Melbourne Cummings and Judi Latta. These womanists write about gender biases, violence, moral agency, and other life robbing experiences, to which womanist Emilie Townes asserts, womanism must always bear witness to and disrupt the “matter-realities” of suffering. The notion of suffering is synonymous with the repression women experience in religious and secular setting; there is a need for action, the need for liberation from the legacy of enslaved bodies and minds.

Without neglecting the task of liberation, womanism must maintain its characteristically postmodern commitment to radical relationality.<sup>91</sup> Black feminists - Patricia Hill Collins, Audre Lorde and bell hooks - expand the notion of standpoint theory<sup>92</sup>, which conceptualizes identities as organic, fluid, interdependent, multiple and dynamic socially constructed “locations” within historical context.<sup>93</sup> Black feminism is grounded in Black women’s historical experiences with enslavement, anti-lynching movements, segregation, Civil Rights and Black Power movement, women’s movement,

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<sup>90</sup> Stacey M.Floyd-Thomas. *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics*. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2006.

<sup>91</sup> Emilie Townes, “To Be Called Beloved,” 201; Marcia Riggs, *Awake, Arise, & Act: A Womanist Call for Black Liberation* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1994).

<sup>92</sup> Stand Point theory according Patricia Hill Collins posits that Black women are the experts of their experiences and the knowledge created from those experiences, because they live at the intersections of their multiply marginal identities.

<sup>93</sup> Patricia Hill Collins. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York, New York: Routledge, 2000.

sexual politics, capitalism and patriarchy.<sup>94</sup> Black churches', and their leadership, and their overall treatment of clergywomen regardless of socioeconomic status, political stance or denominational status is oppressive and not life giving or affirming for Black women. Systematic theologian and womanist ethicist, Jacqueline Grant, reminds us that Black women's experience are tri-dimensional realities render[ing] their situation as a complex one. She states, "One could say that not only are they the oppressed of the oppressed, but their situation represents the 'particular within the particular'." According to Grant, these experiences of Black women are complex, given they incorporate racial, gender, and class oppressions. Ironically, womanist ethicist and theologian Katie Cannon argument suggest that Black women and "Black life requires moral agency that may run contrary to the ethical boundaries of mainline Protestantism" since the assumption of dominant ethical structures "implied that doing Christian ethics in the Black community was either immoral or amoral."<sup>95</sup> In the search for social justice there are a complex and alternative forms of agency, which objectively redefine the nature of the self-in-community. According to Joan Martin in *The Notion of Difference for Emerging Womanist Ethics: The Writings of Audre Lorde and bell hooks*, as womanist ethical and theological thought continues to use difference as a category, further examination of the adequacy of this notion as an epistemological and methodological tool is crucial for understanding African American women's lives. Through the epistemological, methodological, and discursive use of the notion of difference, the field of religious

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid

<sup>95</sup> Katie G. Cannon. *Black Womanist Ethics*, Academy Series 60 vols. Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Scholars Press, 1988.

social justice is challenged.<sup>96</sup> This, in turn, fosters a more accurate analysis of the real historical situation of women as we face the interstructured, yet often discrete, oppressions of race, sex, class, heterosexism, and cultural imperialism, which creates accompanying, forms of hegemonic discourse.<sup>97</sup>

Lorde and hooks, both cultural critics, write from a feminist perspective, utilizing the notion of difference<sup>98</sup> in their work to present the experience of African American women and situated in current feminist theory. They are both often cited in womanist religious ethics given their use of the notion of difference and ensuing analysis of the oppressions facing blackwomen. Womanist ethicist, Joan Martin, posits that embedded in womanist liberation ethics are concepts of social justice and moral agency that address the real lived history and situations of African American women, and value specificity and difference in moral agency, in the face of institutional oppression.<sup>99</sup> Martin asks a crucial question, “Can a notion of difference be instrumental in the dismantling of

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<sup>96</sup> Joan M. Martin. *The Notion of Difference for Emerging Womanist Ethics: The Writings of Audre Lorde and bell hooks*. Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion Vol. 9 No. ½ (Spring-Fall, 1993, pg. 39-51.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid

<sup>98</sup> Difference functions epistemologically as a form of knowledge embedded in human nature. It is a methodological tool for understanding and constructing non-dominant social mutuality and vision, in part because it is also dialogical in nature—difference must be recognized and acknowledged by another. It is part of a necessary political dynamic for coalition works as well as substantially, in content, a form of power. Here, difference for Lorde is essentially positive. It is a tool that enables one to stand over against the distortions within the paradigms of oppression and domination, "learning how to take our differences and make them our strength" (Lorde, 112). The knowledge of true difference is the fundamental tool for dismantling the master's house. How is that? Difference potentially permits us to more accurately see the nature of seduction by the master and his power—if we are oppressed, we are not, and never will be, truly equal to the master in the present scheme of things. So, we have the opportunity to build work and social relationships on alternative, long-term goals with others rather than on short-term gains exploitative of others and ourselves. (Martin, 39-51)

<sup>99</sup> Joan M. Martin. *The Notion of Difference for Emerging Womanist Ethics: The Writings of Audre Lorde and bell hooks*. Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion Vol. 9 No. ½ (Spring-Fall, 1993, pg. 39-51.

oppressive and exploitative discursive structures and can it catalyze African American women's moral agency?" She recognizes the social location of personal experience and its sociopolitical influence on the contributions of blackwomen thinkers.

Black women have sustained Black Churches regardless of the specific denomination. According to Melbourne Cummings and Judi Latta, it is apparent that despite the recognized prominence of women in the church, the leadership has always been preserved for the male. Notwithstanding that point, Black women increasingly, are recognizing and accepting, their "call" to preach and are taking their places in leadership in the ministry of God, but not without a struggle. This literature review will shed light on the premise that the experiences of African American clergywomen navigating ecclesial settings is an arduous, oppressive route toward accepting and following their calling.

### **Black Churches as Historically Liberated— Related to Slavery/Civil Rights**

Audre Lorde poignantly stated that history has encompassed a socialized and institutionalized rejection of difference in order to extract profit from some by making excess of others, and no one has escaped this social education. In her central essay, *Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference*, Lorde writes:

Much of western European history conditions us to see human differences in simplistic opposition to each other: dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior. In a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who, through systematized oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanized other.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Joan M. Martin. *The Notion of Difference for Emerging Womanist Ethics: The Writings of Audre Lorde and bell hooks*. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* Vol. 9 No. ½ (Spring-Fall, 1993), pg. 114

Furthermore, Lorde says we are taught to deal with differences with “fear and loathing,” responding in one of three ways: “ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant or destroy it if we think it is subordinate”<sup>101</sup> Lorde suggest that these three components blindness, eroticization, and destruction — constitute the hegemonic discourse of difference through what she labels the misnaming of difference and its resulting distortion.<sup>102</sup>

According to Rufus Burrow’s article, *Sexism in the Black Community and the Black Church*, there can be no doubt that there were similarities between black and white churches’ attitudes toward women preachers in the nineteenth century, many of which can be attributed to the socialization and acculturation process.<sup>103</sup> Burrow found that although black women were not always in agreement as to whether the sex questions (gender) should ever be subordinated to the race question, it is clear that there was a strong stance for women’s rights in general and black women’s right particular. Reverend Jarena Lee (1783), Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911) are examples of some of those women. Despite the proclamation by several Black<sup>104</sup> pastors to be progressive in their thinking, this progressiveness has not

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<sup>101</sup> Joan M. Martin. *The Notion of Difference for Emerging Womanist Ethics: The Writings of Audre Lorde and bell hooks*. Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion Vol. 9 No. ½ (Spring-Fall, 1993, pg. 39-51

<sup>102</sup> Ibid

<sup>103</sup> Rufus Burrow Jr. *Sexism in the Black Community and the Black Church*. 13 vols. Atlanta, GA: Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center, 1985-86.

held true regarding the status of women preachers and pastors. The issues around gender in Black churches have been problematic, contentious, and convoluted - an understatement to say the least.<sup>105</sup> Cummings and Latta suggest that perhaps nowhere is there a more controversial, tradition-bound subject than that of women in the pulpit—occupying the sacred space and assuming what some consider to be the most revered role of the faith, that of “God’s anointed” bearer of the Word. The testimonies of Black churchwomen confirm this.<sup>106</sup> Ethicist Marcia Riggs is concerned with the way that we reinterpret our beliefs for transforming the moral life of African American churches in the areas of sexual-gender relations, clergy ethics, ministerial ethics and ecclesial practices.

### **Church Practices or Ecclesial Practices**

Riggs declared that African American churches are examined as “supportive institution[s]” of society and as “human communit [ies],” where there is a conflict with the reciprocal interactions between determinative institutions (political and economic) and supportive institutions (law, education, religion, media family), and there is a social morality that those institutions either reinforce or challenge.<sup>107</sup> The sacraments, baptism

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<sup>104</sup> The use of capital B for black through out the dissertation is utilized to privilege the cultural designation like African American, which will also be used interchangeably throughout the work.

<sup>105</sup> Melbourne S. Cummings and Judi Moore Latta. "When They Honor the Voice: Centering African American Women's Call Stories." *Journal of Black Studies* 40, no. 4 (March 2010): 668.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid

and the eucharist are formal practices of churches mandated by doctrines and polity. The informal practices may or may not be spoken or written into official documents of the church, but they are consistently adhered to as normative ways to establish the life of the church. The moral vision of the church provides a structure of meaning that signifies what is perceived and affirmed as good and evil, acceptable and unacceptable, responsible and irresponsible.<sup>108</sup> The moral life of African American churches is examined by both their character (the being) and their agency (the doing); by character, meaning the virtues, values, and ideals that characterize the dispositions of individuals and the ends toward, which the churches attempt. The use of the term agency refers to both formal and informal practices of the churches. There are four features of practices theorized by Riggs:

1. They are indispensable to moral formation
2. They are those particularly pregnant actions that are both a means to a good life and are also aspects of a historically constituted good form of life.
3. They are those actions intrinsic to a way of life that center, sustain, and order that way of living.
4. They are rites that embody what is right.<sup>109</sup>

These practices have been pinnacle to the development of black churches throughout the western hemisphere, often providing the platform for the oppressive ideologies and standards established under the guise of liberation. There is still the need for transformed

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<sup>107</sup> Marcia Y Riggs. *Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church*. Eugene, Oregon: WIPF and STOCK, 2003.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, pg. 21

<sup>109</sup> Marcia Y Riggs. *Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church*. Eugene, Oregon: WIPF and STOCK, 2003, pg. 20

sexual-gender relations. Riggs defines sexual-gender ethics as the morality governing the relationship between men and women who are biologically different beings (sexual) with socially constructed meanings of being female and male (gender) that they bring to both their private and public interactions.<sup>110</sup> Riggs situates the conversation about the treatment of women in black churches by providing a working definition of oppression:

The relational imbalance of power between genders and other social groups, creates oppressive situations, privileging one group over another, limiting, injuring, and or controlling the less privileged group. This process is “embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in institutional rules and the collective consequences of following the those rules.”<sup>111</sup>

### **Ministerial Ethics**

Riggs defines ministerial ethics<sup>112</sup> as the values and practices of a church’s common life, that is, the ethics of the church’s life enables its ministry (its witness) within and outside of its walls. She uses ministerial ethics as an overarching category pointing to the interacting ethics of clergy and laity sharing a common life and call to ministry. Riggs speculates that the theological ethical framework for sexual-gender justice is the book of Acts, which provides a moral vision for transformed African American churches. An understanding of God’s power rooted in the Gospel of Luke, according to Riggs, is the first feature of this theological framework. The only solution to the issues that plague black churches is to understand that power must be interpreted as

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, pg. 21

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, pg. 22

<sup>112</sup> This heading is from Marcia Y. Riggs, *Plenty Good Room*.

relational, as processes of encounter, and this power must be enacted as sharing rather than possessing.<sup>113</sup> Only when there is an equitable distribution of power and a substantial amount of healing in black churches, with an acknowledgement and a understanding that black churches' historical contributions did good as well as evil; this is an integral part of said history, and crucial toward healing in the community and with women specifically.

### **Clergy Ethics**

Clergy ethics<sup>114</sup> refer to formal (usually written) code of conduct prescribed for clergy and those in ministerial roles by a denomination or the morality practiced by persons who are ordained to fulfill the role of clergy in the church. Riggs suggests that the practice(s) of power that drives sexual-gender injustices is one wherein power is interpreted as a commodity that is possessed. In the context of the church, the male clergy seeks to possess the power of clerical status, asserting heterosexual patriarchal privilege.<sup>115</sup> This assertion often plays out through the legislation of using lay women to fulfill personal and professional needs, dismissing or silencing voices of women (lay or clergy) in the governing of the church, restricting or eliminating the full participation of women as leader at various levels of the church ministry, and denying the presence and

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<sup>113</sup> Marcia Y Riggs. *Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church*. Eugene, Oregon: WIPF and STOCK, 2003, pg. 105

<sup>114</sup> This heading is from Marcia Y. Riggs, *Plenty Good Room*.

<sup>115</sup> Marcia Y Riggs. *Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church*. Eugene, Oregon: WIPF and STOCK, 2003, pg. 104.

legitimacy of homosexual<sup>116</sup> persons as leaders and members.<sup>117</sup> This practice of sexual power is dominating and controlling as it determines and maintains a hierarchy of relations between sexual-gender groups, with heterosexual men at the top of the hierarchy. Oppression is justified by interpreting imbalances in power as givens—sanctioned, meaning ordained by God. The patriarchal privileging has positioned men to believe that they have been divinely appointed to decide, whom God has ordained, and/or whom God has called.

### **Black Elitism**

In *The Politics of Black Religion: Your Spirits Walk Beside Us*, historian Barbara D. Savage posits that there is no single, unified black church but rather many churches marked by enormous intellectual, theological, and political differences and independence. The tension between faith and political activism in black churches testifies to the difficult and unpredictable project of a combination of religion and politics. Savage reminds us that African American religion and political struggle seemed poignantly and inextricably interconnected; there have been contentious deliberations among diverse African American groups about whether religious doctrines, religious people, and religious organizations were a blessing or a curse in the struggle for black freedom.<sup>118</sup> Savage

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<sup>116</sup> In order to remain true to tenure of Riggs work I chose not to change the term homosexual, despite the fact that there are more politically and socially acceptable terms such as gay or lesbian, same gender loving, LGBTQ community .

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, pg. 104

found that African American churches could be progressive political forces; her work recovered important debates for decades proceeding, during and after the civil rights movement, arranging evidence from a wide variety of public lives and venues.<sup>119</sup>

Although religious beliefs, religious institutions, and religious people were seen as essential to the discourse, they fundamentally remained a paradox in African American political history. Black churches were seen as central to both projects given they were the only indigenous, black controlled organizations with the potential for mass mobilization.<sup>120</sup>

In the 1790s, blacks in the North established two churches in Philadelphia, one that left a white Methodist church, to establish an independent black Methodist tradition, the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church; and the second, the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, which remains within the larger Episcopal denomination.

In the opening decades of the twenty first century they were marked with intellectual clashes between education and belief, modernity and religion, science and faith, the intellectual and the spiritual. Educated black elites were often at odd the masses of black people... differences between the religious beliefs, modernity and religion, science and faith, the intellectual and the spiritual.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Barbara Dianne Savage. *The Politics of Black Religion: Your Spirits Walk Beside Us*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, pg. 3

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, pg. 7

<sup>121</sup> Barbara Dianne Savage. *The Politics of Black Religion: Your Spirits Walk Beside Us*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008, pg. 7.

Savage indicates that educated black elites were often at odds with the masses of black people. The differences between the religious beliefs and practices of the educated and those of the uneducated, manifested in attempts to control the religious freedom and religious choices of less privileged black people. This distinction created an even larger rift between the two groups. This ever-growing chasm among African American religion and political activism grew. Savage found three paradoxical strains between black religion and black politics.

*First*, there is the choice that individuals make about their religious lives—where and why they worship, whether and why they believe—are among the most privately informed and freely made decisions. Savage says, ultimately, religious freedom also means to define not only one’s religious beliefs, but also the balance between the personal and the political, between individual salvation and communal purpose. In fact according to Savage, black religious belief and black religious life, by their very nature, are resistance to external research and control, including from those who seek to harness their powers for a collective political purpose on behalf of the race as a whole. *Second*, black churches, like other American Protestant counterparts, are the most decentralized and the most idiosyncratic of all social organizations. It is important to note that the regardless of the common usage there is no such thing as the “black church.” The term is political, intellectual, and theological construction that symbolizes unity and homogeneity while masking the enormous diversity and independence among African American religious institution and believers. *Third*, according to Savage, to call black churches into public duty, as a primary vehicle for empowering the race is to rely on an institution that was and remains largely male-led but female dominated not only in membership but also in fundraising and organizing activities.<sup>122</sup>

Savage reinforces my supposition that the prevalence of women in black churches is the primary aspect of the make up of the majority of churches; simply stated women are the majority in black churches as it relates to membership, attendance, finances, and the physical aesthetics of the church. Savage believes:

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<sup>122</sup> Barbara Dianne Savage. *The Politics of Black Religion: Your Spirits Walk Beside Us*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008, pg.8-11.

To call black churches into public duty as a primary vehicle for empowering the race is to rely on an institution that remains largely male-led but female-dominated, not only in membership but in fundraising and organizing activities. Additionally, this reality aggravates persisting sensitivities about the strength and substantiality of black women and about black male authority and masculinity. Given the fact that the typical black church member is a working class black woman, debates about the role that black religious institutions should or should not play in black politics were also implicitly, but rarely explicitly, arguments about the place of black women in American political life and about the unstated “problem” of their largely absent male counterparts.<sup>123</sup>

bell hooks discusses the negative stereotypes concerning the nature of black masculinity which continue to over influence the identities that black males are allowed to fashion for themselves. A natural outcome of militant anti-racist activism, which terrified racist white Americans, emerged from the radical subculture of black maleness. Unfortunately, as long as black males are regarded as savages incapable of rising above their animal nature, they will continue to be seen as an easily contained threat. Therefore, hooks postulates that black males sought liberation from the chains of imperialist white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy. Yet, ironically in a patriarchal culture, all males learn the role of subjugator, developing leadership styles and ways of being that restricts and confines; when race and class enter the picture along with patriarchy, black males endure the worst imposition of gendered masculine patriarchal identity. I contend that these experiences of black males have a significant effect on the black male and how he relates to black women, in political, social, and religious settings, often resulting in the oppressed (the black male) becoming the oppressor (of the black woman).<sup>124</sup> Despite the

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid, pg. 10

fact the black male was liberated from his oppressor (white males) to some extent, the expectation that they learned from their previous oppressive occurrences, it does not appear that the liberative message and experience completely translate to the black males ethos, causing them to stand in a place of superiority. The treatment of African American women as objects rather than creators of scientific or any form of knowledge occurred during an important period of Western science characterized by the emergence of scientific authority in explaining social realities.<sup>125</sup> This continued treatment of African American women as invisible within the feminist analyses, as well as silences concerning their exclusion from specific areas such as science and religion as a profession, have proved harmful and detrimental to the field and to women in general.

### **Churches As Places of Safety for Political Resistance**

Since slavery, the “church” has been considered a place of refuge for people - a sanctuary from slave traders and any other abusers out to harm marginalized bodies. Sociologist, E. Franklin Frazier, described the black church in *The Negro Church in America* as “a nation within a nation”; suggesting the way the church functioned for Negroes. The black church was that stabilizing force for moral and family life; the church was the place for establishing an institutional economic base, nurturing educational

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<sup>124</sup> The use of back women and African American women are used interchangeably, the switch usually denoting the particular time period, that the conversation was taking place.

<sup>125</sup> Patricia Hill Collins. "Moving Beyond Gender: Intersectionality and Scientific Knowledge." In *The Gender Lens: Revisioning Gender*, by Judith Loeber, Beth B. Hess Myra Marx Ferre. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000.

achievement, and fulfilling political aspirations in a society that denied Negroes full participation. Also, in a patriarchal culture, all males learn a role, that restricts and confines; when race and class enter the picture along with patriarchy, black males engender masculine patriarchal identity. I contend that these experiences of black males have a significant effect on how they relate to black women, in political, social, economic and religious settings; often resulting in the oppressed (the black male) becoming the oppressor (the black woman). According to Franklin, the Negro church was an agency of social control and assimilation, a “refuge in a hostile white world.”<sup>126</sup> The churches functioned as an alternate world designed and established to protect its members from the hostile world. Unfortunately, the African American male clergy perceived themselves as securing the rights of patriarchal privilege, which was denied them in the broader society. This appears to be where the “African American male garnered the respect and dominance over women, some maintain that they had not been granted in the larger society, and consequently cannot achieve even in their own homes.”<sup>127</sup> Patriarchal politics not only gave black men a bit of an edge over black women; it affirmed that males did not have to answer to females. Consequently,

it was socially acceptable for all men in patriarchal society (black men were no exception) to lie and deceive to maintain power over women. Just as the slaves had learned from their white masters the art of dissimulation, women learned that they could subvert male power over them by also withholding truth.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Frazier, E. Franklin. *The Negro Church*. New York, New York: Schocken Books, 1972, chapter 3.

<sup>127</sup> Marcia Y Riggs. *Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church*. Eugene, Oregon: WIPF and STOCK, 2003, pg. 80

<sup>128</sup> bell hooks. *Sisters Of The Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery*. Boston, Mass: South End Press, 1993.

As racial violence increased and terrorism ran rampant across the country, most Black churches stood staunchly in their resistance. According to Barbara Savage, African American religion and political struggle seemed poignantly and inextricably intertwined; there were spirited debates among varied groups of African Americans about whether religious doctrine, religious people, and religious organizations were a blessing or a curse in the struggle for black freedom and racial progress.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, during the twentieth century, the dominant political narrative treated African American religion with hopelessness and condescension. In the late 1950s, the Civil Rights movement began to stir within churches, church people, and church culture; many of those who emerged as black political leaders were ministers, empowered by their literacy and by their prominent role in building black churches which were the first public forms of political organizing.

Simultaneously, church began to serve as a behavioral control system for women in general and clergywomen or those attempting to pursue the call into the ministry. The Civil Rights movement propagated a series of intellectual, economic, and political changes in the decades following the 1960s. Savage found that the prominent place of religion in the movement and the advent of Black Power required theologians, social scientist and historians to grapple with a new question about the nexus between religion and political resistance. Womanist theologian, Delores Williams, states,

While Black churches sustain Black women emotionally and provide “theological space” for Black women’s faith expressions. Black churches also “suppress and

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<sup>129</sup> Barbara Dianne Savage. *The Politics of Black Religion: Your Spirits Walk Beside Us*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008.

make invisible Black women's thought and culture; through their uncritical use of the Bible and their patriarchal theology.<sup>130</sup>

These tactics were utilized to subjugate and keep them in their place. Marla Frederick, in *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*, posits that the Black church religious experience involved some degree of capitulation or accommodation in the face of unequal structures of power.

Several black churches and their members did not embrace involvement by the church in the Civil Rights and Black Power movement. Frederick recognized that the type of power Black churches have to effect change in the community emphasizes the significance of the black public sphere;<sup>131</sup> financial resources, facilities, and security of the church have all contributed to making it a central component in organizational and protest efforts.<sup>132</sup>

The power yielded by black churches is impressive, yet disappointing when an in-depth analysis of black churches is undertaken. Such analysis reveals the maltreatment of many of the communities within the church, i.e. women and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Queer (LGBTQ) communities. Eboni Marshall Turman states in

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<sup>130</sup> Delores S. Williams. *Sisters in the Wilderness The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2007, pg. xvi.

<sup>131</sup> Frederick describes the black public sphere as being dubbed an "alternative" public sphere to that described by Jürgen Habermas. Habermas considered the public sphere an elite space, set apart from the state, wherein people could engage in rational and critical debate about political issues affecting their lives. The historical exclusion of certain groups from the broader public sphere mandated the creation of alternative spheres. Not only race, but also class as well as gender biases encouraged the creation of alternative spheres wherein varying views and opinions could be fully expressed. See First Sunday Notes, 22.

<sup>132</sup> Marla F. Frederick. *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2003, pg.9

*Toward a Womanist Ethic of Incarnation: Black Bodies, the Black Church and the Council of Chalcedon*, that body politics is clearly identifiable in the American racial project; bodily confluence led to the construction of raced identities in order to distinguish an immutable Western European ideal to justify its oppressive and exploitive relationship with other groups.<sup>133</sup> “Religious rhetoric, political rationale, and pseudoscientific theory and experimentation all served to sanction the dehumanization of black African bodies and other non-European bodies that varied culturally and phenotypically from the Western norm.”<sup>134</sup> I would assert that in the same manner that Marshall Turman states that the black body is dehumanized in the racial project, women in general, and clergywomen specifically, have experienced the same, if not often worse, treatment from the one institution that was established to protect them and all people. Ironically, African American women have had their bodies reconstituted as disembodied sites of social conflict and interest by both white and black patriarchal forces. Black women bodies have been deemed problematic, inconvenient, disruptive annoyances unless they are providing services accommodating others’ needs and at their convenience.<sup>135</sup>

Womanist Theologian, Kelly Brown Douglas, shows how black religious institutions have been rendered “invisible in and invisible to the eyes of the dominant

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<sup>133</sup> Eboni Marshall Turman. *Toward a Womanist Ethic of Incarnation: Black Bodies, the Black Church and the Council of Chalcedon*. New York, New York: Palgrave, 2013.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 2-5.

culture.”<sup>136</sup> Black clergy and black religious scholars seized the media attention to articulate the meaning of the black church and its role in the black struggle for freedom. They explained the nature of black liberation theology. In general, black church leadership attempted to present the black church in a manner more reflective of its “rich history, incredible legacy and multiple meanings.”<sup>137</sup>

Brown Douglas, in his careful analysis of the black church and black liberation theology, began to gain clarity concerning what was “going all wrong.” “Something was going all wrong” in the black church, something beyond what she had previously recognized. Before, Brown Douglas thought it was a matter of sexuality. Now she understands that it was about more than black sexuality and the LGBTQ body—even as it was precisely about sexuality and LGBTQ bodies and I would add Black women bodies.”<sup>138</sup> Brown Douglas realized that these spokespersons were doing more than protecting the integrity of the black church, as they claimed. Intentionally or not they were offering an “apologetic defense.” She suggests, that the church that emerged in slavery and asserted itself in protest to “slaveholding” versions of Christianity was put on the defensive, seeking at least a favorable reception within mainstream society and dominant religious culture.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Kelly Brown Douglas. *Black Bodies and The Black Church: A Blues Slant*. New York, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, pg. xii

<sup>138</sup> Kelly Brown Douglas. *Black Bodies and The Black Church: A Blues Slant*. New York, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pg. xii

Brown Douglas posits, even if this apologetic defense was reflective of a shrewd Faustian<sup>140</sup> pact that it revealed another troubling narrative within the black churches, one identified as a *narrative of civility*.<sup>141</sup> Brown Douglas describes narrative of civility as a persistent and controlling narrative within the black churches; it presumes that the way black people are perceived by the wider society is related to the way in which the black churches are perceived. It protects the image of the black churches and strives to present churches as an institutionalized embodiment of black civility. Brown Douglas says, undoubtedly, “the narrative of civility is inspired by a commitment to life, freedom, and over social well-being; it does not always function to the benefit of all black bodies.”<sup>142</sup> This concept is enigmatic and disconcerting because on one hand, it emphasized the uniqueness of black church history and culture; on the other hand, it exalts white church culture, which is the antithesis to black church culture. In fact, instead of preservation of the wellbeing of black people, the narrative of civility nurtures a hostile culture and maintains an excluded class within the black church community. This way of being literally pushes the black church to “cast off” and “look down” on various bodies. Brown Douglas proclaims therefore that the narrative of civility is problematic for black

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid

<sup>140</sup> Faustian - **Faust** is the protagonist of a classic German legend, a magician and alchemist who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for power and knowledge. Definition found in American Heritage Dictionary of English language, Fifth Edition, 2016 Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.

<sup>141</sup> Kelly Brown Douglas. *Black Bodies and The Black Church: A Blues Slant*. New York, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pg. xii

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, xiii

churches, as it requires the black church to discard certain bodies, while offering a preferential option for the outsider, yet legitimatizing a white god. For example, the church will not accept members of the LGBTQ community fully, unless they are providing a service for the church, i.e. being the minister of music, while offering handout to the poor and destitute. Unfortunately, while it presents the black church as a refuge for black life,<sup>143</sup> it repeatedly estranges various black bodies. Brown Douglas proclaims that this narrative of civility is attuned to the very culture, system and ideologies that have disregarded, disrespected and disenfranchised black bodies. Subsequently, despite virtuous intents this narrative leads to a complex relationship with the very bodies for which the black church exists.

### **Biblical Reference to the Role of Women Used by Black Churches**

Sexual-gender socialization refers to the processes by which we acquire our sexual-gender myths and role expectations through those persons (such as parents and teachers) and institutions (such as schools, churches, and media) that are socializing agents.<sup>144</sup> Riggs' considers socialization as a form of moral education where women and men acquire virtues and values associated with a sexual-gender morality. Although there are traditional or status quo sexual-gender roles deriving from the sexual-gender morality, these roles can be changed because the roles are learned—historically specific and

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<sup>143</sup> After the emancipation with given segregation and the Jim and Jane Crow laws the church was the only place that black people could gather to worship, socialize and have political discussions.

<sup>144</sup> Marcia Y. Riggs. *Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church*. Eugene, Oregon: WIPF and STOCK, 2003, 99.

relative, and persons are moral beings (have the capacity to be intentional) who can challenge and resist traditional roles and expectations. Transforming the sexual-gender roles of African American women and men in the church will thus be accomplished through moral education that affects countersocialization.<sup>145</sup>

Countersocialization is a way of practicing the ongoing process of resocialization that is at the heart of the Pauline<sup>146</sup> project of communal ethics. Riggs states,

Paul's communal ethics was based in "the power of the cross," the power of God, the power of life. Importantly, the power of the cross is the power of the cross has two critical pillars: 1) unity and 2) mutual service. Moreover, Paul understood that a community shaped by the power of the cross is one wherein its members acquire a new symbol system and meaning structure.<sup>147</sup>

Men's moral agency will be self-critical but not self-denigrating when they recognize their gender-based power and seek to use that power for the creation of liberated sexual-gender relations, knowing that their personal power and manhood is not diminished by such action.<sup>148</sup> Riggs suggestion that once men get clarity that their power is not tied up in the domination of women but in fact in supporting the creation of liberated sexual-

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>146</sup> The term Pauline is used to reference and explain the works or literature of the Apostle Paul in the Christian biblical text.

<sup>147</sup> Marcia Y. Riggs. *Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church*. Eugene, Oregon: WIPF and STOCK, 2003, 99.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>148</sup> Marcia Y. Riggs. *Plenty Good Room*, pg. 99.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid,102.

gender relations. Like a host of unnamed women in the Bible, in an ecclesiastically male-dominated cultural environment where women are often anonymous, they and their voices have been silent, with only a few exceptions, in proclaiming their acceptance of the call to preach.<sup>149</sup>

### **Call to Leadership the Black Religious Context (Call Story)**

What exactly is the nature of a “call”? Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1950) wrote that “the call of Jesus Christ” is a call to discipleship and is truly accepted by anyone who believes in Him. Bonhoeffer declared that the call, when it comes, comes to a person alone and that God’s call will come more than once.<sup>150</sup> Does this suggest that call stories, told by ministers in the context of the culture of African American women, echo only spiritual principles without other cultural manifestations?<sup>151</sup> William H. Myers, New Testament professor posits in *The Irresistible Urge To Preach*, “Discussions of call, whether public or private, is not a new phenomenon in the Black churches. Call stories are heard in sermons, testimonials and ritual leading to ordination.”<sup>152</sup> According to

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<sup>149</sup> Melbourne S. Cummings and Judi Moore Latta. "When They Honor the Voice: Centering African American Women's Call Stories." *Journal of Black Studies* (Sage Publications) 40, no. 4 (March 2010): 668.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid

<sup>151</sup> Ibid

<sup>152</sup> William H. Myers. *The Irresistible Urge To Preach*. Atlanta, Georgia: Aaron Press, 1992, pg. xiv. Other examples of calls stories can be found in: Myers, *God’s “Yes” Was Louder Than My No: Rethinking The African American Call Ministry*; Tracy Hartman’s, *Already but Not Yet: The Status of Women Baptist*

Myers, scholars have taken seriously the importance of how call stories are told, with what is told. There are several terms utilized in this process, such as the terms story and narrative.

A “story” refers to the content: what is told; and “narrative” refers to the discourse: how it is told. “Story” is the storyteller’s attempt to reconstruct the chronological account of what happened. “Narrative” is the oral or written words that the hearer or reader experiences as articulated by the storyteller.<sup>153</sup>

The Cultural determinants that are discussed are the following: What is a call story? What does “being called,” mean in the context of the culture of African American religious communities? How are Black women’s cultures and ways of being in the world viewed? The perception of strong women getting involved in any type of politics is mixed— suggesting adjectives such as bold, confrontational, impolite, and honest. Nevertheless, she is revered and respected as a woman who stands her ground and comes to the aid of those in need.<sup>154</sup>

This notion of “respectability” is so valued in most churches that is doing the “right thing” and not going against the status quo, dressing and acting the expected way. Women’s ministerial leadership is often undervalued, and more often than not women are absent from powerful decision-making bodies in the church, like the deacon and trustee

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*Pastors, Cummings and Latta’s, When They Honor the Voice: Centering African American Women’s Call Stories; LaRue’s, This is My Story, providing*

<sup>153</sup> William H. Myers. *The Irresistible Urge To Preach*. Atlanta, Georgia: Aaron Press, 1992, pg. xvi.

<sup>154</sup> Marla F. Frederick. *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2003, pg. 2.

boards.<sup>155</sup> Jacquelyn Grant suggests that male leadership in churches celebrates women as the “backbone” of the church in order to keep them in the “background.” Cheryl Townsend Gilkes’s work on churchwomen in, *If It Wasn’t for the Women*, leaves the reader with little doubt in answering the hypothetical:

If it wasn’t for the women, there would be no church. Yet while the inner dynamic of church life is often far from ideal, women continue to worship God and contribute to the overarching aims and missions of their local church bodies. They moved beyond the problems and limitations of the church to full participation not because the church is perfect, but because their churches form valuable community networks that foster mutual support, nurture individual gifts, and validate individual identities.<sup>156</sup>

### **Resistance and Accommodation**

Lynne raises several issues.<sup>157</sup> First, the suggestion that faith and the church work against women’s radical expressions of anger and indignation reflects part of a larger debate within the study of African American religion.<sup>158</sup> Discussions concerning sexism within the church itself are not addressed. Resistance and accommodation are seen largely as subjects for the analysis of racism, not sexism. The issue of sexism was relegated to feminist (white middle class women) Nevertheless, the history of the resistance/accommodation debate illuminates a discussion of how the church serves as a

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>156</sup> Marla F. Frederick. *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2003, pg. 4

<sup>157</sup> Frederick uses pseudonyms through out her work when she discussed people, churches, businesses other originations.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 5

source of strength and empowerment for people of faith.<sup>159</sup> This revisionist work of the social unrest of the sixties began to reconceptualize the relationship between religion and social protest, ultimately demonstrating how religion serves as a means of both “social relief and social protest.”<sup>160</sup>

Gayraud Wilmore, a scholar of African American religion, notes that black religion “began in Africa, was mixed with European Christianity in the Caribbean and Latin America evangelical Protestantism on the slave plantations of the South,” and suggest that “an exceedingly elastic but tenacious thread that binds together the contributive and developmental factors of black religion in the US as one distinctive social phenomenon,” its radicalism.<sup>161</sup>

### **Spirituality in Context**

Spirituality is specific to particular groups—such as African American women—when it is informed by shared historical or ritual experiences. It is informed first by an individual’s relationship with God—nurtured by religious doctrine, Holy Scriptures, pastors, televangelists, and other mediators of faith. It is further informed by historical traditions—learned understandings of what it means to serve God. Finally, spirituality is

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<sup>159</sup> Marla F. Frederick. *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2003, pg. 2.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 5

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 5

informed by social relations—one’s positioning in society, which in the United States in inevitably raced, classed and gendered.<sup>162</sup>

Historical traditions further inform women’s spiritual lives by giving them a standard against which to measure their spiritual progress. These historical traditions are both personal and collective.<sup>163</sup> Women and other members of the church get caught up with the legacy of the church; they are steeped in traditions and old ways of doing things, which at times dates back to slavery. These memories and understanding are fundamental parts of their spiritual life. Frederick argues that:

Collective histories include assumptions passed down about what it means to serve God, how one should behave in church, and what types of activities one should engage in as a believer. The history of black church activism thus inevitably informs women’s understanding of what they should or should not do within and outside the public realm. These ideas establish guidelines for them to measure the success or failure of their particular church.<sup>164</sup>

According to Frederick, social conditions are the primary backdrop against which Frederick understand as women’ notions of spirituality. Investigating the dynamics of racism, sexism, and classism at the turn of the twenty-first century helps to discern the forms of activism embedded in the spirituality that these women practice.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Marla F. Frederick. *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2003, pg. 16.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 17

<sup>164</sup> Ibid

<sup>165</sup> Marla F. Frederick. *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2003, pg. 17.

Patricia Hill Collins argues that although African American women may all experience the intersecting oppressions of gender, race, and often class, their responses are varied.

“The existence of core themes [race, class, and gender oppression] does not mean that African American women respond to these themes in the same way. Diversity among black women produces different concrete experiences that in turn shape various reactions to the core themes.”<sup>166</sup>

For instance, there are women who are adamant about fighting against patriarchy experienced in society as a whole, yet, when it comes to addressing the same issues in churches, they yield to tradition and unwritten polices. On the other hand, there are a few women that will fight for justice wherever injustice exists. There are multiple ways in which women of color are oppressed and disrespected, by their race, gender, class, and socioeconomic status to name a few.

Deborah King articulates this diversity in terms of the concept of “multiple jeopardy.” “‘Multiple’ refers not only to several, simultaneous oppressions but also to the multiplicative relationships among them. In other words, the equivalent formulation is racism multiplied by sexism multiplied by classism.” King’s writing informs and challenges previous models that mainly focused on race and oppressions and complicates the assumption that these oppressions occur in linear fashion. She suggests, “The relative significance of race, sex, or class in determining the conditions of black women’s lives is

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<sup>166</sup> Marla F. Frederick. *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2003, pg. 17.

neither fixed nor absolute but, rather, is dependent on the socio-historical context and the social phenomenon under consideration.”<sup>167</sup>

Womanist theologians use a variety of methods to approach the scriptures. Some attempted to find black women within biblical narrative so as to reclaim the role and identity of black people in general, and black women specific within the Bible. Some examples are social ethicist, Cheryl Sanders, and womanist theologian, Karen Baker-Fletcher. Some approach the Bible ‘objectively’ to critically evaluate texts, which degrade women and people of color and offer an African-centered form, to resist male domination and bias, or what could be termed anti-women or androcentric attitudes and forms.<sup>168</sup>

One of the questions we fail to ask when dealing with the gender issues as it relates to religion is, first whether or not the particular statement is in the Bible. Does the Bible even have categories like ‘senior pastor or pulpit minister’ or are these socially generated titles, which have been used to separate and create hierarchal status in the ecclesial realm? Never mind that the Bible does not have categories like “senior pastor” or “pulpit minister.” According to Ben Witherington III, the Jean R. Amos Professor of New Testament for Doctoral Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary: “the New Testament has been used over and over again to justify the suppression of women in

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<sup>167</sup> Marla F. Frederick. *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2003, pg. 17.

<sup>168</sup> Williams, Delores. "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices." *Christianity and Crisis*, March 1987.

ministry.” He contends that there should be exegesis of Biblical texts, not emotions, rhetoric, mere church polity, dubious hermeneutics and the like.<sup>169</sup>

One of the most contentious conversations is about the objections to women in ministry; per Witherington, “some of these objections come out of a high church tradition, some tend to come from low church traditions, some are Catholic/Orthodox some are Protestant.” There are three main questions/ issues posed as it relates to women in ministry according to Witherington:

1. Women cannot minister, because only males can be priests offering the sacrifice of the Mass etc.
2. Women cannot be ministers because then they would have headship over men, including their husbands — and this will never do, and is a violation of the household codes in the New Testament.
3. Women cannot be Christian ministers because specific passages in the New Testament prohibit it.<sup>170</sup>

#### **Witherington Addresses Issues of Women in Ministry:**

First, women cannot be ministers, because only males can be priests offering the sacrifice of the Mass. The root problem with this argument is that the New Testament is perfectly clear that apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, elders and deacons are not priests in the New Testament. Witherington III offers, there is no need for a separate order of priests in the New Testament because Christ’s sacrifice made obsolete the entire Old Testament sacerdotal system of priests, temples and sacrifices. The only priesthoods we hear about in the New Testament are: a.) The priesthood of all believers, which of course includes women, and b.) The heavenly high priesthood of Christ (see Hebrews). Indeed the whole language of sacrifice and temple is spiritualized in the New Testament (NT) to

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<sup>169</sup> Ben Witherington. *www.beliefnet.com/columnist/bibleand culture/2009/10/why arguments -against-women-in -ministry arent-*. June 2015. [biblical.html#QABUb9JGAeDMvX4H.99](http://biblical.html#QABUb9JGAeDMvX4H.99).

<sup>170</sup> Ben Witherington. *www.beliefnet.com/columnist/bibleand culture/2009/10/why arguments -against-women-in -ministry arent-*. June 2015. [biblical.html#QABUb9JGAeDMvX4H.99](http://biblical.html#QABUb9JGAeDMvX4H.99).

refer to our offering of ourselves or our praise to God, and the Temple is described in various places in the NT (cf. 1 Cor. 3-6), as either the believer's body, or the whole community of Christ in which Christ and the Spirit dwell. The hermeneutical problem appears to occur about the time when the church became a licit religion under Constantine; the Old Testament hermeneutic took over, a hermeneutic which saw churches as temples, the Lord's Supper as a sacrifice, ministers as priests, the Lord's Day as the Sabbath.

Second, women cannot be ministers because then they would have headship over men, including their husbands—and this will never do, and is a violation of the household codes in the New Testament. This is a complex argument and at the center of the confusion regarding what the New Testament considers as the physical family and home, and the order in the family of faith. While there are texts such as Colossians 3-4 and Ephesians 5-6 and other text in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter for example those talks about the structure of the physical family, the patriarchal family was the reality in the New Testament yet; Paul and others were working hard to change the structures. Also, it created the awareness that wives; children and slaves are all created in the image of God, being neither chattel nor property. We also can find mentioned in Paul's letters examples of women as teachers, evangelists, prophetesses, deacons and apostles.

Third, women cannot be Christian ministers; the support for this notion is usually the passages in the New Testament as bases for prohibiting it. In 1Corinthians 14:33-36 and 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:8-15, both prohibit women from teaching and preaching in the church, yet we often fail to seek to understand the back story and the tradition or condition of the time. There is a hypocrisy of the arguments related to women and their ability to teach or lead a Bible study in the home or on the "mission field," which ironically is acceptable, yet there is a problem doing the same in the church - all totally unrelated to the scriptures. The prophetess provided answers to questions about marriage, land purchases and much more. Given the position and expertise of these women, the Corinthians assumed when prophets spoke in their assemblies, logically they believed they had a right to ask questions.

Paul corrected women about speaking in that particular scenario because there was a time and place for questions he was not say that women should never speak, it is the failure of the interpreter to read what events occurred prior to a particular event taking place.

Witherington provides another analysis of the Habakkuk scripture, "The Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence."<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> The Holy Bible. *Habakkuk*. Grand Rapid, Michigan: Zondervan, 2011.

A subsequent test used to provide proof that women should not be ministers, which is often proof-texted. In 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:8-15,<sup>172</sup> Paul provided instructions to Timothy regarding protocol for fledgling converts. Interestingly, the problem appeared to be with particular women, high status women from Ephesus, who wore fancy clothes and hairstyles and expected that they would be teachers in the church, given their status. Some commentaries share that this was a corrective passage, dealing with several problems; Paul had no issues correcting men and women when they were wrong. The women from Ephesus played vital roles in the Greco-Roman religious festivals, temples and worship services. These priestesses and prophetesses were teachers, healers, and keepers of the eternal flames. The logical procedural expectations would be for one to continue their social standing after converting to Christ, doing the same things they were doing in their former churches. The issues were the lack of proper instruction and learning the appropriate way of governance, being instructed by others, male or female.

Women's roles varied from one region to another, but Paul's writings clearly placed him among the most progressive thinkers of his day. Many of Paul's collaborators were women; it appears that Paul often affirmed the ministry of women despite the cultural gender prejudices.

The story of Phoebe<sup>173</sup> who was considered a servant of the church at Cenchrea, "servant" may refer to a deacon, a term that sometimes designated administrative responsibly in the Early Church. Paul called Phoebe a "succorer" or "helper" of many.<sup>174</sup> In the epistles, Paul applied the term to any minister including himself; there are examples in 1Corinthians 3:5, 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:6, and Ephesians 3:7, 6:21. This term succorer officially designated her as the church's patron or sponsor, almost certainly the owner of the home in which the church at Cenchrea was meeting, which entitled her to a position of honor in the church. Phoebe was not the only influential woman in the church; Paul commended the ministries about twice as many women than men. The commendation might have indicated his sensitivity to opposition women experienced for their ministry, given the prejudice against women's ministry that existed in Paul's culture. For example,

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<sup>172</sup> Ben Witherington. *www.beliefnet.com/columnist/bibleand culture/2009/10/why arguments -against-women-in -ministry arent-*. June 2015. [biblical.html#QABUb9JGAeDMvX4H.99](http://biblical.html#QABUb9JGAeDMvX4H.99).

<sup>173</sup> The Holy Bible. *Romans*. Grand Rapid, Michigan: Zondervan, 2011.

<sup>174</sup> Ben Witherington. *www.beliefnet.com/columnist/bibleand culture/2009/10/why arguments -against-women-in -ministry arent-*. June 2015. [biblical.html#QABUb9JGAeDMvX4H.99](http://biblical.html#QABUb9JGAeDMvX4H.99).

Paul praised Priscilla before her husband, Aquila, as a result of her higher status (Romans 16:3-4). Paul also referred to two women in Philippi, (Philippians 4:2-3); women achieved more prominent religious roles in Macedonia than in most parts of Rome. There appeared to be a ranking of prophets second only to apostles (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:28); Paul acknowledged the ministry of prophetesses (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:5).<sup>175</sup>

### **History of Women Leadership in Black Churches**

Systematic Theologian and founding mother of Womanist Theology, Jacqueline Grant, states that blackwomen's experience is a tri-dimensional reality render[ing] their situation a complex one. One could say that not only are they the oppressed of the oppressed, but their situation represents the "particular within the particular."<sup>176</sup>

Grant would argue that it is not [theological relativity], because it is in the context of Black women's experience where the particular connects up with the universal.<sup>177</sup> Grant stresses that blackwomen's experience is complex because of the intersectional experience of racial, gender, and class oppression. Cannon further deepens this claim by arguing "Black life requires moral agency that may run contrary to the ethical boundaries of mainline Protestantism" since the assumptions of dominant ethical structures "implied that doing Christian ethics in the Black community was either immoral or amoral."<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid

<sup>176</sup> Jacqueline Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*, Academy Series no 64 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 216

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 216.

<sup>178</sup> Joan M. Martin. "The Notion of Difference for Emerging Womanist Ethics: The Writings of Audre Lorde and bell hooks." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 9 (Spring-Fall 1993) 39-51.

As womanist ethical and theological thought continue to use difference<sup>179</sup> as a category further examination of the adequacy of this notion as an epistemological and methodological tool is crucial for understanding African American women's lives, the development of theoretical formulations, and the concrete work of social transformation.<sup>180</sup> Martin elucidates that further examination of the idea of difference as a methodological and epistemological tool is crucial for understanding African American women's lives, the development of theoretical formulations, and the concrete work social transformation fosters, an accurate analysis of the real historical situations of women as we face the interstructured, yet often discrete, oppressions of race, sex, class, heterosexism, and cultural imperialism which created accompanying forms of hegemonic discourse.<sup>181</sup>

### **Agents of Culture and Community**

Sociologist and African American studies professor Cheryl Townsend Gilkes posits in, *If It Wasn't for the Women... : Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community*, to be an agent of the culture and the community entails the black women's understanding of her agency, centrality, importance and indispensability to their churches and communities. Interestingly, black women are

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<sup>179</sup> To read more on the notion of difference, see Audre Lorde's take as presented in her work, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, and those of bell hooks in *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*.

<sup>180</sup> Joan M. Martin. *"The Notion of Difference for Emerging Womanist Ethics*, pg.40.

<sup>181</sup> Joan M. Martin. *"The Notion of Difference for Emerging Womanist Ethics: The Writings of Audre Lorde and bell hooks."* Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion 9 (Spring-Fall 1993) pg.40.

keenly aware of their importance to the survival of the church and how radically dependent their churches and communities are on their presence and actions for both organizational integrity and effective mobilization. Women are an integral part of the church. Gilkes states, despite the fact that women are blocked from the most visible leadership position; they find ways to make their voices heard and their power felt in alternative spaces, which gives limited access.

Cummings and Latta examine the call stories of professional ordained African American female ministers in the context of womanist theology, therefore, offer a broad perspective of the lives of Black women in the ministry—one that positions them as “agents of culture and community” (a term used by Cheryl Townsend Gilkes) rather than simply as victims of discrimination and oppression considered through a feminist lens. It places their work in a humanist perspective, frames that work in relationship to the Divine, and presents the work as lessons of survival and justice.<sup>182</sup>

### **Women’s Movement and Black Churches**

A full exploration of African American women’s civil rights activism, therefore, should include an analysis of their religious consciousness (particularly, but not only, their Black Christian consciousness) and its relationship to motivations that foster ordinary and superlative practices by many Black women activists.<sup>183</sup> Because of the racism historically inherent in American society, many scholars argue that there never

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<sup>182</sup> Melbourne S. Cummings and Judi Moore Latta. "When They Honor the Voice: Centering African American Women's Call Stories." *Journal of Black Studies* 40, no. 4 (March 2010): 671.

<sup>183</sup> Rosetta E. Ross. “Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights”. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, Fortress, 2003, pg. xiii.

was nor ever could have been a Black religion of the pre-Civil Rights Era that focused solely on otherworldly ends.<sup>184</sup> Ross argues in *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights* that Black women’s civil rights activism is their female enactment of Black religious values reflected an internal concern for the Black community’s survival and flourishing and a related external concern to address society’s formal and conventional sources of inequality.<sup>185</sup> Ross focused on the lives of seven Black religious women who were civil rights activists—Ella Baker, Septima Clark, Fannie Lou Hamer, Victoria DeLee, Clara Muhammad, Diane Nash and Ruby Doris Smith Robinson. Six were Christian and one was Muslim; while they came from different life circumstances and contributed in different ways, these women had several things in common.<sup>186</sup>

Septima Poinsette Clark stated,

“In stories about the civil rights movement you hear mostly about the black ministers. But if you talk to the women who were there, you’ll hear another story. I think the civil rights movement would never have taken off if some women hadn’t started to speak up. A lot more are just getting to the place now they can speak out.”<sup>187</sup> Black religious women in the Civil Rights Movement embraced a worldview that held racial uplift and social responsibility as central to the value and meaning of religious life. Their practice within the Movement was continuous with this concept of religious duty that pervaded earlier traditions of Black

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid

<sup>185</sup> Ibid

<sup>186</sup> Rosetta E. Ross. “Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights”. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, Fortress, 2003, pg. xiv.

<sup>187</sup> Rosetta E. Ross. “Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights”. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, Fortress, 2003, pg. 1.

women's religious activism.<sup>188</sup> Also, Ross stated that clearly Black religious institutions and Black persons with religious self-understanding played central parts in the movement that sought to expand inclusion and participation of African Americans in U.S. social life.<sup>189</sup>

The role of Black religious institutions as buffers against the cruelties of racism was particularly significant before and during the Civil Rights Era. At that time, Black religious structures continued their antebellum tradition of affirming humanity and providing opportunities to participate in society for descendants of former slaves, who held U.S. citizenship *de jure*, but often were excluded from full exercise of that citizenship.<sup>190</sup> Typically these studies focused predominantly or exclusively on male elites, especially Black ministers. Substantive studies of women's civil rights activism have only very recently begun to appear in representative numbers.<sup>191</sup> Studies of the Civil Rights Movement that have treated religious self-understanding do not examine the role of an African American religious worldview and gendered, particularly Black women's, interactions with Black religious traditions and institutions and with U.S. social life.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>191</sup> Rosetta E. Ross. "Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights". Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, Fortress, 2003, pg. 2.

<sup>192</sup> Rosetta E. Ross. "Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights". Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, Fortress, 2003, pg. 2.

## Modern Gender Relations

In this section, I explore issues of gender bias, inequity, social norming and social control that play into the politics of ordination specifically for African American women in black churches in an effort to understand and explore moral agency embedded in womanist liberation ethics. In this analysis, I address the real lived history and situation of African American women that value specificity and difference in moral agency in the face of institutional oppression.<sup>193</sup> The overarching ethical framework evaluates where African Americans women and men are along this moral agency axis— complicity ↔ accountability ↔ responsibility — with regard to sexual-gender relations within the African American church.<sup>194</sup>

Riggs states further that the African American church is considered “a supportive institution” of society and as “a human community.”<sup>195</sup> There are reciprocal interaction between determinative institutions (political and economic) and supportive institutions (law, education, religion, media family), and there is a social morality that those institutions either reinforce or challenge.<sup>196</sup> To speak of the church as a human community is to offer a social interpretation that acknowledges that the church is a

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<sup>193</sup> Joan M. Martin. *The Notion of Difference for Emerging Womanist Ethics: The Writings of Audre Lorde and bell hooks.* Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion 9 (Spring-Fall 1993), pg. 40.

<sup>194</sup> Marcia Y. Riggs. *Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church.* Eugene, Oregon: WIPF and STOCK, 2003. pg. 18.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, 19.

community (“a body of persons who share some measure of common life, and a common loyalty”) that fulfills the following functions:

1. A natural community—it addresses physical and social needs of human beings;
2. A political community — it establishes an order to execute its purpose;
3. A community of language—its members communicate using a common language that distinguishes them from those outside the community;
4. A community of interpretation— it provides specific meanings of key terms and symbols that constitutes the distinctive beliefs and identity of the community;
5. A community of memory and understanding— it retains its identity over time because its members share a common memory of important events that are retold and relived; and
6. A community of belief and action –its members share a commitment and a professed loyalty that is expressed through actions.<sup>197</sup>

Riggs speaks on the moral life of the African American church examining both the character (the being) and the agency (the doing) of these churches. Character refers to the virtues, values, and ideals that characterize the dispositions of individuals and the ends toward, which the church strives. By agency Riggs refers to both the formal and informal practices of churches. Some features of these practices are:

1. They are indispensable to moral formation
2. They are those particularly pregnant actions that are both a means to a good life and are also aspects of a historically constituted good form of life.
3. They are those actions intrinsic to a way of life that center, sustain, and order that way of living
4. They are rites that embody what is right.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Marcia Y. Riggs. *Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church*. Eugene, Oregon: WIPF and STOCK, 2003. pg. 19.

The practices of churches are formal when the doctrines and polity of the churches mandate them; in this analysis, the sacraments, such as baptism and the eucharist, are such practices. Practices are informal when they may or may not be spoken or written into official documents of the church, but they are consistently adhered to as a normative way to order the life of the church. The character and agency of the church derive from a moral vision that provides a structure of meaning that signifies what is perceived and affirmed as good and evil, acceptable and unacceptable, responsible and irresponsible.<sup>199</sup>

Riggs refers to sexual-gender ethics as the morality governing the relations between women and men who are biologically different beings (sexual) with socially constructed meanings of being female and male (gender) that they bring to both their private and public interactions.<sup>200</sup>

### **Strategies of Containment**

Strategies of containment is a term that I first heard from Willie Jennings when he was having a conversation with doctoral students of color explaining to us how we must continue our work, while understanding that there are those in the academy that have developed strategies of containment developing methods, rules and policies that conveniently and strategically keep people of color from participate in the academy as

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<sup>198</sup> Marcia Y. Riggs. *Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church*. Eugene, Oregon: WIPF and STOCK, 2003. Pg. 20.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, 18.

professor.<sup>201</sup> Analogous is the plight of African American clergywomen and women in general. There is a patriarchal systemic force developed to consciously and subconsciously propagate religious exclusion of women from leadership in ecclesial settings. The strategies of containment include tactics such as: denial of ordination, attitudes and behavior of male colleagues, patriarchy, and policy. There are also several forms of social norming that include: rituals, messages, rejection, ordination process and policies, culture and access or the lack there of.

### **Gender Exclusion and the Politics of Difference**

Lorde and hooks use the notion of difference to delineate the experience of African American women as situated in current feminist theory. Both writers are often cited in womanist religious ethics. Lorde and hooks have become important African American – centered resources for womanist explication.<sup>202</sup>

Martin asks if a notion of difference could be instrumental in the dismantling of oppressive and exploitative discursive structures and if it could catalyze African American women’s moral agency.<sup>203</sup> These critical cultural critiques embodying emerging “theory” from African American women’s standpoints and within the larger

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<sup>201</sup> Willie Jennings, personal conversation with PhD students of color, February 2013.

<sup>202</sup> Joan M. Martin. *"The Notion of Difference for Emerging Womanist Ethics: The Writings of Audre Lorde and bell hooks."* Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion 9 (Spring-Fall 1993), pg. 40.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, pg. 41.

context of the so-called Third World feminist liberation streams.<sup>204</sup> It is important to recognize the social location of personal experience and its sociopolitical influence on the contributions of blackwomen thinkers. Finally, both women are self-affirming activists through their cultural production (and its ensuing production of theory) within and on behalf of the African American and feminist movements as spheres of historic, contemporary, and (potential) future social transformation.<sup>205</sup>

*bell hooks* title, *Talking Back* uses the language of resistance, resistance to her mother's silence of her childhood inquisitiveness and womanish behavior.

It represents her revolt with defiant speech, of speaking in their own voice about (a) how blackness [then] became one—like how you keep your stuff to yourself, how private you could be about your own business and (b) the need for blackwomen's voices “to emerge [not] form silence into speech, but to change the nature and direction of our speech, to make a speech that compels listeners, one that is heard.”<sup>206</sup> Refusing to see this difference is what constitutes the operation of the politics of dominance and difference, which leaves a variety of blackwomen's experiences captive to someone else's power of naming.<sup>207</sup> Refusing to see difference is what constitutes the operation of the politics of dominance and difference, which leaves a variety of blackwomen's experiences captive to someone else's power of naming. Each uses difference epistemologically and methodologically for defining the nature of African American women's particularity in the complexity of racial, gender, and class-structured oppressions. Here is the crux of the matter: that each points toward the necessary cultural and political activity in and for African American women's

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid, pg. 41.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, pg.42.

<sup>206</sup> Joan M. Martin. "The Notion of Difference for Emerging Womanist Ethics: The Writings of Audre Lorde and bell hooks." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 9 (Spring-Fall 1993), pg. 43.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 44.

moral agency—an agency that is marked by both critical deconstruction of difference as domination and the critical action of difference as creative power.<sup>208</sup>

Martin states that,

History has encompassed a socialized and institutionalized rejection of difference in order to render profit for some by making surplus of others, and no one, for Lorde, has escaped this social education. Moreover, everyone has been taught to deal with human difference with “fear and loathing,” and to respond in one or more of three ways to these differences: “ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it I dominant, or destroy it we think it is subordinate. These three elements – blindness, eroticization and destruction – constitute the hegemonic discourse of difference through what Lorde terms the misnaming of difference and its resulting distortion. Anything “different” in this scheme becomes divisive, deviant, and threatening from the perspective of the dominant, normative, and exploitative group and their power.<sup>209</sup>

It is a tool that enables one to stand over and against the distortions within the paradigms of oppression and domination. As Martin notes, learning how to take our difference is the fundamental tool for dismantling the master’s house. How is it? Difference potentially permits us to more accurately see the nature of seduction by the master and his power—if we are oppressed, we are not, and never will be, truly equal to the master in the present scheme of things.<sup>210</sup>

Womanist ethicist Marcia Riggs who explicates the notion of morality and moral agency supports examining the source of morality. Riggs mentioned three interrelated structures of relationships between men and women throughout history: 1) structure of

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid

<sup>210</sup> Joan M. Martin. *"The Notion of Difference for Emerging Womanist Ethics: The Writings of Audre Lorde and bell hooks."* Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion 9 (Spring-Fall 1993), pg.pg. 46.

labor, 2) structure of power and 3) structure of desire. The structure of labor refers to the division of labor that is the organization and practices of paid/unpaid work, men's and women's jobs, and so on. The structure of power refers to a hierarchy of authority, control, and/or coercion, and "power may be an imbalance of advantage or an inequality of resources." The structure of desire refers to "desirability of an other", that is, homosexual/heterosexual relations, the antagonism of gender, and the like." In this analysis, the contention is that male power is a result of the way that the interrelated structures of labor, power, and desire are distinctively configured and operative in the African American church.<sup>211</sup>

Riggs offers the social construction of gender theory and Christian ethics:

- ✓ Social scientists distinguish between "sex," which is, a biologically based category, and "gender," which refers to the particular set of socially constructed meanings that are associated with each sex.
- ✓ The socioculturally constructed differences between women and men are hierarchically related, such that women are perceived as deficient (inferior) or deviant (evil) from a male-biased norm.
- ✓ Differences between women and men that are understood as deficiency or deviance from a male-biased norm are used to rationalize sexism.<sup>212</sup>

The decision to use social construction of gender theory as the framework for this analysis aligns with a quest for a Christian postmodern sexual ethics that Christine E. Gudorf outlines.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Marcia Y. Riggs. *Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church*. Eugene, Oregon: WIPF and STOCK, 2003. pg. 24.

<sup>212</sup> Marcia Y. Riggs. *Plenty Good Room*: pg. 25.

Gudorf suggests that social construction theory offers the church a way to hold in tension the desires for order and the search for relationality and justice that individuals and groups dominated by hegemonic sexual norms seek. According to Gudorf, social construction theory offers a way that may help us to accomplish the difficult task of rethinking sexual ethics in the quest for some agreed-upon meanings for sexuality as the church seeks to engage in public discourse.<sup>214</sup>

Riggs states that social construction theory is a means for reconstruing traditional sources for ethical thinking in the churches.<sup>215</sup> A constructionist point of view, the theological basis for a Catholic natural law approach to sexuality uses biological and social science as methods for “discerning divine intentions within an evolving, dynamic creation”.<sup>216</sup>

Joan Martin reminds us that womanist ethics attempts to find strength in understanding and using our differences, which enhance creativity and vision. In fact a womanist understands when a person does not know the fullness of herself, and is thereby denied herself moral madness follows.<sup>217</sup> Lorde finds that difference is essentially positive, it is a tool that enables one to stand over against the distortions within the paradigms of oppression and domination, ultimately, “learning how to take our

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<sup>213</sup> Marcia Y. Riggs. *Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church*. Eugene, Oregon: WIPF and STOCK, 2003. pg. 25.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>217</sup> Joan M. Martin. "The Notion of Difference for Emerging Womanist Ethics: The Writings of Audre Lorde and bell hooks." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 9 (Spring-Fall 1993), pg. 46

differences and make them our strength”<sup>218</sup> Lorde states, the knowledge of true differences is the fundamental tool for dismantling the master’s house; difference potentially permits us to see precisely the nature of seduction by the master and his power—if we are oppressed, we are not, and never will be truly equal to the master in the present scheme of things.<sup>219</sup> An alternative way of being, seeing and doing is required, in order to level the playing ground.

In summary, womanists and black feminists thought have determine that marginalized groups (i.e. Black people and other people of color) have constructed in marginal spaces, a world of community and collectivity where resources needed were shared; and therefore, in the context of differences the actual meaning of solidarity is learned. While the notion of difference assists womanist ethicist in recognizing ethical customs and values appropriate to the African American communities struggle and location, where they regularly experience acts of discrimination. Women of color are keenly aware of the quadruple forms of discrimination they face: race, gender, class, sexuality, age, ability; these often intersecting categories, which are not experienced separately, problematize further experiences of repression and containment.

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<sup>218</sup> Audre Lorde. *Sister Outsider: Essay and Speeches by Auder Lorde*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1996, pg. 112

<sup>219</sup> Audre Lorde. *Sister Outsider: Essay and Speeches by Auder Lorde*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1996, pg. 112

## **PART II – QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY**

### **CHAPTER THREE – TO BE OR NOT TO BE: AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGYWOMEN EXPERIENCES**

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodology used to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of African American clergywomen. Specifically, this study uses a phenomenological qualitative research approach to examine their experiences and cognitive representations of pursuing their call, be it through pastoring or other forms of ministry within Black Churches; addressing the ways in which African American clergywomen develop leadership strategies and navigate ecclesial settings, despite the barriers to actualizing their call.

In this chapter, the qualitative research approach is a phenomenological study as the qualitative research method, which includes several components which are: research design and rationale, the recruitment of participants, data collection, and the systematic data analysis of the interviews, study design, interview question construction, explanation of conceptual framework, risk, confidentiality, benefits and trustworthiness, audit trail, member checking and peer debriefing.

## Social Constructivism

Utilizing a womanist ethical approach, which is constructive in that it seeks to determine how to eradicate oppressive social structures that limit and circumscribe the agency of African American women. Womanist ethical reflection provides descriptive foundation that lead to analytical construction for the eradication of oppression in the lives of Black people and, by extension, the rest of humanity and creation.<sup>220</sup> In an effort to understand the world in which African American clergywomen live and work, I employ social constructivism<sup>221</sup> in this study to develop subjective meanings of their experiences – meanings directed toward certain objects or things.<sup>222</sup> In *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, John Creswell postulates: “philosophical assumptions are embedded within interpretative frameworks that researchers use when they conduct a study.”<sup>223</sup> Accordingly, Denzin and Lincoln<sup>224</sup> believe philosophical assumptions

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<sup>220</sup> Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas. *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2006, pg. 7.

<sup>221</sup> Social constructivism is a theory of learning which draws heavily on the work of the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). It suggests that learners add to and reshape their mental models of reality through **social** collaboration, building new understandings as they actively engage in learning experiences. Social “construction,” “constructionism” and “constructivism” are terms in wide use in the humanities and social sciences, and are applied to a diverse range of objects including the emotions, gender, race, sex, homo- and heterosexuality, mental illness, technology, quarks, facts, reality, and truth. This information is found in Mallon, Ron, "Naturalistic Approaches to Social Construction", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/social-construction-naturalistic/>>.

<sup>222</sup> Creswell posits that subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically; these meanings are not merely imprinted on individuals but are created through interaction with others (consequently social construction) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals’ lives. p.25.

<sup>223</sup> Creswell, John W. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. Thousands Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2013.

(ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology) are fundamental properties folded into interpretive frameworks utilized in qualitative research. Creswell suggests that interpretive frameworks, such as social constructivism,<sup>225</sup> can be either social science theories or social justice theories, which frame their theoretical lens in studies. Social science theories could be theories of leadership, attribution, political influence and control, and numerous other possibilities taught in the social science disciplines. Social justice theories (advocacy/participatory theories) seek to bring about change or address social justice issues in our societies.<sup>226</sup> Social justice theories are particularly well suited to this study because its participants identify with various intersectional underrepresented and marginalized groups, including gender, race, class, religion, sexuality and geography.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> For more information on qualitative research see: The Sage handbook of qualitative research (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Denzin and Lincoln (2011). They stated, “We want a social science committed up front to issues of social justice, equity, nonviolence, peace, and universal human rights” (11). Also, Denzin and Lincoln mention social constructivism (which is described as interpretivism) is another worldview. Social constructivism engages individuals in understanding the world in which they live and work, developing subjective meanings of their experiences. They say that this type of work leads the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas; relying on the participants’ views of the situation W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications 2013, p.22.

W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications 2013, p.22.

<sup>225</sup> Womanism is a descriptive in its articulation of the subjective, communal, self-loving, and critical aspects of Black women’s culture and the cult of Black womanhood, womanist ethics is constructive in that it seeks to determine how to eradicate oppressive social structures that limit and circumscribe the agency of African American women. To learn more see Floyd-Thomas, Stacey M. *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2006.

<sup>226</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications 2013, p.22.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid

## **Research Design and Rationale**

### Qualitative Analysis — Phenomenological Approach

I selected the phenomenological qualitative research approach to understand the participants lived experiences. A phenomenological qualitative analysis describes the common meaning for several individuals lived experiences of particular phenomenon. The goal is to investigate the effects and perceptions of an experience, through the narration of participants, of either a shared single incident or shared condition. It is designed to capture a shared experience of a phenomenon, in this case, about the patriarchal strategies of containment that are designed to suppress or silence African American women's call to ministry leadership in ecclesial settings. Through this phenomenological approach, African American clergywomen tell their own stories and experiences, drawing on their lived experiences and tactics/strategies developed by navigating the patriarchal system of "Black churches."

Phenomenology is entrenched in early 20<sup>th</sup> century European philosophy. It involves the use of copious descriptions and close analysis of lived experiences to understand how meaning is crafted through embodied perceptions (Sokolowski, 2000; Stewart and Mickunas, 1974). Phenomenology contributes to a deeper understanding of lived experiences by exposing assumptions about particular ways of knowing. Sokolowski posits, phenomenological statements, like philosophical statements state the obvious and the necessary; they tell us often what we already know. They are not new

information, but even if not new, they can still be important and illuminating, because we often are very confused about just such trivialities and necessities.<sup>228</sup>

In phenomenology reality is comprehended through embodied experiences, through close examination of individual experiences, phenomenological analysts seek to capture the meaning and common features, or essences, of an experience or event. The veracity of the event, as an abstract entity, is subjective and knowable only through embodied perception; we create meaning through the experience of moving through space and across time.<sup>229</sup>

Creswell suggests qualitative researchers using a phenomenological analytical approach focus on describing what participants have in common, as they experience a phenomenon. The basic purpose of a qualitative phenomenological analysis is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence (a “grasp of the very nature of the thing,” van Manen, 1990, p.177). This process includes the collection of data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon, and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals. This description consists of “what” they experienced and “how” they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994).<sup>230</sup> A description of the experience of the phenomenon, this is an attempt to set aside my personal experiences (which cannot be done entirely) so that the focus can be directed to the participants in the study. A list of significant statements are developed about a specific topic, while treating each statement as having equal worth,

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<sup>228</sup> Starks and Trinidad in *Choose Your Method: A Comparison of Phenomenology, Discourse Analysis, and Grounded Theory*. Qualitative Health Research Volume 17 Number 19 December 2007 1372-1380 2007 Sage Publication 10.1177/1049732323077031 <http://qhr.sagepub.comhosted> at <http://online.sagepub.com>

<sup>229</sup> Ibid

<sup>230</sup> Ibid, p. 76

and working to develop a non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements. Phenomenology is being used as a qualitative analysis tool rather than a philosophical, which informs the underlining tenets of this dissertation.

### Data Collection

Phenomenological studies often consist of in-depth and multiple interviews with participants. Polkinghorne (1989) recommends that researchers interview 5 to 25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. Other forms of data may also be collected, such as observations, journals, taped conversations, formally written responses, and accounts of various experiences of drama, films, poetry, music, and other forms of art, novels or sermons. The content of interview questions should explore experiences around the phenomenon being studied. Open-ended questions are most appropriate and generally lead to textual and structural descriptions of the participants' experiences.

In the phenomenological approach, the goal is to understand the essence of the experience. The analysis process consisted of considering the shared phenomena among participants. Next, suitable participants were selected to join in the study. After the participants were selected, the data collection process began, using primary interviews with participants, documents, observations and art. Subsequently, the data analysis took place, analyzing data for significant statements, meaning, textual and structural description and description of the "essence." Afterwards, I read through the written transcripts several times to obtain an overall feeling for them. Identifying significant phrases or sentences that pertained directly to the research question relating the

experiences of African American clergywomen, formulating meanings and clustering them into themes common to all of the participants' transcripts, integrating the results into an in-depth, exhaustive descriptive of the phenomenon. The final stages of this process were the validation of the findings with the participants, while including participants' remarks, in the final description.<sup>231</sup> It was important to focus not on the life of individual participants, but rather on the understanding of the lived experiences of the participants around the phenomenon of being a black clergywoman.<sup>232</sup> Finally, the process concluded with describing the "essence" of the experience being researched.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the African American clergywomen process of navigating ecclesial settings, which are riddled with opposition and obstacles preventing many and impeding others from stepping fully into their calling of ministry. This study was designed to explore the beliefs, attitudes and needs of African American clergywomen, as they pursue their calling.

## Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is the process of inspecting, organizing, and transferring collected data into a form of explanation, understanding, or interpretation of the studied phenomenon. Saldaña posits that the nature of your central and related research questions—and thus the answers you seek will influence the specific coding choices you

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<sup>231</sup> John W. Cresswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. Thousands Oaks: SAGE Publications 2013, p. 115.

<sup>232</sup> Anderson, E.H., and Spencer, M.H. (2002). Cognitive representations of AIDS: A phenomenological study. *Qualitative Health Research*, 12, 1338-1352.

make.<sup>233</sup> The research question framing should align with ontological, epistemological and other stances. The research questions embed the values, worldview and direction of inquiry; they are influential in determining what type of knowledge is going to be generated.<sup>234</sup> According to Saldaña, ontological questions address the nature of participants' realities; such research questions might begin with statements such as: What is the nature of \_\_\_\_? , What are the lived experiences of \_\_\_\_? , What is it like being \_\_\_\_? These types of questions suggest the exploration of personal, interpretive meanings found in the data.<sup>235</sup>

## Process

The process for the qualitative analysis is as follows: The participants were identified, letters were mailed with consent forms and date and times were set up to meet with the women during the conference. After the initial interviews were transcribed there is a first read of the interviews to refresh my memory, of the described personal experiences. The interviews were videotaped and secured on the laptop per protocol of the IRB; the next step was the transcription of the interviews, and transferring them into Atlas.ti, the qualitative analysis software. After the first reading was complete, the second

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid, p.60

<sup>234</sup> Ibid, p.60

<sup>235</sup> Ibid, p. 61

read of the interviews entail developing my first cycle of coding, which is a list of significant statements about how individuals experiences related to specific topics.<sup>236</sup>

The open-ended questions were adjusted, which required careful attention to what was being said and done in their life settings. Attention was given to the specific contexts where the clergywomen work and live in order to understand their historical and cultural settings.” research.<sup>237</sup> The topics were created from my research question and thesis; which were used as a guide, the first transcript read created a baseline of particular statements to consider. Each statement selected was treated as having equal value; these statements were then group into larger units of information, which I identify as themes.<sup>238</sup> The interviews were read several time, first for content; then in the initial coding, where qualitative data is broken down into specific parts, where they are closely examine and compared for similarities and differences, as interviews were added, categories began to develop, there were approximately four cycles of coding, which initial resulted in over two hundred codes, which were then narrowed down into categories of supercodes and sub codes (major themes and sub themes). These codes were combined and narrowed down to fifteen from the two hundred codes which included include two supercodes and eight sub codes; this process requires you to keep your research question in front of you. Descriptions of the themes were written in the memo, which is called a “textual

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<sup>236</sup> John W. Cresswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. Thousands Oaks: SAGE Publications 2013, p. 193.

<sup>237</sup> John W. Cresswell, *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid*

description” of the experience — what happened— and includes verbatim examples.<sup>239</sup>

My research question: As African American clergywomen navigate ecclesial settings in which ways did they experience, strategies of containment to prevent them from attaining senior pastorate positions, ordination in patriarchal structures within Black churches?

After all of the codes were established, networks of quotations were created around each code (theme), which completed a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating the essence of the clergywomen experiences, representing the aspects of a qualitative phenomenological approach (sharing “what” the participants experienced with the phenomenon and “how” they experienced it, the context).<sup>240</sup>

#### Role of the Research

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research approach was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of African American clergywomen. This study has the potential to address professional, ecclesial leadership and academic significance. The findings could lead to hiring of more African American clergywomen as senior pastors, and the ability of these said women to navigate the ecclesial settings successfully while following specific strategies of resistance, while serving and or navigating oppressive environments found in churches in general and the African American churches specifically.

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<sup>239</sup> *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. Thousands Oaks: SAGE Publications 2013, p. 193.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid*, 194.

As an African American womanist ethicist interested in equality and justice specifically in ecclesial settings and a mentee of the convener of the Women in Ministry (WIM) conference, Cynthia Hale, pastor of Ray of Hope Church in Atlanta, Georgia. As Chief Operating Officer of Triple Threat Ministries, I participated in the WIM conference, where African American clergywomen and Para-ministry leaders convene to receive insight, encouragement and inspiration to continue working in an often thankless profession where service is paramount and obstacles are often placed in our way.

The participants were senior pastors or equivalent with at least five or more years of service in ministry and the lead in their particular field. There were three participants included in the study, who had a previous relationship with me. Nonetheless, I did not allow those factors to interfere with the process or to create bias. This was achieved through bracketing. Bracketing in a phenomenological research study is used to manage bias based on my own previous experiences and allows for the setting aside of any prior information, perceptions, or beliefs about the participants; the concept of bracketing is appropriate in research that aims to explore human experience; the application and operation of bracketing remain vague and, often perplexing.<sup>241</sup>

Bracketing is a methodological maneuver of phenomenological investigation that requires the researcher to consider putting aside one's own belief about the phenomenon under investigation or what one already knows about the subject prior to and throughout the phenomenological investigation.<sup>242</sup> Although it is difficult to separate what you know

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<sup>241</sup> *Bracketing in Phenomenology: Only Undertaken in the Data Collection and Analysis Process?* Zenobia C.Y. Chan, Yuen-ling Fung, and Wai-tong Chien *The Qualitative Report* 2013 Volume 18, Article 59, 1-  
<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR18/chan59.pdf>

about a person, the purpose of bracketing is to allow the researcher to acknowledge what and whom they know, this process allows you to hold your understanding in such a way that it is a reflective move that develops inquisitiveness.

This will provide evidence that the researcher has not attempted to influence the data analysis and collection process; also, a number of challenges are overcome before the data collection, being aware of these factors contributing to the dilemma and tackle the issues of how properly and practically to plan and conduct the study using the phenomenological approach.<sup>243</sup>

## **Methodology**

### Study Design

Atlas.ti is a qualitative data analysis software package utilized for the collection and analysis of data; which can code a number of different media types, including text, images, videos and audio. Atlas.ti assists with qualitative research, where segments of text (quotations) and writing notes (codes and memos), the program assist with the analysis process, managing data sets, coding text, and describing patterns and themes found in the data.

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<sup>242</sup> *Bracketing in Phenomenology: Only Undertaken in the Data Collection and Analysis Process?* Zenobia C.Y. Chan, Yuen-ling Fung, and Wai-tong Chien *The Qualitative Report* 2013 Volume 18, Article 59, 1-  
<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR18/chan59.pdf> (p.1)

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, p. 3

## Interview Protocol

The qualitative phenomenological study concerning African American clergywomen in the Black Churches,<sup>244</sup> involved the implementation of key informant interviews to ascertain the fundamental thoughts and perceptions that African American clergywomen have about the ecclesial settings and their ability or inability to navigate these often hostile and unwelcoming settings. The qualitative interviews, which show the lived experiences of the interviewees, sought to describe and find meaning with central themes in the life and world of the clergywomen. The interviews were useful in obtaining in-depth information about personal experiences; they allowed for adaptability, enabling trust and a rapport to acquire information the respondent would not normally reveal by any other data collection. Specific Institutional Review Board protocol and procedures were agreed upon and complied with to follow for approval by the University of Denver, Institutional Review Board (IRB) in order to conduct research project on human subjects.

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<sup>244</sup> The reference to the “Black Churches” for the purpose of this study will denote the collective reality of blacks and the black community across denominational lines.

## **Design**

### Study Population

To participate in this study, must meet the following requirements:

African American, female, twenty-five years and older, college educated, attendees of the Women in Ministry Conference, higher education (M.Div., DMin, Th.D., PhD, DD).

There were twelve participants in this study of season clergywomen. Utilizing established clergywomen are secure mentally, emotionally and financially, which therefore would enable them to share freely about their encounters that women are often silent about in order to have the ability to work in their desired fields.

### Recruitment and Consent

Recruitment for this study began by contacting Cynthia Hale, Senior Pastor of The Ray of Hope in Atlanta Georgia, to inform her of this dissertation research. She was identified as a key gatekeeper because of her mentorship role with black women and her recognized leadership among African American women clergy members. The African American female senior clergy located in the South, specifically attending the Women and Ministry Conference sponsored by the Ray of Hope Church in Atlanta Georgia, held the third week in September. I asked the convener and my mentor, Hale, to assist in asking the specific clergy to participate in the interview process. I had an idea of the specific women I would like to interview, I sent a letter to Hale asking for her support in this portion of my dissertation, providing an update on my progress in the program and a

list of the women including her that I was interested in interviewing. I provided her with the consent form; we also decided whether pseudonyms or actual names were most appropriate. The women were willing to use their names and signed consent forms to that fact. Letters were mailed to more women than the study required so that I would reach the desired number of twelve women.

### Procedures

I interviewed a total of twelve women for forty-five-minutes to an hour each or two thirty-minute sessions. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed within a week of their recording; all audio files will be discarded after the prescribed time established by IRB protocol.

### **Interviews**

The participants were mailed a letter inviting them to participate in the interview on the first day of the conference, during the registration time prior to the first session so that it did not interfere with their participation in the conference. Participants were provided with my email and cell phone number to schedule times for the interviews, which lasted for forty-five minutes to an hour, the majority of the interviews took an hour because of the women's willingness to share their experiences. A room was designated in the hotel where the interviews were held, water was provided for each participant. At the end of the day seven interview were completed, all other interviews would have to completed via Skype, if an opportunity presented itself; six months later the five women were interviewed at another conference, The Daughters of Destiny also sponsored by the Ray of Hope. There were twelve questions asked, demographic information, experiential

questions related to their calling, sexism, how they define sexism, closing with their interpretation of why the caged bird sings. See Appendix for actual questions.

### **Question Construction**

The interview questions used in the research study were standardized open-ended interview questions with follow up prompts. See Appendix. In a standardized and open-ended interview, each participant responded to the same pre-constructed questions. Participants may have been asked follow up questions expanding on their answers in the preconstructed questions. The participants were not restricted to answer questions; they had the freedom to answer the questions with their personal words (open-ended). This approach allowed freedom for participants to share their life experiences. The ultimate goal of the project was to provide a conduit for the voices of the clergywomen, who had been silenced by the patriarchal systems that strategically worked to prevent women from attaining positions of senior pastor or simply pastor and/or other major leadership positions in the church. The interview questions were developed around the initial research question: Are African American clergywomen faced with strategies of containment preventing them from obtaining primary leadership positions in Black Churches? As the research and work with and on the research question developed: As a result of religiously condoned, and culturally accepted patriarchal ecclesial settings within Black Churches, as African American clergywomen navigate ecclesial settings in which ways did they experience strategies of containment designed to prevent them from obtaining primary leadership positions (senior pastoral positions or ordination)?

## Conceptual framework

I approached this study using a womanist social literary analysis as a source for constructive womanist ethics. This critical engagement incorporated what Stacey Floyd-Thomas defined as the four tenets of womanist ethics: radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love and critical engagement. I primarily focused on the fourth tenet critical engagement where I engaged African American clergywomen's worlds at the intersection of their oppression, since they have borne the brunt of social injustice throughout the history of the modern world.<sup>245</sup>

The following four tenets provide a foundation for womanist ethics:

1. *Radical subjectivity* dimension of the “nature vs. nurture” dialectic inherent within black women's moral formation; learning the moral lessons that will allow survival and subvert the triple jeopardy of racism, sexism and classism.<sup>246</sup>
2. *Traditional communalism* hold accountable not to their individual whims or personalized localized consciousness but rather to the collective values of black history and culture; rendering a better understanding of how black people collectively undo the historically constructed racist-sexist-classist-heterosexual ideologies that have homogenized them in ways that discount the variations of their humanity and that have deprived them of seeing themselves culturally as traditionally capable as well as traditionally universalist, even within the most oppressive of circumstance.<sup>247</sup>
3. *Redemptive self-love* demystifying the perceptions of black women's bodies, ways, and loves as vile, the intentionality with which black women writers reconcile black women back to their truer selves is invaluable in the formation of womanist ethics.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Stacey Floyd-Thomas. *Mining the Motherlode*. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2006, pg. 10.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>247</sup> Stacey Floyd-Thomas. *Mining the Motherlode*. pg. 10.

4. *Critical Engagement*– black women engage their world at the intersection of their oppression; most obviously as a counter balance to feminism, womanism is always cognizant that; the life chances and potential of black women are circumscribed by more than sexism.<sup>249</sup>

In the analysis of this study, I take a Womanist ethical approach and critique the canonical, theological, and philosophical assumptions of agency.

In the qualitative research methods approach, the narrative analysis will be open-ended questions, which the interviewees will interpret the question and recreate an intimate understanding of their experiences with African American clergywomen.

Carolyn K. Riessman stated,

“To the sociologically oriented investigator, studying narratives is additionally useful for what they reveal about social life – culture “speaks itself” through an individual’s story. It is possible to examine gender inequalities, racial oppression and other practices of power that may be taken for granted by individual speakers. Narrators speak in terms that seem natural, but we can analyze how culturally and historically contingent these terms are.”<sup>250</sup>

### **Risks**

My work “presented minimal risk to human participants.”<sup>251</sup> The major risk in this project was that the participants’ male colleagues and other women, both might understand this work as airing dirty laundry or usurping male authority; these

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<sup>248</sup> Stacey Floyd-Thomas. *Mining the Motherlode*. pg. 10.

<sup>249</sup> Stacey Floyd-Thomas. *Mining the Motherlode*. pg. 10.

<sup>250</sup> Catherine K. Riessman. *Narrative Analysis: Qualitative Research Method Series 30*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publication, Inc., 1993.

<sup>251</sup> Prior to engaging in the participant recruitment process, I am taking an Ethnography course where I will submit an application for approval for human subject research from the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

assumptions could result in ostracizing the women interviewed. Secondly, these women might be black balled by the patriarchal systems. Exposure of the male clergy behavior as it relates to gender issues in the church, has the potential of calling negative attention toward the women if read. The notion of black balling could entail not being invited to participate on ecumenical functions, interfaith events, and invitation to participate in prestigious events, like MLK statewide celebrations. Third, the potential interviewees are women established and secure in their positions, having the ability to speak freely and openly about issues that many of them have already preached or spoken about at conferences that I have attended. This research will document these experiences and findings. The effort to minimize risk or harm and protect my subjects' welfare was established by using pseudonyms for them and their churches. The benefit of this research to its participants is the validation of the female clergy's experiences, and the knowledge that you are not alone in these experiences, and the creation of strategies of resistance.

### **Confidentiality**

The protocol I will follow for the data collected, includes that all typed responses will be on my personal laptop, which is locked with my password; after the data is transcribed and coded, all superfluous information will be destroyed by deleting for the hard drive. The coded information will also be stored on my laptop, and the coding processes, was completed with the assistance and direction of Dr. Ortega. All information data will only be accessible with password. My laptop in a Mac, in case of unforeseen

theft or loss, my laptop has location mode if the laptop is lost or stolen, it can be tracked. Per IRB protocol the final findings will be maintained and transferred to portable hard drive, where it will be stored for three years. Deleting and shredding any data no longer viable to this project, I will destroy and de-identify all project related information.

### **Benefits to Subject / Future Benefits**

This dissertation will contribute to the discourse of the patriarchal leadership of the Black Church and its impact on female clergywomen. The potential benefits of this scholarship include the potential of cross cultural understanding; enhancing and expanding critical consciousness; benefitting society as a whole and specifically African American female clergy and lay women; and raising the cognizance of pervasive gender issues in ecclesial settings. The majority of the extant scholarship relates traditionally to the genesis of Black theology, which has been situated in oppression, has characterized African American existence in America.<sup>252</sup>

### **Interview Pilot Study**

The dissertation committee recommended that during the summer, at least three participants were interviewed to test the questions, seeking to the validity of the interview questions and procedures. This small scale testing of the procedures was used in the main study. This testing of the logistics of the procedures includes the effectiveness of the direction, clarity of the questions and reliability of the results. This pilot study assisted

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<sup>252</sup> Stacey Floyd-Thomas. *Black Church Studies: An Introduction*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007, pg. 90-92

with alleviating and correcting any obvious flaws in the interview protocol. After completing the three interviews the researcher was clear on the direction of the questions, eliminating questions that took the interview off track or into dead-end directions, while the information was useful, it would move the work in a direction suited for another project. This pilot project also clarified the need to streamline questions, allowing the participants to share freely such details as their call story, oppressive experiences, giving voice where their voices was otherwise silenced.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of a research study is essential to acceptance into the academic world and to conduct further research on the topic. In a qualitative inquiry, the goal of trustworthiness is to support the argument that the inquiry's findings are worth considering. Lincoln and Guba posit that trustworthiness of the research study is important to evaluate its value, which involves establishing four main criteria: *credibility*-confidence in the "truth" of the findings; *transferability*-the ability to show the findings have applicability in other context; *dependability*-the research shows the findings are consistent and could be replicated; and *conformability*-the degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not biased by the researcher's motivation or interest.<sup>253</sup> There are at least six other relevant techniques that assist with establishing processes that will assist with a successful and valid research processes, which include: audit trials, reflexivity, thick rich description, triangulation, member checking and peer debriefings.

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<sup>253</sup> YS. Lincoln and EG. Guba. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

## **Audit Trials**

According to Julie Carlson in *Avoiding Traps in Member Checking*, qualitative researchers are scrupulous note-takers, considering everything as important. Therefore, creating an audit refers to keeping copious documentation of all components of the study, should an external audit be utilized. This would include field observation notes, interview notes, journals, records, calendars, and various drafts are all a part of the audit trails.<sup>254</sup> Often a three to five year span for maintaining audiotapes, videotapes and photographs is a part of constructing an audit trail.<sup>255</sup> Creswell and Miller suggest that many do not use auditors, but keep careful documentation that reveals their research report. Likewise, the reader is viewed as the external reviewer, and as someone who will be determining credibility.<sup>256</sup> In this project, copious notes were taken during research and interviews, however I found that this copious note taking process appeared to impede the intimacy of interviewer and interviewee session. The interviews were very informative, but as the researcher, there were times during the interviews where my complete undivided attention, without the distraction of recording the interview could have created a more intimate conversation.

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<sup>254</sup>Julie A. Carlson, *The Qualitative Report* Volume15 Number 5 September 2010 1102-1113<http://www.nova.edu> *Avoiding Traps in Member Checking*

<sup>255</sup> Ibid, p. 1103

<sup>256</sup> Ibid

### **Thick and Rich Description**

The qualitative study is concerned with corroborating or substantiating findings over time across similar situations.<sup>257</sup> An understanding of commonalities makes it possible for corroboration of specific topics; detailed descriptions of settings, participants, data collection, and analysis procedures are a way of making their accounts more credible. An additional purpose of thick, rich description identified by Cresswell and Miller (2000) is to draw the reader closely into the story or narrative to increase coherence and to evoke feelings for and a sense of connection with the participants in the study.<sup>258</sup> In this project, I provided a rich description of each of the participants' narratives of their call story, specifically why and how they came to understand their experiences as they pursued their calling. These narratives provided insight into the lives of these clergywomen and extensive details of their experiences.

### **Member Checking**

I provided participants with opportunities to check (approve) particular aspects of the interpretation of the data.<sup>259</sup> This process determined if the data analysis was congruent with the participants' experiences. This process verified transcriptions or early interpretations. Participants were given the opportunity to check if they wanted to see

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<sup>257</sup> Julie A. Carson, *The Qualitative Report* Volume 15 Number 5 September 2010 1102-1113 <http://www.nova.edu> *Avoiding Traps in Member Checking*, pg.1104

<sup>258</sup> Ibid

<sup>259</sup> Doyle, S. (2007). Member checking with older women: A framework for negotiating meaning. *Health Care for Women International*, 8(10), 888-908.

their interview or the research after it was completed, thus far conversations about either what the said during the interview or concepts and themes were discussed with those interested in having a conversation about finding, they were asked how they would interpret a particular concept.

### **Peer Debriefing**

The goal of peer debriefing was to share analytical sessions with peers for the purpose of exploring aspects of the data analysis, which might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind<sup>260</sup> (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba, there are four purposes for peer debriefing in qualitative research:

1. Encourage the researcher to investigate bias and in-depth understanding;
2. Supports the testing of emerging hypotheses in a risk-free environment;
3. Offers researchers the opportunity to develop and assess upcoming steps in the research design; and,
4. Researchers are able to articulate frustration, concerns, and obtain support and encouragement from a peer.<sup>261</sup>

I selected two colleagues as my peer debriefers: one was a classmate in my qualitative class who is also in the DU/Illiff Joint PhD program; the second was a Master of Divinity student at Illiff School who was interested in Womanism. The choice to use two peer debriefers provided me with an extended reach in testing emerging hypotheses/themes and identifying undetected bias which should enhance my understanding of data collected

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<sup>260</sup> E. G. Guba & Y. S. Lincoln (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publication Publications, Inc.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid

and analyzed. The two colleagues discussed and critiqued developmental ideas and interpretations with me, offering advice, insight and recommendations.

## CHAPTER FOUR – WE ARE THE ONES WE HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR<sup>262</sup>:

### AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGYWOMEN EXPERIENCES

“ The free bird thinks of another breeze, and trade winds soft through the sighing trees, and fat worm waiting on a dawn bright lawn, and he names the sky his own. But the caged bird stands on the grave of dreams his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream; his wings are clipped and his feet are tired so he opens his throat to sing....”<sup>263</sup> ~Maya Angelou

#### Introduction

This research contends that African American clergywomen have struggled under a Eurocentric masculinist worldview that has proven divisive, demeaning, and disconcerting and that has contributed to Black women's subordination.<sup>264</sup> According to Patricia Hill Collins, placing Black women’s experiences at the center of analysis offers fresh insights on the prevailing concepts, paradigms and epistemologies of their

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<sup>262</sup> June Jordan from *Passion* (1980) and from *Directed by Desire. The Collected Poems of June Jordan*. Copyright 2005 by the June M. Jordan Literary Estate Trust. **Poem for South African Women** Commemoration of the 40,000 women and children who, August 9, 1956, presented themselves in bodily protest against the “dompass” in the capital of apartheid. Presented at The United Nations, August 9, 1978. The resistance to the Pass Law led to many thousands of arrests and was the spark that ignited the Sharpeville Massacre on March 21, 1960, and led to the arrest of Robert Sobukwe that day. Colloquially, passes were often called the **dompass**, literally meaning the “dumb pass.”

<sup>263</sup> Maya Angelou. *Caged Bird*. In Shaker, *Why Don’t You Sing?* New York: Random House, 1983.

<sup>264</sup> Patricia Hill Collins. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York, New York: Routledge, 2000, pg. 221-238.

worldview and on its feminist and Afrocentric critiques. Subsequently, as mentioned in Chapter Three, this chapter contains an analysis of the interviews of twelve African American clergywomen and their journeys in various ecclesial settings in pursuit of their clerical calls, passions and dreams.

The compilation and analysis of these women's experiences were conducted from a womanist perspective that, according to Mitzi J. Smith, "unapologetically prioritizes Black women's experiences, voices, traditions, and concerns as legitimate sources of dialogue and knowledge." Smith reiterates that a womanist perspective provides an intentional and contextual frame of reference for life experiences in Black churches and communities.<sup>265</sup>

This chapter contains the analysis of the interviews of twelve African American clergywomen's journeys in various ecclesial settings.

This chapter will 1) offer brief biographical profiles of each clergywoman, 2) bring life to the voices of these twelve African American clergywomen by sharing their stories, and providing a glimpse into their lives and development as they navigated ecclesial settings on their journey to major leadership roles, 3) reveal the oppressive and dismissive experiences these women and many others encounter in ministry on a daily basis, 4) demonstrate that these twelve women persevered, finding their voices and places, despite obstacles, and often-hostile situations, and 5) provide closing remarks that will establish a foundation for moving forward with *strategies of resistance*.

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<sup>265</sup> See Mitzi J. Smith, *Womanism, Intersectionality, and Biblical Justice*, Mutuality Gender Justice 101, cbeinternational.org, Summer 2016, pg. 8-11.

## Positionality — Black Women in Black Churches

In previous chapters, I addressed the ways in which Black women in historical contexts participated in specific efforts to resist oppressive occurrences, even prior to the antebellum era. In this chapter, the voices of these twelve African American clergywomen and their journeys to becoming senior pastors were utilized and coupled with an assessment of their experiences of strategies of containment (an effort to prevent them from attaining senior pastoral positions, ordination in patriarchal structures within Black churches, and other senior level roles in ecclesial institutions). These women and many before them believed they had and have a moral obligation to accept and pursue their respective callings. There is an unspoken sentiment among African American religious women that has been deeply imbedded in their lived experiences. It is an idea that social responsibility was and is a part of one's identity, sense of purpose, values, and reason for being.<sup>266</sup> Joyce Ladner, Sociologist and former Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) worker, contends the "obligations" to contribute to improving the social life as "earning your space in the world" originated in response to the particular circumstances of African Americans.<sup>267</sup> Black women understand this value as responsibility, Ladner states,

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<sup>266</sup> Sociologist and former Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee (SNCC) worker Joyce Ladner identifies Black women's social responsibility of Black forebears to sustain and improve African American life. See *Witnessing and Testifying : Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*. Rosetta E. Ross. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003; for more insight women fighting for social justice issues such as the Civil Rights movements; citing black women activist from Harriet Tubman to Ella Baker to Joyce Ladner, women who all had some ties to the church.

<sup>267</sup> Rosetta E. Ross. *Witnessing and Testifying : Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003, pg. 4

To assure progress for the race... through the dint of their own efforts.” The obligation does not stop with the needs of Black communities, however. As a moral value, the social responsibility of Black women, she posits, is the idea and value that it is our duty to help those in need.<sup>268</sup>

Despite the fact that there have been some inroads in Black churches and an increased number of Black women attending and completing seminary and theological schools, the adage “women need not apply!” remains a prevalent message for African American women in the twenty first century.<sup>269</sup>

In *The Woman in the Pulpit*, Carol M. Norén, says, “Seeing another woman in the pulpit has the effect of raising a sort of mirror to the woman preacher. It causes her to compare her own work with this other person who is like her and yet not like her, to reflect on how she has grown and what she may become.”<sup>270</sup> Norén reminds us that this notion that the feminine role can demonstrate what a masculine one can only parody is relevant; in fact, she points out that a woman’s laughter, solemnity, tension and other moods come across in such a way that only a woman preacher can personify. Clergywomen are role models attesting to the divines, exuding grace in their life and ministry; beneficiaries of exposure to this grace discover how to claim for themselves this sustaining power.<sup>271</sup> These women have a liberating story to tell, a voice to be heard and

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>269</sup> Rev. Dr. Peterson Pastor emeritus at New Hope Baptist Church statement on panel discussion on women in ministry at Iliff School of Theology.

<sup>270</sup> Carol M. Norén. *The Woman in the Pulpit*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991 pg. 30.

<sup>271</sup> See Carolyn De Swarte Gifford. *The Defense of Women’s Right to Ordination in the Methodist Episcopal Church: Women in American Protestant Religion 1800-1930: A thirty-six volume reprint collection demonstrating the breadth and diversity of the roles played by women in American religion*. New York, New York: Garland Publishing, 1987.

missions to accomplish. Like Jarena Lee, a woman in the African Methodist Episcopal Church who responded candidly to her experience of divine calling, saying, and “no one will believe me” yet, Lee continued to pursue her calling. Despite the fact that Bishop Allen gave her permission to be an exhorter, he refused to ordain her. Exhorters occupied the lowest positions in the Church's hierarchy and [they] had to have permission before addressing individual congregations. They could lead Sunday school classes and prayer meetings, but in formal church services, they usually spoke at the leniency of the presiding minister, and only in response to the biblical text that he had selected for the

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We find that there is a declaration that women were allowed to play a public leadership role as long as it was benevolent and charitable work. In the 1740s, Methodism's founder John Wesley depended on the counsel of women, and allowed them to play an active role in class meetings, which were small groups, which met for mutual support and growth in faith. Initially, women who felt God's call to preach asked Wesley for his advice and he told them they could certainly pray publicly and testify to their faith experiences and they might even exhort, but only to small groups. But preaching was not acceptable for women. Despite the fact that some of them were powerful speakers who's groups grew from ten to twelve to over two hundred. The 1Corinthians 14:34 was used to teach that women were forbidden to speak in church and they must not teach men or otherwise have authority over them (1 Timothy 2:12) Wesley's counsel being a pragmatist, he advised the women to explain to their listeners that although Methodists did not allow women preachers, it was permissible for women to tell what was in their hearts concerning their faith. He also stated women's preaching was not acceptable, exhorting and prayer was and it was safe to preach as long as they didn't call what they were doing preaching. By 1771 Wesley had a stronger stand on the question of women's preaching. As a result of the phenomenal growth, and success, Wesley permitted lay preaching on the grounds of “extraordinary call” God had given to some talented laymen to preach the Gospel. As the women continued to preach and the success of their preaching was evident other male clergy who were also called pragmatic as well as principled and believed if women's preaching brought people into the faith, then they must acknowledge the “extraordinary call” these women had evidently received. Phoebe Palmer, evangelist and influential leader in the Holiness movement, wrote in *The Promise of the Father, 1859*; she did not claim women's right to preach based on an idea that women were equal to men in the sight of God and therefore should not inhabit a separated sphere by a few American women during the 1830s, including the Quaker sister Sarah and Angelina Grimké. Palmer appealed to the authority of scriptures, citing Biblical texts indicated that extraordinary person of both sexes could be enabled by God's Holy Spirit to preach and prophesy. In 1869 Maggie Newton Van Cott, was the first woman to be granted a measure of official recognition from the Methodist Episcopal Church MEC, (the northern Methodist church) did not claim her right to preach by virtue of equality with men before God. She also was not concerned with women's rights but only with her call from God impelling her to preach whether or not she had the blessing of the Methodist hierarchy. After receiving her license she stated it would have very little value for her unless God has sanctioned her preaching.

At the 1876 General Conference Van Cott petitioned for the language of the *Discipline* be clarified on the licensing and ordaining of women on women's lay rights of the denomination. Then there was Frances E. Willard, president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union a famous Methodist — male or female — in America during the late nineteenth century, boldly stated the underlying reason for the denial of clergy and laity rights to women; in 1889 the battle reached its highest intensity. Willard stated the issue, the fundamental problem: men did not want to share power—especially sacred power with women. The rights were denied of laity and clergy rights of women during the 1888 General Conference. There were always a few male supporters such as Professor Luther T. Townsend, a respected faculty member of Boston University and recognized throughout the denomination for his preaching ability, agreed with Willard that radical action was necessary in the face of men's refusal to grant women their rights.

day.<sup>272</sup> Lee eloquently takes issue with the church's positions, arguing that inspiration to preach comes from God. "If the man may preach, because the Savior died for him, why not the woman, seeing he died for her also? Is he not a whole Savior, instead of half of one?"<sup>273</sup> Lee was a woman before her time, trailblazing in her revolutionary act to speak God's word. In rebuttal to questions on a female ministry, she responded, "Did not Mary, *first* preach the risen Savior?"

In addition to defending Christianity, Lee is also defending the rights of women, an act which was very unusual for most nineteenth-century women, since subordination and subjugation were usually accepted conditions and always associated with the status of being a woman. Nevertheless, for Lee, Christianity and its consequences assumed moral and ethical dimensions, which extended beyond the organization of the church.

Ross suggests that Black women scholars theorize Black women's religious perspectives and practices and the teaching and writing in the fields of theology, religious ethics, Bible, sociology of religion, and ministry practice. The work of retrieving, interpreting, and theorizing, is womanist work that engages Black women's religiosity with other theological discourses and religious interpretations.<sup>274</sup> Womanist ethicist, Katie G. Cannon, analyzes and challenges fundamental traditions of patriarchy in Black churches, especially in preaching. Cannon contends that while Black preaching resists hegemony of the larger society, it also marginalizes and oppresses women. Therefore,

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<sup>272</sup> William L. Andrews. *Sisters of the Spirit*. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986, pg. 14

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid*,37.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid*,7.

according to Cannon, the task of womanist theology includes “unmasking” the patriarchy of Black religious traditions while “disentangling” affirmation for Black women found there.<sup>275</sup>

### **Profiles**

This intergenerational, ecumenical group of contemporary women consists of accomplished pastors, professors and chaplains. They are: Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Hale, Rev. Dr. Gina Stewart, Rev. Dr. Valerie L. Jackson, Rev. Dr. Naomi Harris, Rev. Dr. Antoinette Alvarado, Rev. Billie Cox, Rev. Kanyere Eaton, Rev. Janis Grubbs Cobb, Rev. Tawana Davis, Rev. Dr. Renita Weems, Rev. Loraine Priestly-Smith, and Rev. Courtney Clayton Jenkins.

#### **Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Hale**



Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Hale is the founding Senior Pastor of the Ray of Hope Christian Church in Decatur, Georgia. This woman began her ministry with four people meeting for Bible study in her apartment. The Ray of Hope’s membership has increased to approximately 7,500 persons over the first 17 years, with an active membership of 3,000 and an average 2,000 in worship each Sunday morning. Hale speaks openly about the trade-offs she lives with as a result of choices she made early in her ministry.

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<sup>275</sup> Katie Geneva Cannon, “The Wounds of Jesus’: Justification of Goodness in the Face of Manifold Evil,” in *Katie’s Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*. New York: Continuum Publishing, 1995, pg. 109-10.

A native of Roanoke, Virginia, Hale has been in ministry for thirty-six years. She attended Hollins College in Virginia where she earned her Bachelor of Arts in Music. Hale also holds a Master of Divinity degree from Duke University and a Doctor of Ministry from United University Theological Seminary, in Dayton Ohio. Additionally, she has five Honorary Doctor of Divinity degrees and one Honorary Doctor of Law degree.

Hale is revered locally, nationally, and internationally for her leadership, integrity, and compassion. In 2004, Hale established a mentoring program known as ELAH (Hale backwards) Pastoral Ministries, Incorporated, to assist in the spiritual as well as practical development of pastors and para-church leaders. In September 2005, she convened her first Women in Ministry Conference - a premiere, national conference with a focused mission to develop, coach and mentor Christian Women in Ministry for the 21st Century. Presently, she serves on the Board of Visitors at Duke Divinity School, the Board of Trustees at Hollins University, Chairperson of the Board of Directors at Beulah Heights University, Chairperson of the Board of Directors for the City of Hope Ministries, Inc., and the Secretary for the Hampton University Ministers' Conference. Hale was inducted into the African American Biographies Hall of Fame and the Martin Luther King Board of Preachers of Morehouse College. In July 2009, Hale was appointed by President Barack Obama to serve on the President's Commission on White House Fellowships. She is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha, Sorority Incorporated.

### **Rev. Dr. Gina Stewart**



Rev. Dr. Gina Stewart is a preacher, builder, mentor, adjunct professor and Senior Pastor. She is the daughter of Christ Missionary Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. She is the first African American female elected to serve an established African American Baptist congregation in Memphis, which is in Shelby County.

A native of Memphis, Tennessee, Stewart has been in ministry for twenty-five years. She attended the University of Memphis and earned a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) in Marketing in 1982. Stewart earned a Master of Education in Administration and Supervision from Trevecca Nazarene College in Nashville, Tennessee in 1989. She also earned a Master of Divinity degree from Memphis Theological Seminary in 1996. She participated in the Harvard Divinity School Summer Leadership Institute for Church Based Community and Economic Development in 2000. Stewart also earned her Doctor of Ministry degree from the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta, Georgia in 2007. She is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated.

### **Rev. Dr. Naomi Harris**



Rev. Dr. Naomi Harris is a pastoral care counselor, teacher, preacher, and scholar at Shorter AME Church. She was ordained in the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2004 and serves in bereavement ministry and family counseling. Harris also teaches in the areas of

ministerial and spiritual health care, women's empowerment, and spiritual direction. A native of Woodville, Mississippi, Harris has been in ministry for over thirty years. She attended Alcorn State University in 1960, and earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and English. Harris earned a Master's degree in Counseling and Guidance from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin in 1972. She also earned her Master of Divinity degree in 2004 and a Doctor of Ministry degree in 2012 from Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. Harris is the author of *Integrating the Pastoral Care Components Of Listening, Prayer and Presence For More Effective Funeral Sermons*.

#### **Rev. Tawana Davis**



Rev. Tawana Davis was the Executive Pastor and Women's Ministry Director at Shorter Community AME Church in Denver, Colorado. The co-founder of Soul 2 Soul LLC, an organization committed to soulful social justice, working to help liberate the oppressed and oppressors in an open, affirming, and womanist-based ways. Davis is also the outreach coordinator for the Impact Empowerment Group where she serves as a mentor and resource coordinator for at-risk youth, through prevention and intervention as it relates to gang activity and involvement. A native of Chicago, Davis has been in ministry for seven years. She earned her Masters of Divinity from the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta, Georgia in 2010. Davis was ordained in 2011 as an Itinerate Deacon, and in 2013 as an Itinerate Elder. Currently, Davis is enrolled in the Antioch University Leadership & Change doctoral program.

### **Rev. Loraine Priestley-Smith**



Rev. Loraine Priestley-Smith is the Senior Pastor of First United Methodist Church in Freehold, New Jersey, which has served the central Monmouth County area for over 180 years. Priestley-Smith graduated from New Brunswick Theological Seminary in 2007.

### **Rev. Dr. Antoinette (Toni) Alvarado**



Rev. Dr. Antoinette (Toni) Alvarado is the Co-Pastor of Grace Church International established by her husband and Senior Pastor, Bishop Johnathan E. Alvarado. She also serves as Vice President and Dean of Students for the Greater Atlanta Theological Seminary, a ministry of Total Grace Christian Center. A native of Mississippi, Alvarado has been in ministry for twenty plus years. She attended Beulah Heights University in Atlanta, Georgia where she earned an Associate of Arts degree in 1996 and a Bachelor of Arts in 1998 in Biblical Education. Alvarado earned a Masters of Divinity Degree with an emphasis in Christian Formation and Discipleship from the Church of God Theological Seminary, in Cleveland, Tennessee in 2003. She earned her Doctor of Ministry Degree in Leadership and Renewal from Regent University School of Divinity in Virginia Beach, Virginia in 2008. She also earned a Master of Theology from Columbia Theological Seminary in 2009, and a Graduate Certificate in Women's Studies from the University of Georgia in 2013.

Alvarado is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of My Sister's Keeper Foundation for Women; a leading influential organization focused on "Moving Women from Average to Excellence" in their educational, personal and professional pursuits and development. Alvarado is the author of *Run and Not Be Weary: The Pursuit of Purpose and Destiny*. Her second work is, *A Woman's Heart*, a Devotional Series. Alvarado is a Certified Coach & Coach Trainer through Lifeforming Leadership Coaching, Virginia Beach, Virginia (2005).

### **Rev. Billie Boyd-Cox**



Rev. Billie Boyd-Cox is the Senior Pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church in Conyers, Georgia. Cox is the first female to serve as senior pastor of the historic Baptist church in Rockdale County. A native of Lafayette, Alabama, Boyd-Cox has been in ministry for sixteen years. She earned a Bachelor's of Science degree in Organizational Leadership from Mercer University in Atlanta, Georgia (Summa Cum Laude). She earned her Master of Divinity Degree at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology in December 2012. Presently she is working on her Doctor of Ministry at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta, Georgia. Boyd-Cox is the recipient of numerous awards including the 2013 Spirit Award presented by the Rockdale Chambers of Commerce, the 2013 Civic Engagement Award presented by the Rockdale Chapter of Georgia Federation of Democratic Women and the 2014 Georgia Women's Legislative Caucus Servant Leadership Award.

### **Rev. Dr. Valerie L. Jackson**



Rev. Dr. Valerie L. Jackson is the Senior Pastor of University Park United Methodist Church in Denver, Colorado, where she is the first woman and African American to serve as senior pastor. A native of Boston, Massachusetts, Jackson has been in ministry for over sixteen years. She attended Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts where she earned a Bachelor's of Arts in Sociology in 1983. She also earned a Masters of Divinity with concentrations in Homiletics and Theology and a Masters of Arts in Christian Education and Certificate of Theology from the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta, Georgia. Jackson is a member of the International Honor Society of Theta Phi and a past member of the ITC Board of Trustees. Jackson served as the first full-time, paid Director of Christian Education and Training, and the first woman licensed to preach at the Beulah Grove Baptist Church in Augusta, Georgia.

### **Rev. Kanyere Eaton**



Rev. Kanyere Eaton is the Senior Pastor of Fellowship Covenant Church, a Bronx-based congregation of the Evangelical Covenant Church that is committed to engaging God's people for worship, equipping God's people for service and empowering God's people for leadership. Eaton has worked in both public and private sectors as a social service professional with backgrounds in early childhood

education, substance abuse recovery, direct service management, hunger prevention and philanthropy. A native of San Francisco, Eaton has been in ministry for fifteen years. She attended Cornell University where she earned a Bachelor's of Science in Sociology in Human Development and Family Studies. She also earned her Master of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary in New York and a Masters of Science in Social Work from Columbia University. She is currently pursuing a Doctorate of Ministry degree from San Francisco Theological Seminary.

### **Rev. Janis Grubbs Cobbs**



Rev. Janis Grubbs Cobbs is the Chief Chaplin at Veterans Hospital in Kansas City, Kansas. Cobbs' denomination is the National Baptist Convention of America. She is endorsed through the National Baptist Convention of America, dually aligned with the American Baptist Convention of America and American Baptist Churches. A native of Chicago, Cobbs has been in ministry for thirty-three years. Cobbs completed her undergraduate work at Bishop College in Dallas, Texas. She also earned her Masters of Divinity from Colgate at Rochester Divinity School in Rochester, New York, and is currently attending the Doctor of Ministry program at Central Theological Seminary.

### **Rev. Dr. Renita Weems**



Rev. Dr. Renita Weems is Co-Pastor of the Ray of Hope Community Church in Nashville Tennessee. She is a biblical scholar, academic administrator, writer, blogger, ordained minister and public intellectual whose scholarly insights into modern faith, biblical texts and the role of spirituality in everyday lives make her a much sought-after writer and speaker. She is Vice President and Academic Dean at American Baptist College in Nashville, Tennessee. Ordained an elder in the AME Church since 1984, Weems is a former member of the faculty of Vanderbilt University and former William & Camille Cosby Visiting Professor at Spelman College. A native of Atlanta, Georgia, she has been in ministry for thirty-three years. She attended Wellesley College, where she earned a Bachelor's of Science in Economics. She earned her Masters of Divinity in 1983 and her PhD from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1989. Weems was the first African American woman to earn a Ph.D. in Old Testament and Hebrew Bible.

### **Rev. Courtney Clayton Jenkins**



Rev. Courtney Clayton Jenkins currently serves as the Senior Pastor of Euclid Avenue Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, in Ohio. A native of Cleveland, Ohio, she has been in ministry for approximately eighteen years. She attended Spelman College where she earned a Bachelor's of Arts in English Literature in 2004. Jenkins earned her Masters of Divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary with a concentration in

Preaching and Congregational Ministry in 2008. She is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ denomination. She previously served as the Designated Pastor of Shaker Heights Community Church, United Church of Christ. She sits on the board of directors for United Black Christians (UBC), helping them to develop leadership training for the next generation of church leadership. At the age of 27, she was the first woman to be ordained at the historic Mt. Zion Congregational Church in Cleveland and the youngest pastor to lead that congregation. Additionally, she serves as a board member for the Local Church Ministries (LCM) board of directors. Jenkins was honored to serve as the youngest member of the search committee, which selected the current, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ.

The themes developed from the research analysis provide a glimpse into the lives of twelve African American clergywomen sharing their perceptions and experiences of polity, history and ideology of the major leadership found in Black churches. These themes also provide understanding into the lived experiences of these clergywomen and how it shapes their leadership style and their ontological positioning in their respective communities while providing insight into their shared experiences.<sup>276</sup>

My analysis and interpretation of this intergenerational, ecumenical group of women and their liberatory resistance to oppression in ecclesial settings is approached through the lens of womanist ethics, with the integration of the following tenets: radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love, and critical engagement.

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<sup>276</sup> John W. Cresswell. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. Thousands Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2013.

These tenets, juxtaposed against the womanist definition created by Alice Walker, will frame and provide a foundation for this work:

**WOMANIST**<sup>277</sup> 1. From *womanish*. (Opp. of “girlish,” i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, “you acting womanish,” i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered “good” for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: “You trying to be grown.” Responsible. And, In charge. *Serious*. Correlates with *Radical subjectivity* — “the formation of Black women’s radical subjectivity in light of the racist-sexist-classist oppression that they face and the ways in which they have subverted forced identities and hegemonic truth claims.”<sup>278</sup>

2. *Also*: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally a Universalist, as in: “Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige and black?” Answer. “Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented.” Traditionally capable, as in: “Mama, I’m walking to Canada and I’m taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me.” Reply: “It wouldn’t be the first time.” Correlates with *Traditional Communalism* — “speaks to the ways of being, doing and thinking that have nurtured and supported Black women in their individual and collective quest for liberation.”<sup>279</sup>

3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*. Correlates with *Redemptive Self-love* — “follow autobiographical and/or spiritual trajectories in their discussion of individual womanist paths of self-love, self-acceptance and the emergence of womanist consciousness and aesthetics. They assert the importance of self-reflexivity and

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<sup>277</sup> Alice Walker’s Definition of a “Womanist” from *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* Copyright 1983, with the Womanist ethics tenets by Stacey Floyd-Thomas. *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics*. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2006.

<sup>278</sup> Stacey Floyd-Thomas. *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*. New York, New York: New York University Press, 2006, pg. 8

<sup>279</sup> Stacey Floyd-Thomas. *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*. New York, New York: New York University Press, 2006, pg. 9

cultural metaphor as a redemptive project of Black womanhood.”<sup>280</sup>

4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender. Correlates with *Critical Engagement* — “highlights the necessity for womanist thought to remain on the cutting edge of approaches to and discourses on religion and society. Realizing the role that womanism plays in tandem with other feminist, liberationist and anti-racist scholarly movements and social institutions, the authors mandate that womanism continues to be a fruitful resource or engaging major questions in a variety of disciplines and social contexts that take seriously the interaction of religion and society. Central to the notion of critical engagement is embracing the dynamic tensions in what ought to be the meaning and identity politics of womanism itself in the normative field of religious studies extending especially to the politics of white feminist and Black [male] theological thought in the United States and globally.”

I discussed the historical grounding of Black churches, utilizing a womanist ethics lens and a qualitative analysis as the instruments for assessment to analyze and challenge fundamental traditions of patriarchy. Katie Cannon reminds us that while Black preaching opposes power relations of the larger society, it also marginalizes and oppresses women. Cannon argues that the task of womanist theology includes “unmasking” the patriarchy of Black religious traditions while “disentangling” affirmations for Black women found there.<sup>281</sup> Womanist theologian Delores Williams claims that while Black churches sustain Black women emotionally and provide “theological space” for their expression of faith, Black churches also “suppress and help make invisible Black women’s thought and culture.”<sup>282</sup> Elonda Clay argues, “black

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid

<sup>281</sup> Katie G. Cannon. "The Wounds of Jesus: Justification of Goodness in the Face of Manifold Evil." In *Katie's Cannon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*, by Katie G. Cannon, New York, New York: Continuum, 1995, 109-10.

<sup>282</sup> Delores S. Williams. *Sisters in the Wilderness The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2007.

women are expected in some black churches to be invisible, except for their working hands, open pocketbooks, ... conquered, and silently tossed aside as hussies afterwards.”<sup>283</sup>

The themes that emerged in this project will set the stage for the final portion of this work, foregrounding the problem of *strategies of containment* found in many Black churches and then shifting to the contribution of developing *strategies of resistance*, creating approaches to assist with navigating oppressive ecclesial settings. Having analyzed the data from the interviews, I have provided a profile of the women establishing their social location; I will use the metaphor of being caged from Maya Angelou’s poem Caged Bird and her book I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, describing those tactics used to prevent clergywomen from pursuing their (mission, goal, calling) as they progress toward fulfilling their callings.<sup>284</sup>

### **Strategies of Containment**

Systematic theologian, Jacquelyn Grant, poignantly stated that some liberation theologians acquiesced in one or more oppressive aspects of the liberation struggle itself;

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<sup>283</sup> Clay, Elonda. "Confessions of a Ex-Theological Bitch: The Thickness of Black Women's Exploitation between Jacquelyn Grant's "Backbone" and Michael Eric Dyson's "Theological Bitch"." In *Ain't I A Womanist Too?*, by Monica Coleman, 93-106. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2013.

<sup>284</sup> The goal in future work is to develop a Green book for African American clergywomen similar to the traveling Green Book created in in the 1940’s during the Jim Crow era when it was most difficult to travel as a Black person. Victor Hugo Green developed the Green Book. Green a postal worker in Harlem, New York. He published this book from 1936-1966. Green realized there was a need to give Negro traveler information that would protect them as they navigated their way from the south to the north searching for a new life and jobs opportunities. Some believed that this book assisted with perpetuating Jim Crow, versus fighting against the unjust law. By no stretch of the imagination, am I suggesting the creation of a tool to navigate oppressive ecclesial settings in an effort to avoid fighting against the oppressor, but rather providing the tools required to with stand the oppressor, and who better to glean this knowledge from than those women who have sacrificed, struggled and withstood the test of time as they pursued their calling and fulfill their dreams. For more information about the “Green Book” see Newsweek 3/17/2017 How The ‘Green Book’ Saved Black Lives On The Road by Alexander Nazaryan on Newsweek.com

“where racism is rejected, sexism has been embraced; where classism is called into question, racism and sexism have been tolerated; and where sexism is repudiated, racism and classism are often ignored.”<sup>285</sup> This notion will contribute to furthering the understanding of the experiences of the clergywomen and the disparity of relatedness found in ecclesial settings in an effort to answer the question: As African American clergywomen navigate ecclesial settings, in which ways did they experience, strategies of containment to prevent them from attaining senior pastoral positions, and ordination in patriarchal structures within Black churches?

These themes provide clarity by revealing a need for more women in major leadership roles in ecclesial, political and social settings. The findings from the research can also increase the ways clergywomen navigate oppressive, exclusive, patriarchal environments.

Grant offers,

If the liberation of women is not proclaimed, the church’s proclamation cannot be about divine liberation. If the church does not share in the liberation struggle of black women, its liberation struggle is not authentic. If women are oppressed, the church cannot possibly be “a visible manifestation that the gospel is a reality” — for the gospel cannot be real in that context.<sup>286</sup>

There is a deep contradiction in the church’s language or proclamation of liberation and its actions when one considers the status of black women in the church as laity and black

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<sup>285</sup> Grant, Jacquelyn. "Black Theology and the Black Woman." In *Words of Fire*, by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York, New York: The New Press, pg. 320.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid

women in the ordained ministry of the church.<sup>287</sup> Therefore, this study contends that strategies of containment often placed in front of clergywomen, thru questioning related to specific attributes such as gender, age, cultural prowess, class, sexual orientation, or (dis) ability. The patriarchal structures have established oppressive ideological practices, which include utilizing the bible and historical precedent to determine and limit the participation of women. Stacey Floyd-Thomas states,

“Manufactured patriarchalism is the devaluing of anything that is female, whereas ecclesial clericalization and hierarchalization represent the religious authority and sacred rhetoric that justifies the perpetuation of them both — resulting in the sanctification of black women’s oppression. In light of this, the plight of black womanhood is simply regarded as what is ordained by God.”<sup>288</sup>

This study contends that Black churches for centuries have operated with a hierarchical, surveillance style of leadership, yielding power from the pulpit over the individual bodies in the pews; yielding power in a Foucauldian style of panopticism, where the church edifice represents Jeremy Bentham’s<sup>289</sup> proposed panopticon<sup>290</sup> and the pulpit represent the observation tower. In order to keep the people in the pews in order and complacent,

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<sup>287</sup> Grant, Jacquelyn. "Black Theology and the Black Woman." *Words of Fire*, by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York, New York: The New Press, pg. 325.

<sup>288</sup> Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas. *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics*. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2006, pg.43.

<sup>289</sup> Jeremy Bentham an English philosopher, jurist, and social reformer. Founder of modern utilitarianism –“it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong”.

<sup>290</sup> The panopticon a circular building with an observation tower in the center of an open space surrounded by cells that contain inhabitants. The design of such establishment provided surveillance, which floodlight impaired the inhabitants’ vision, prohibiting them from being able to tell if there was a guard in the central tower watching. This inability to see created docile rather than active action. Rendering the inhabitants often policing themselves. Usually associated with prisons the panoptic style may be utilized other institutions with surveillance needs such as hospitals, financial institutions, schools, etc. For more on panopticon see *Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage Books, New York: 1995.

the pastor utilizes language (sermons) in such a way that God becomes the guard that is always watching, which keeps parishioners in check. This subtle policing of parishioners holds people accountable to the pulpit, often more so than to God.

The coding process revealed relevant themes garnered from the interviews as they related to the experiences of the clergywomen; these themes, developed from the research findings, provide a glimpse into the lives of the clergywomen and their perceptions of the ecclesial settings. Their lived experiences and how they shaped their leadership styles and their ontological positioning in their respective communities will provide an opportunity to gain insight about their shared undertakings.<sup>291</sup> A compilation of their responses offers an overview of factors that contributed to the success or setback of these women's experiences. The following themes emerged from the data: strategies of containment from the church, strategies of resistance from the women. The strategies of containment are: *Ordination Dilemma, Unabashed Gender Exclusion by Church Hierarchy, Co-Conspirators Collusion: Parents, Parishioners and Pastors, Cultural Constraints and Language Constraints*. The participants description of their experiences of actualizing their call in the church can be described in two ways: strategies of containment from Black churches, and their on strategies of being "caged".

### **Ordination Dilemma**

United Methodist senior pastor, Valerie Jackson, calls this practice a

subtle, 'divinely seductive' gender war against the identity, voice and personhood of women. It is a war that is culturally and religiously acceptable to all parties

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<sup>291</sup>John W. Creswell. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. Thousands Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2013.

involved (including women), and in many ways, it is far more deadly than the designated explicit wrongdoings such as adultery, alcoholism, and physical abuse because it hides under the guise of normality.<sup>292</sup>

There are social-cultural-historical-political conditions that have assisted in establishing a warped understanding of “black womanhood.” This study contends that other culprits are: language, inferred ideologies, indoctrination and power or the desire to maintain said power; all at epicenter of myths, devised about “black womanhood.” It is imperative that we understand and clarify how notions of black womanhood are depicted, realigned, and re-appropriated throughout time.

Gina Stewart shares how the ordination process was used to exclude women from ministry:

The other thing about ordination for most women that I have encountered; ordination has been seen as graduation, because ordination has often been used in a lot of settings as a way to—as a form of exclusion for women to deny them full participation in ministry. So the excuse some would hear is, well you can’t do that because you are not ordained. And so consequently, I have met a lot of women who feel that they can’t do ministry unless they’re ordained. When my position is, you do the ministry and ordination will come. This is a powerful double-edged sword; you cannot be assigned or considered by a church if you are not ordained and you cannot be ordained unless you have a church considering you to become their pastor. This particular ecclesiastical polity is found in several denominations

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<sup>292</sup> Valerie L. Jackson. *A Critical Analysis of Preaching in the National Baptist Convention, USA, Incorporated: The Social-Cultural and Existential Reality of Women*. Denver, Colorado: Iliff School of Theology, 2014, pg. 15

such as Baptist, United Church of Christ, and the Christian Church Disciples of Christ, African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) has other policies written and unwritten that often prevent full participation.

Valerie Jackson recalls her experience with ordination or lack of ordination process:

I was not ordained in the Baptist Church at all, I was licensed to preach in the Baptist Church and therefore; I did not go thru an ordination process. However, I can say for the Missionary Baptist Church theoretically, the ordinations would be the same, they will be individual ordinations, and the ordination comes when a church, a specific church calls you to pastor, and that's male or female, that's when you get to be ordained. Now, the trick is even though theoretically, they are equal; in practice, typically speaking, a woman is not going to be called to be a pastor therefore she will not experience ordination. But they get away with it because on paper it appears to be done equally.

This tactic of being caught in a *vicious cycle* of having a standard requirement to advance to the position of senior pastor is one of the fiercest strategies of containment, utilized on women specifically. These requirements appear to stand for both men and women, who are being called by a church to be a Senior Pastor, yet in the Baptist churches, “the final frontier,” the [stain glass ceiling] the road less traveled, the land of the big chairs, the testosterone zone, and the “for boys only club” have been the senior pastorate.”<sup>293</sup> In

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<sup>293</sup> Teresa Fry Brown. *Can A Sister Get A Little Help?* Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2008, pg. 117.

fact, the sentiment that women do not belong in the “boys only club” is pervasive, regardless of denominational affiliations; one can find this thinking in AME, Baptist, Church Of God In Christ (COGIC), Pentecostal, and the list goes on. Teresa Fry Brown, Brandy Professor of Preaching at Candler School of Theology, posits:

Women are not supposed to preach," "She's trying to be a man," "What does her husband think?" "Child, I remember when she was in the choir," "That's why she can't get a man: she's got to run everything," "She's going straight to hell, going against God," "Can't no woman tell me anything; all they do is run their mouths." "She might be able to preach but she can't pastor," or something similar. You fill in the particulars. It seems everyone has an opinion about women in ministry but few confront the call of a man or his actions and ministerial gifts following ordination. Male authority is seemingly equated to absolute, above question authority. Women, on the other hand, are thought to need male validation to decide everything from the color of their hair to appropriate times for menstruation and childbirth. This persistent theologically and socially ideal woman was created to take direction from a man and supply all his needs. She is pure, virtuous, and without blemish. She raises as many children as her spouse requires. She is the property of the male. She works nonstop, sunup to sundown, with little or no rest. She is described as a "helpmate," an aforethought, a subordinate, a lesser partner, an inferior, ready to please. She never has a negative thing to say about anything or anybody even when she is oppressed or abused. She has little or no brain of her own so she has no opinion worth considering. She keeps the man's castle and makes sure he is never lonely or depressed. If he is not religious, it is her fault. If he is unfaithful to her, it is her fault. If he is sick, it is her duty to make him well, just like his mother did. Any deviation from this model is unnatural, particularly in the house of God. "God a man, after all. My Bible says that man is the head of the household; women are to be silent and let the man (who was made in God's image first and foremost) talk." These comments and searing critiques permeate discussions of women in ministry.<sup>294</sup>

These archaic ideologies unfortunately prevail even in the twenty-first century; this ubiquitous notion of womanhood in general and black womanhood specifically, establishes these subservient ideas, which are ingrained in the culture of black churches and black communities; and other church communities of color. The reference to black

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<sup>294</sup> Teresa Fry Brown. *Can A Sister Get A Little Help?* Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2008, pg. 6.

churchwomen as the backbone of the church could be considered a backhand slap, which lacks respect and dignity she (the black women) is due. Jacquelyn Grant, posits that the terminology *backbone*; “appears to be a compliment, especially when one considers the function of the backbone in human anatomy.”<sup>295</sup> Yet the telling portion of the word backbone is “back”. Grant asserts that most ministers who use the term are apparently referring to the location versus the function of the term; per her observations, women are given the main responsibilities of the kitchen and children, while men are elected or appointed to the important board and leadership positions. Grant further states, “the conspiracy to keep women demoted to the background is also aided by the continuous psychological and political strategizing that keeps women from realizing their own potential power in the church.”<sup>296</sup> Ironically and sadly, they are rewarded for remaining in these “backbone” or supportive positions, yet are penalized for trying to move from the backbone to the head position—the leadership of the church - another prime example of a *strategy of containment* utilized to keep women in their place. By considering the distinction between prescribed support positions and the policy-making, leadership positions that the oppression of black women in the black church can be seen more clearly, according to Grant. These distinctions, again, are a part of the subtle nuances of polity, and ideologies that sustain and maintain the gatekeeper positioning to keep women out of the pulpit.

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<sup>295</sup> Jacquelyn Grant. "Black Theology and the Black Woman." *Words of Fire*, by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York, New York: The New Press, pg. 325.

<sup>296</sup> Jacquelyn Grant. "Black Theology and the Black Woman." *Words of Fire*, by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York, New York: The New Press, pg. 326.

Harris shares how her biological father who was a minister told her that she could be a missionary, and participate in several positions in the church, except become a minister. Ironically, we find that women can clean the church, set the communion tables, cook for the people, serve the people but can not lead the people:

At a young age, I told my father about my experience of sensing the call to ministry. However, I might add, that I grew up in a family setting that did not accept females accepting the call to preach. And, although my father was a Baptist minister, ... he did not accept my call to the ministry... to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. So his advice to me was to continue to be a Sunday school teacher, continue to be a missionary and continue to work in the church. Ahhh, but he never really announced or encouraged me to accept my call to preach. In that community that I grew up in, there were no females who were preaching at that time.

Chaplain Janis Cobb, Chief Chaplain at the VA Hospital in Kansas City, describes these sexist experiences, like being a surgeon with hands tied behind:

Cobbs ... it's just like doing communion, its like, like I equated like this. It's like, a surgeon with their hand tied, you couldn't doing anything. That's how I would feel every first Sunday, not so much that I wasn't in the pulpit participating in the priestly role. But, when it came to communion you know, distributing of the Lord Supper, I felt like a surgeon with his/her hands tied, and if you've been a surgeon you would understand. So, I look at our surgeons at the VA and I have had

opportunities to actually watch a surgery; can you imagine you're looking over the patient and you know the diagnoses, you know what you need to do, you have all the materials in front of you, and all the things for interventions, but your hands are tied. And that's just how I felt on the first Sundays, a surgeon with my hands tied, and I think that's the best way to describe sexism for me in the church.

Unfortunately, as more and more women are trained in Seminaries and Theological Schools, they find themselves benched, sitting on the sidelines, denied opportunities to participate in the holistic ministerial experience. The use of the scriptures or unwritten rules, or the seminal statement, 'that's just the way we have always done it here at *Backwards Missionary Baptist Church*', ironically stands as the legitimate and just way of running churches.

There are several subtopics that fall under the super code of *strategies of containment*, in addition to ordination dilemmas, denominational systemic difficulties, cultural and language variances, which all stem from patriarchal structures of oppression, sexism, ideological notions of inclusion and exclusion and overall misogynistic rhetoric often shared from the pulpit.

According to Ethicist, Keri Day, we find that women are also complicit in these personal bodily violations.

Day states, women of the "black underclass"<sup>297</sup> encounter daily forms of psychic, social, political and economic death, ... unfortunately, within black churches

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<sup>297</sup> "black underclass"— a term black feminist sociologist Patricia Hills Collins and black sociologist William Julius Wilson utilize; women who were primary providers often under-employed or unemployed.

today, these kinds of sexist logics persist, as black women fight forms of ecclesial apartheid and sexual abuse at the hands of black male clergy and their supports. Juanita Bynum is one of the women that assisted with providing language such as ‘self-worth’, which Day calls “religio-cultural grammar that allowed them to be reclaimed and redeemed as worthy and pure in a white society (and many black church spaces) that defined them as fundamentally impure.”<sup>298</sup> This is a problematic road to take when discussing gender differences or inequities, especially when it involves allowing someone to name you and validate your very existence, associated with and from negative terminology.

Day asserts,

the problem with this grammar of ‘worthiness’ is, it is grounded in the sexist institutional control of their very bodies — holiness is what black women wear, who they decide to love, how they obey and /or disobey, male authority and more.<sup>299</sup>

Additionally, according to Day,

the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and class are well defined given the fact that many black women locked in intergenerational cycles of the lowest social class continue to suffer in silence, attempting to understand how to tackle the trauma of their lives in ways that do not reinforce erroneous, and uncompassionate interpretations of their very beings.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Keri Day. "#BlackSkinWhiteSin: What Juanita Bynum Gets Wrong: Reflections from A Pentecostal Woman Preacher." *thefeministwire.com*. February 13, 2017.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid

<sup>300</sup> Ibid

Bynum's messages are a double-edged sword; on the one hand, the charismatic and neo-Pentecostal black women interpret it as a liberatory message; yet on the other hand, her message has proportionately reinforced the very circumstances of these women's subordination. Bynum is an example of self-hate, wrapped in religious pious thoughts, which kills the spirit and binds one's soul in a conundrum of so called holiness, or what Day calls, "the traditional ideas of holiness grounded in patriarchal assumptions of black women's sexual promiscuity and the disgust pathology and psychosis within black communal spaces." Finally, Day contends, Black churches often tend to police Black women's bodies, black women's agency and their sense of self-determination.

This continual policing of black women's bodies, is detrimental to both parties, creating what Albert Memmi in *The Colonizer and The Colonized* called a relentless reciprocity which binds the colonizer to the colonized—his product and his fate. Memmi states:

No one can treat a man like a dog without first regarding him as a man. The impossible dehumanization of the oppressed, on the other side of the coin, becomes the alienation of the oppressor. It is the oppressor himself who restores, with his slightest gesture, the humanity he seeks to destroy; and since he denies humanity in other, he regards it everywhere as his enemy. To handle this, the colonizer must assume the opaque rigidity and imperviousness of stone. In short, he must dehumanize himself, as well. Therefore we can conclude that the acts of male clergy inevitably adversely affect their lives also.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Albert Memmi. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1991, pg. xxviii.

This dissertation affirms, that the downfall of Black churches' liberatory stance, which was its origin, proved to be nonexistent when it comes to women and the LGBTQ community, two apparent marginalized groups in the church.

### **Unabashed Gender Exclusion by Church Hierarchy**

When the church structures polity become so insidious with their governing policies that women fail to see inconsistency and inequities, powerful interventions are necessary to break institutional strongholds. Jackson shares her insight:

My pastor was okay with me being called to preach. I was the first woman licensed to preach in that church. He immediately made me Director of Christian Education, which in and of it-self was historical. I had no idea that my positioning was situated in misogyny. It was in alignment with the culture I had been in since birth; the roles of women and men. It was normal that the deacons were men. Trustees were men. All of that was normal. I had not been exposed, at the time, to too many other denominations ... definitely not many other faiths. So there was no reason for me to think this was wrong. I was completely okay with that at the time because that was how I was trained. But then Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) began to open my mind and taught me to read the Bible with fresh eyes. ITC began to enlighten me about the history of patriarchy and what it looked like for women throughout the years. When I returned [from seminary], I was no longer the same person. I became a misfit. I was often in trouble. I taught one of the prime time Bible studies. It was a big deal. Things like

this could often keep me from seeing what I was in, because I was given opportunities that no other woman had been given. Now I was constantly being in trouble for what I was teaching.

Jackson's pedagogy describing God as dual-gendered, based on Genesis 1:26-30, caused her to be called into the pastor's office one final time.

The pastor said, 'Jack, in order for you to stay in this position to teach in that class, you have to agree that God is male.' I said, 'Well, Pastor Davis, I do agree that Jesus is a male.' I started bold but when it became clear that my job was on the line . . . my salary and benefits and community were all on the line . . . then, I gave in. After surrendering to him, this is when I literally, could feel a foot on my throat. I could no longer breathe. That was the beginning of the end of my tenure at Beulah Grove Baptist Church. Approximately one year later, I put in my letter of resignation. That was in March of 2008.

This notion of the proverbial foot on ones neck is not only a strategy of containment, mentioned by Jackson and Hale, is deeply rooted in this tactic of intimidation, producing a binary situation: sink or swim; in or out; right or wrong dichotomy, for any objectors or those requesting or demanding equity.

Rev. Kanyere Eaton recalls her first denominational meeting with the Evangelical Covenant Church:

So when I got to my first denominational meeting, I'm on a bus, on a shuttle going from the airport to the conference center. On a bus literally filled with older

white men and I sing myself, the old sesame street song, “One of these thing is not like the other, one of the things just doesn’t belong,” tell me which one before my song is done! [laughter in the background] When I was introduced as the new pastor of the Fellowship Covenant Church, it took some of my denominational heads several iterations of hearing it before they could get their head around it. So I was introduced by one of the pastors, this is Kanyere Eaton, she’s pastoring Fellowship, “Oh are you doing an internship with Fellowship?” NO, I am pastoring. The next time I saw them; Oh you met her yesterday, this is Kanyere Eaton, she’s the Pastor of Fellowship Covenant Church, □ Oh are you assistant pastor of that church in the Bronx?” Nope not assistant pastor, I feel like that was subtle sexist, cause I feel like if I was a young black man, they would’ve said, Good choice. That’s what I think they would’ve said.

It appears that it does not matter the denomination; the sentiment about women remains the same and there is this universal understanding and acceptance of the belief that women should not participate nor stand at this sacred lectern.

Chaplain Cobbs acknowledges that she was so indoctrinated in an old school mindset, which to this day she is attempting to break.

So, selecting my major, when I was looking at the catalogue at Colgate and at that time I felt, I always realize I wanted to work with the church, I wanted to have some kind of capacity, although I didn't know that they had professional capacity, outside of pastoring. So, I knew wanted to work with the church. I

wanted to be trained. So when I was looking at the degree program. My mom said you probably want to do the MA-Master of Arts, I said you No, it's not a professional degree, in case I want to do something with the church. She said the Master of Divinity, that's for preachers (laughter) and you're not a preacher. And at that point, I wasn't at the time. But I just felt compelled to do that extra year, the three-program versus the two-year program. Even in selecting my degree it caused some conflict and friction with my mom, you know. Yeah, and that was before I even acknowledged my call<sup>302</sup> or was called into the ministry; but I knew, like I said, I wanted to work with the church. I knew I had that call on my life, But I didn't know outside of preaching that there were actually other things you could do. I mean, outside of preaching and being a missionary, those were the two ministries, only two things I mean what women were allowed to do. In seminary, someone said maybe the Lords' calling you to preach! Then I said, I looked at them and said the Lords' not going to call a woman to preach! That's what I was indoctrinated with. You know. I said the Lords' not going to call a woman to preach. They said what If, He calls you! I said He is not going call me; and that was in the beginning of September. In October, that's when I acknowledged my call.

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<sup>302</sup> See more on Call or call stories see *When They Honor the Voice: Centering African American Women's Call Stories* by Melbourne S Cummings and Judi Moore Latta. A Call - According to Cummings and Latta, is the process of callings ... inner yearning or urging toward ministry, encountering the Holy Spirit, being reluctant or feeling unworthy of the call so as to deny or run away from it or having a "tug of war", and passionately searching or desiring to satisfy a hunger or thirst to serve the community. Some women identify "being called" as process—a lonely, isolating experience that begins an ongoing, life-long journey of discovery; other describe it as a joyful single moment of enlightening when they felt God's presence and their voices empowered.

Chaplain Cobbs shared how the church and her family indoctrinated her with notions of staying in the proper place. It became clear after further conversation that her mother was attempting to protect her from any heartache and disappointment and negative backlash that might be associated with her choice to pursue her calling into the ministry.

Cynthia Hale in Georgia and Gina Stewart a Baptist minister in Tennessee, provide insights on the denominational issues in the Disciples of Christ and the Bible Belts<sup>303</sup> stance on women in ministry respectively. According to Hale, the edicts and ways of being come from the top:

Well I've experienced sexism; I'm going to talk about it denominationally because that's where I have really experienced it... (deep breath). When I was umm set to become the President of the national convocation of the Christian church, that's our black fellowship group, this was way back, in like, I think I was first considered like 85 or 84, no 85; then I had a cadre of men who came out against me and tried to stop it, and they did it under the covers, you know they were undercover, because they were my friends and everything, so called friends, but umm somebody let me know what was going on; but I got elected anyway...! So ummh; And then another time was during the general assembly of the Christian church, I was being considered for the Deputy General Administer and President which would also have been the organizations' number four position at the time, and it was also the person, the person who was going to be over the

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<sup>303</sup> Bible belt is an informal region in the southeastern and south-central United States where socially conservative evangelical Protestantism deeply rooted in the social and political undertakings, and church attendance across denominations is higher than other areas in the United States. Known for their extreme beliefs and ideas about religion, ultra conservative.

black fellowship group of this national convocation that I had been the president of... ok the black clergy came out and protested at our general assembly in Des Moines, Iowa. That happened in 1985 that was a year before I came to be the Pastor of Ray of Hope. So that is my immediate and you know personal encounter with sexism. And, I define sexism as any action or attitude, an action, umm against a woman that, umm tries to hinder her from achieving or acquiring that which is due her... which she can rightfully earn or achieve. So, that's how I define it. It's also a put down of women.

These personal affronts have persisted since the inception of black churches and, for the most part, men have attempted to monopolize the ministry as a profession while continually failing to recognize the biases of their practices towards women, despite the fact that their struggles paralleled the injustices they fought against in white churches.<sup>304</sup>

Stewart found that she had to take an alternative approach to her dilemma in the Bible belt in order to achieve her desired outcome:

In the Baptist denomination, God does not call women to preach. At that time, particularly some twenty-five years ago there were some pastors who unequivocally believed, unequivocally that God didn't call women to preach. So, I just started you know to support him, and working with him and uh doing-- I didn't leave. I just, I made myself available to serve him, help him and basically what happened over the next five years was it was really an informal parish

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<sup>304</sup> Cummings Melbourne S., Judi Moore Latta. "When They Honor the Voice: Centering African American Women's Call Stories." *Journal of Black Studies* 40, no. 4 (March 2010): 666-682.

practicum, because he trusted so, he let me preach, he let me do communion, he let me umm baptize, he let me do dedications. I think the only thing I didn't get a chance to do was a wedding. Before he died, I did assist with some but I never presided over a wedding until after he died. So, he gave me full—he gave me the opportunity for full expression, and full participation in ministry from that day until the day he died.

Although Stewart was keenly aware that the Bible belt had stringent unwritten rules on where women could and could not serve in black churches, she was also clear that this particular obstacle might require a personal touch, and this was not going to prevent her from her call. Stewart, ironically is a strong-willed, powerful woman, yet when she speaks about what her senior pastor and the informal practicum, she states that he “let her ...” preach, do communion, baptism, dedications; there appears to be this patriarchal power that depletes women of the power and agency that they inherently possess. Did Stewart get caught up for a couple years, in what Teresa Fry Brown calls the conformity seduction?

Fry Brown says those women that refused to play the game of “conformity” were denigrated by male ministers as: “dragon ladies,” “angry bitches,” “man haters,” “want-to-be's,” “poor excuses for mother,” “too ugly to find a man,” and “bishop's prostitutes.” Fry Brown, an ordained member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and an officer of the General Board of A.M.E. as the Historiographer /Executive Director, Department of Research and Scholarship, found that,

conformity was and is the rule of the day in the church life. The resounding message was that if one wished to survive, the chief operating vocabulary was one of compliance, quiescence, assimilation, allegiance, conventionality, submission, or willingness to be others.<sup>305</sup>

This treatment will continue as long as women acquiesce to the male leadership's disrespect and disregard, doing that which they themselves would not tolerate.

Patricia Hill Collins reminds us of the need to shift our emphasis from “black women's oppression to how institutionalized racism operates in gender specific ways ... and how gender oppression works in tandem with racial oppression.” These socially negotiated identities and ways of being with each other, specifically those of the opposite sex, are inevitable; and the only way for women to claim their spaces and voices is to develop strategies of resistance to combat all types of oppression: racial, social, economic, gender and political.

### **Co-Conspirators Collusion: Parents, Parishioners and Pastor**

One of the most perplexing issues with Black churches is the fact that many of the Black churches emerged from white congregations where the slaves or free blacks were relegated to the balcony and restricted to a special time to pray and kneel at the communion table. Therefore, in the early nineteenth century, Richard Allen and others perceived these acts as unjust and decided to separate from such unholy acts. Ironically, Allen failed to see that he was a part of the patriarchal regime, especially when he failed to see the injustices that he perpetrated on the women of his time relegating them to one area of the church—the pews—by withholding ordination from women as he did with

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<sup>305</sup> Teresa Fry Brown. *Can A Sister Get A Little Help?* Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2008, pg. 25.

Jarena Lee.<sup>306</sup> Given the fact that Allen demanded and achieved liberation from the white Methodist Church, and was able to determine his own policies as it related to women in ministry under the auspices of the A.M.E. Church, there could have been a more amiable outcome. It appears that Allen fell prey to that patriarchal structural power, his retort to Jarena Lee, when she shared her called to ministry, Allen's response was, "our Discipline knew nothing at all about it—that *it did not call* for women preachers," completely ignoring Lee's assertion of her calling. Given this statement, I believe Allen was mentally, spiritually and psychologically still bound to the white churches oppressive systems, despite the fact that his body was no longer relegated to the balcony, Allen's mindset appeared to be unable to think beyond certain limitations, yet he had secured the highest position in the church.

This patriarchal monopoly, unfortunately, is not exclusive to one particular denomination; it appears to run across the vastness of denomination in various ways;

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<sup>306</sup> Jarena Lee: Born in Cape May, New Jersey, the early years of Jarena Lee were spent working as a domestic servant. In her twenties, she was converted, sanctified, and received a call to preach. When the African Methodist Episcopal Church rebuffed her request for approval to preach she married an AME minister. His death within a few years of the marriage, left Lee a widow with two young children. In order to support her family she renewed her request to the Rev. Richard Allen, the Bishop of the African Methodist Church who then granted her official church approval to preach.

Lee's evangelistic meetings took place in her home city of Philadelphia and also throughout New England, Canada and west into Ohio. She recounted her meetings in her autobiography, the first to be published in the United States by an African American woman. In that autobiography, Lee frequently mentions the denominational and racial composition of her audience, which, in both cases, was quite inclusive. Between 1849 and 1857, there is no recorded history about her. The last known event in her life was a visit she made to the home of Rebecca Cox Jackson, a Shaker leader, on New Year's Day in 1857. In order to discuss the herstory of women in ministry in the African Methodist Church, it is important to briefly look at the early beginning of women in ministry within the Protestant churches. Although the Second Great Awakening in the mid-19th century created greater opportunities for women to be involved in worship, social norms and Biblical injunctions were generally used in antebellum society to justify the exclusion of women from public roles or offices in Protestant churches. In the late 19th century, women began moving into new arenas of lay leadership in home and foreign missions as well as religious education but barriers to ordained ministry remained. Denominations with Free Church polity and religious groups of a more charismatic nature were more amenable than the more hierarchical churches to permitting new forms of female leadership. After that occasion, at the age of 73, nothing is known about her life or death. To read more on Lee, see Andrews, William L. *Sisters of the Spirit*. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986.

from the National/American Baptist, to the Christian Church Disciples of Christ, African Methodist Episcopal, and Evangelical Covenant Churches.

Cynthia Hale recalls two experiences of coming up against the patriarchal stain glass ceiling:

As soon as I finished seminary or as I was finishing seminary, I went to apply for a church in Greensboro, NC a twenty-five member church that had their pastor for maybe thirty or forty years and he was retiring... I had been preaching there and they loved me as a preacher, but when I went to apply they couldn't see a woman being the pastor. Once I started Ray of Hope they called me and said would I reconsider I said No, I'm afraid not I have a church now thank you. So that was clearly sexism, you know, umm and sometimes you know, sexism is not all that intentional, it is... fear you know, just like racisms, you know and classism. Fear, fear of the unknown, so for them it was fear of the unknown because I knew that they loved me but uhh so that was clearly an obstacle. And then once I came, once I went to the bureau of prisons...I went there in my second year of seminary. And I was working there part-time. The chaplain trained me and then resigned, the moment I graduated he told the warden, "hire her." The warden hired me on the spot! But he did not go through this commission of all white male clergy (leans in) who were supposed to interview me first. So, then he says well you go on before this commission I went before them and they literally cussed me out ... they asked me, "What qualifies you to be chaplain?" I was already hired. They were mad!

In the mist of patriarchal roadblocks, there are always those allies that have the capacity to see and believe other possibilities. Those male counterparts provide support in complete opposition to spoken and unspoken rules designed to keep women out of leadership positions of power. Hale continues:

He went around them! So they asked me, “What qualifies you?” When I went to seminary the brothers said, “God doesn’t call a woman. What qualifies you? When I went to start this church, the black clergy in Atlanta said to me; who the hell do you think you are to come in here and start a church, what qualifies you? So the question has always been; what qualifies you? So that time, I had had it. I went out in the car and broke down in tears and I said, “God, What qualifies me?” He said not what, **who**, go in there and tell them **I** qualified you **I** called you. Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set You, Apart. Go tell them that. So ever since then, when people say What, I say not “What”, but “Who”! (She points up). I don’t have to answer that question, talk to God about it.

Hale provides a powerful story with an inspiring breakthrough of the many adversarial situations she experienced in her journey.

Black feminist, Barbara Smith, asserts that a black feminist analysis has enabled us to understand that we are not hated and abused because there is something wrong with

us, but because our status and treatment is absolutely prescribed by the racist, misogynist system under which we live. Smith further states,

Women of color have the fewest choices about the circumstances of their lives; yet they have the profound capacity to cope under the worst of conditions, and this is not liberation, although our spiritual capacities have often made it look like a life. Black men didn't say anything about how poverty, unequal pay, no child care, violence of every kind including battering, rape, and sterilization abuse, translated in to 'liberation.'<sup>307</sup>

### **Cultural Constraints**

African womanist, Chikwenye Ogunyemi, contends that a womanist must be conscious of more than issues of sex and gender. Ogunyemi says we must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic and political consideration into our philosophy. This philosophy, according to Ogunyemi, must celebrate Black roots and Black life, balancing Black womandom while concerning itself with black sexual power struggles coupled with world power struggles that subjugate blacks,<sup>308</sup> imploring us to focus on an ethics of survival, an important component of womanist theology.

Anthropologist, Edward Tylor (1871), theorizes that culture is convoluted and includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. (Given the era he lived in, the use of the gender specific term 'man' probably did not mean the universal humanity term, man). Herskovits (1948) tells us that, "Culture is the man-made part of the environment," and Mead (1953)

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<sup>307</sup> Barbara Smith. "Some Home Truths On the Contemporary Black Feminist Movement." In *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought*, by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York, New York: The New Press, 1995.

<sup>308</sup> Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English." In *The Womanist Reader*, by Layli Phillips. New York, New York: Routledge, 2006.

says culture “is the total shared, learned behavior of a society or a subgroup.” Malinowski (1931) combines these aspects and formulates the notion that “Culture is a well organized unity divided into two fundamental aspect—a body of artifacts and a system of customs.” Despite the fact, that some believed that Tylor placed too much emphasis on this definition, for this particular work, this study draws on a combination of all of these theories.

Additionally, cultural studies professor, Paul Gilroy’s; theories of race, racism, and culture, influenced and shaped the culture and political movement of black British people in the 1990s. His work utilizes the transatlantic slave trade to emphasize the influence of the journey on black identity. Gilroy uses imagery of the slave ship as representing what he claims as a cultural exchange as well as a commodity exchange that defines the transatlantic slave grade and consequently black culture. These androcentric definitions of culture provide crucial examples of problematic terms; ideologies and one-sided views developed by men, which failed to consider the female perspectives and capabilities. Sojourner Truth poignantly spoke decades ago on the issue of suffrage and it remains relevant in the twenty-first century as women continue to seek liberation now. In 1867, Truth stated:

I feel that if I have to answer for the deeds done in my body just as much as a man, I have a right to have just as much as a man. There is a great stir about colored men getting their rights, but no a word about the colored women, and if colored men get their rights, and not colored women theirs, you see the colored men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as it was before. So I am for keeping the whole thing going while things are stirring: because if we wait till it is still, it will take a great while to get going again...<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Sojourner Truth. "Keeping the Things Going While Things Are Stirring." In *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*, by Miriam Schneir, 129-30. New York, New York: Random House, 1972.

The intergenerational groups of women in this study have all been exposed to the cultural constraints, be it from their churches, communities, families, and friends or even in the great sisterhood of other women. There must be a continual stirring of this issue of inequality, if we ever expect to reach the summit, where all people are created equal.

They shared how these dynamics affected their life choices.

Harris recalls her family dynamics as a preacher's kid:

My call story is... ummh... I describe it as an in process calling that took place in my early childhood, from the age of about 4 or 5. I knew that I had a special call on my life, and that I had a special relationship with God. And I knew that I was called to do a special work for and with God. (Pause) However, I might add, that I grew up in a family setting that did not accept females accepting the call to preach.

Harris recalls that her father, without any explanation, squashed her dreams.

Harris lived her life for many years obedient to the cultural norms of her time, despite the fact that she felt stuck. She said she remained in the church setting for the sake of her family, another cultural constraint, which will keep women from boldly pursuing their calling or dreams. It took her husband passing and her children reaching adulthood before she felt free. Harris states:

I feel that I should be where I can serve best. At that moment, I was concerned about keeping the family together and worshiping together, and the value of just

worshiping together. Now that my children are grown and my husband has passed away, and I am a widow, I still feel that I have the freedom to go wherever I need to go to worship in the way that I need to worship and to serve in the way that I need to serve. The service is a bit different because my children are grown now, and my husband has passed away. I am still serving God. So wherever or whatever form it takes is fine with me. And that's not to say I don't respect the rituals and practices and customs of the AME church or the Baptist church. It's just that I realized now that the polity of the church is not the essence of your relationship with God. It doesn't define your relationship... you can find God in any... (thinking) ... sacred setting ... spiritual settings so to speak. Maybe I should say many spiritual settings.

Harris is a prime example of a woman living up to the social and cultural norms of her community - a woman who sacrifices her personal goals and desires for that which she believes to be the right, honorable and Christian womanly thing to do. Each one of the participants shared experiences of adversity or non-supportive behaviors and comments, whether it was from their parents or other family members. Ironically, second to the men of the church, the most disruptive and disrespectful group were other women.

Stewart recounts a member's reference to leaving the church as a result of Stewart's gender:

I remember uh, one of my members moved her membership. She married a guy and uh we were talking and I said you know what's going on with you sweetie. She said, "Well just starting to go someplace else because—and I'll leave his name—leave him nameless- he wants to be at a church where there are men—there are more men in leadership," I said No he wants to be in a church where there are only men. I said because with intentionality I've tried to make sure that there is a balance. You know I say don't apologize for putting women in leadership, I said but there are men in leadership at this church. I said, but men don't get to lead just because they wear pants and have a penis, they get to lead because they have character, they get to lead because they have integrity, they get to lead because they possess the gifts and the skills and the anointing and the heart and all of that that goes along with leadership—spiritual leadership. So, that was a very sexist comment from her husband but I— I read through the lines between the lines because what he was really saying is I rather got to a church where I don't have to see women on the platform, I rather go to a church where I don't have to see women giving leadership in significant areas particularly in roles that are male dominated.

Eaton shares how the women of the church actually attempted to intimidate her, Sunday after Sunday. There is always an expectation of the men attempting to shake your foundation question one's abilities and preparedness, but it was a surprise when the women attacked with full force. Eaton opens with her definition of sexism:

So I define sexism as a conscious, subconscious, and unconscious; sometime all three together, sometime different facets of each, being in operation which makes, people believe, men and women believe; that men are superior than women; that men are more capable, that men are more gifted, that men just by nature better leaders. I think that many, many, people are unconsciously sexist, subconsciously sexist, that if most folks, if you ask them they would say of course not. I think that many, many, men and unfortunately, many women don't believe that women are fully human. I believe that there is somehow, a subtle sense that women are capable of less and are satisfied with less. That somehow women just gain, comprehensive satisfaction from, feeding, you know, oatmeal to a little one, and you know and that's probably, maybe that's not all there is to this person; she can make the baby and feed the baby and raise the baby; and still there is more. I feel like women are not, that sexism renders women not full human, in the way that racism, and the system of chattel slavery in this country. There was a real belief, (an establish system), a legal system believed that black people were 3/5th of a human. I feel that people don't believe that women are real human beings. So when I came to my church; I held a town meeting, wanting people to feel comfortable with me; Andriette, wanting people to have a sense of who I was and what I hoped for, wanting to share some elements of vision with them and hear their desire for our trajectory; and a older woman raised her hand to say, ummh, to ask a question and her question was, "what gives you the right to stand up there?" I said; Oh, I said I was voted in, and I received, you know I had a 3/5th

vote whatever the amount was, 70% of the vote, which said they would give this a shot. She said yea, “but when I was growing up women didn’t have the right to stand in the pulpit, even in this church they didn’t! What makes you feel like you could be the pastor?” And this was after I had been pastoring for months; and then a man came after her, and stood up and said why do you think Jesus’ twelve disciples were male? What do you think about that? So, now this was at my very first town hall meeting. That very same man would come to church for the first months; he would stay for the alter prayer, and he would stay for the reading of the lectionary, he would stay for the praise songs being sung, and he would stay for the choir, and he would stay for the announcements; and as soon as I stood at the lectern and open up the bible, he would stand up in a pronounced way [gesturing with hands] shake his jacket and walk toward the door. The surprise for me was young women. Andriette, how thrilled I was to come here. So I said, here I am a young professional; I spent the last decade running a private family foundation. I’m an educated black woman, full of heart, childless, deeply desirous of imparting love, and mentorship and support to young women; excited about what I could share with young women and wanting to bring them close. And I have never been hazed, [soft, laughter] hazed; the way those young women hazed me. They waited for me, so, our church has three floors, and we are fortunate to have an elevator, I would get off the elevator, and they would wait for me, young women, to critique me, to tell me what typos I had in the program or brochures, while I preached they would give me the mean look; one person turned her back

completely as I preached, [she turned to show] to say you preach to my back you'll watch my back as you preach. They would heckle me while I preached. I said something in a sermon about the value of psychotherapy and why I thought that black people of all people deserved counseling, we deserved support, for our souls, for support for our mind. We live with double and triple jeopardy: with sexism, racism and classism, and that these are punitive to the souls. And that we deserve to sit and have someone, not compete with us, but just absorb, take in and help us with the complexity of our lives.

Eaton's experiences with the women in her church would make one question exactly who is despised in these situations?

According to Cornel West in *Black Sexuality: The Taboo Subject*—black self-hatred and self-contempt, in Black America must come to terms with the refusal of many black American to love their own bodies—especially their black noses, hips, lips and hair. West suggests white supremacist ideologies are based primarily on the degradation of black bodies in order to control them by instilling fear through extreme intimidation.<sup>310</sup> Interestingly, this fear is sustained by convincing Black bodies that they are ugly, their intellect is inherently underdeveloped, and their culture is less civilized.<sup>311</sup> These tactics utilized by white patriarchal, misogynistic oppressors are appropriated by Black men in general and Black clergymen specifically, and exploited against women in the

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<sup>310</sup> Cornel West. "Black Sexuality: The Taboo Subject." In *TRAPS: African American Men On Gender and Sexuality*, by Rudolph P. Byrd and Beverly Guy-Sheftall. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid

community and in the church. Frances E. Wood, in *Take My Yoke Upon You*, says the dominance and submission mode of gender relations within the Black Christian community, as well as the dominant culture, meets the criteria for moral evil: sustaining and reinforcing attitudes, beliefs, policies and practices that deny certain individuals or groups the status of full humanity, created negative concepts of “otherness,” and justify patterns of discrimination against the oppressed group.<sup>312</sup> This study contends that the notion of moral evil is exactly what transpires in Black churches all under the guise of the betterment of the community, or the church. Wood asks, how have we come to the place where a group so attuned to the adverse effects of racism, as are Black churchmen, is desensitized to their own sexism? Audre Lorde presents a relevant question:

What [man] here is so enamored of [his] own oppression that [he] cannot see [his] heel print upon [a] woman’s face? What term of oppression have become precious and necessary to [him] as a ticket into the fold of the righteous, away from the cold winds of self-scrutiny?<sup>313</sup>

Several of the participants associated their experiences with male clergy with negative verbiage such as: heel print on face, foot on neck, kept me on my knees (praying).

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<sup>312</sup> Frances E. Wood. "Take My Yoke upon You: The Role of the Church in the Oppression of African-American Women." In *A Troubling In My Soul: Womanist Perspectives ON Evil and Suffering*, by Emilie M. Townes. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993.

<sup>313</sup> Audre Lorde. *The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action in Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1984, pg. 42.

Stewart states:

There are people that are—get so get more angry about women in ministry than they do about sin or than they do about the violence that being you know that's impacting the lives, people that are losing their lives to violence and killing and uh you know police brutality. There are people that get angrier with that, than they do about some of the more pressing existential realities. I think its several things. I think one is patriarchy. Patriarchy is—is deeply entrenched in not only our churches but in our culture. And so, when you have culture and a church culture that is shaped and influenced by male dominance and is determined by the man that she is in relationship with not her own value, uh you already have the frame work you know uh, for those type of obstacles because the attitude is this is a man's job because it is a man's world. And the truth is it's still a man's world you know Beyoncé says girls run the world, but the world hasn't gotten the memo yet. It's still a man's world. And you know Cheryl Sandburg talks about that in Lean In, that it's still a man's world. And so umm, you know you have to deal with patriarchy you have to deal with biblical literalism, which does not take in to account context, culture, eisegesis or historical reconstruction of the text but basically takes the text for what it is—Paul said that women ought to keep quiet, now out of all of the scriptures that are in the bible, all of the scriptures even the one were, Paul commends women to scripture which I find so interesting. Jesus who becomes the paradigm for ministry uh in the New Testament, who was egalitarian in every sense of the word and in terms of his ministry to women and

way that woman ministered to him. With all that people quote Paul more than they quote Jesus. So—so the biblical literalism which—which again cause people to use the bible again as a tool to oppress women to deny us our full expressions because the bible is a source of authority, so if the bible says it then you ought not do it and then of course you know you definitely have issues with authority. You definitely have issues of authority, umm because you know if I don't see you the way I see you has a lot to do with the way I treat you. So, I don't see you, first of all as a person, and I don't see you as an equal; I'm certainly not going to submit to you and —and the tragedy is that it's not always the men it's the women too! I was thinking over my--over my life as a minister and one of the things that occurred to me is that—now this is with ministers, that I've had more resistance from women ministers that served in my congregation, in the congregation that I serve, than I have the brothers. And there haven't been many but when I think about the people who resisted my leadership, or who felt like I couldn't teach them anything; uh it's been the women.

### **Language Constraints**

Our past experiences as a people can often be understood through the expression of language, myths, stereotypes, symbols and folktale; the conundrum is which of these are deemed authentic and which have been contrived to maintain power over others. In *The Power of Language and Language of [Em]Power[ment]*, Jacquelyn Grant states that language is contrived; it is gender-biased, socially constructed and arranged for the

purpose of establishing and preserving a masculine world and male superiority.<sup>314</sup>

Furthermore, Grant asserts, “The power of language is of such force that it undergirds the social, political and economic interests of the powerful. Is it not conceivable then that just as language has been used against Blacks, it has been used against women as well?”<sup>315</sup>

Fry Brown expounds on language:

... language is one of the most powerful tools women in ministry have at their disposal. Language expresses one’s heart, soul and mind. Language is socially shaped through traditional or contemporary values and usage. Language is informational, dialogical and culturally specific. Language assists us in unearthing the depth of our spirituality and emotion.<sup>316</sup>

Language has been key to altering situations, events and history, since the beginning of time. It has been used to keep a people oppressed and locked in positions of servanthood. Courtney Clayton, UCC pastor, knew from a young age she was called to preach. As a young minister, her experiences were different from other participants. Clayton grew up seeing and knowing several female pastors; she did not stand in a place of not having female role models or examples. Although the numbers are still low, as a millennial, she has an advantage over most of the other study participants who were the first or only female in their classes, positions, and the like.

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<sup>314</sup> Jacquelyn Grant. "The Power of Language and the Language of [Em]Power[ment]." *The Journal of Interdenominational Theological Center* 21: 81-93.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid, pg. 86.

<sup>316</sup> Teresa Fry Brown. *Can A Sister Get A Little Help?* Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2008, pg. 29.

This millennial pastor's experiences matched those who were her senior. Yet, as she blazed a trail in the UCC denomination, she found greater insight on the politics of this thing called church. Clayton remarks:

... There have been times, there are some things I know out right, that I have experience because I am a woman. Like the time when one of the men called me a BITCH in the parking lot and other men in the church justified it; when I brought this insult to the attention of the other male leaders, they were simply justifying, why that statement was acceptable, because that's how men talk, and in fact they were more upset with the man that brought the comment to me, than the man that made the comment. That's what ... forget who brought the statement to me, what about the man that made the comment?

Whether there are cultural linguistic differences or not, Clayton had to confront the language and the manner that a parishioner spoke to her in the parking lot.

Grant poignantly states,

the fact that black theology does not include sexism specifically as one of those injustices is all too evident. It suggests that the theologians do not understand sexism to be one of the oppressive realities of the black community. Silence on this specific issue can only mean conformity with the status quo.<sup>317</sup>

It appears that the good old boys' system is alive and well. Clayton retorts:

Then there are other moments; I am the first woman, the first African American and the youngest pastor. People think that was great, but I say if I fail they will

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<sup>317</sup> Jacquelyn Grant. "Black Theology and the Black Woman." *Words of Fire*, by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York, New York: The New Press, pg. 329.

never call anyone in those three categories again. So this church had all white pastors and a Latino pastor in the past, before me. When I first came there were forty people it was about 55% African American when I got there; and most of the African American who are members of the multicultural, multiracial, high church which has been primarily funded by Ford money, came with a strong mentality that white is right, so I had to deal with some of that too; now, if white is right and now you have a black female pastor, that creates other issues ...

Oppressive white supremacy language must be confronted and addressed while being keenly aware of the tendency to use the sacred only to advance secular when convenient for the political interests of those in power. Servanthood language has been used to further enslave the enslaved.<sup>318</sup> This is one of the issues that Clayton faces as she takes this journey as Senior Pastor.

The intergenerational participants all shared a variety of emotions and attitudes ranging from fear, anger, discomfort, heartbreak, stress, loneliness, to the need for validation. They experienced the fear of not being accepted, not making the cut in ecclesial settings; and tapped into the source of their anger as a result of discrimination. They also commented on the awkward and uncomfortable situations they were placed in, which was often stressful and heartbreaking. The majority of the women shared that this leadership position creates spaces of loneliness; some had to overcome the fear of never

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<sup>318</sup> Jacquelyn Grant. "The Power of Language and the Language of [Em]Power[ment]." *The Journal of Interdenominational Theological Center* 21: 88.

getting married. All of the participants have a strong understanding of their calling and have had experiences analogous to Maya Angelou's *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*, where like Angelou they experienced attempts to silence their voices.

## CHAPTER FIVE – WHY DOES THE CAGED BIRD SING?

“The caged bird sings with a fearful trill, of things unknown but longed for still, and his tune is heard on the distant hill for the caged bird sings of freedom.”<sup>319</sup>

~ Maya Angelou

In this chapter, the caged bird symbolizes the African American woman in Black churches in general and African American clergywomen specifically. While being African American women experience gender oppression through the larger society’s subordination, and through sexism in Black communities, the participants in this study point to the urgency to disrupt, deconstruct and construct a new way of being and doing church that provides equal opportunities to men and women. In the twenty first century, there is still substantial resistance to women obtaining major leadership positions particularly in Black churches and ecclesial institutions. This issue of the denial of equity in leadership positions in ecclesial settings remains prevalent, despite the fact that conversations about this disparity have taken place for at least twenty years. Jacqueline Grant was one of the most vocal objectors, contending that Black churches intensify women’s diminished social status, by relegating Black women to the background through the celebration of their “backbone” service.<sup>320</sup> The well-known adage that women are the backbone of the church is still a part of conversations in Black Churches. Grant contends

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<sup>319</sup> Maya Angelou. *Caged Bird*. In Shaker, *Why Don’t You Sing?* New York: Random House, 1983.

<sup>320</sup> Jacquelyn Grant. "Black Theology and Black Woman." In *Black Theology, a Documentary History, Volume 2: 1980-1992*, by Gayraud S. Wilmore and James Cone. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1992.

that while this metaphor is hypothetically utilized to suggest that women are the support bases of the church, in fact, the word refers to their location—the back. Grant observes, “What they really mean is that women are in the background and should be kept there; they are merely support workers.”<sup>321</sup>

There is a need to address the positioning of Black women in Black churches because it is not acceptable to relegate women to manual service while rendering leadership service unnecessary and often inappropriate. The message is that women can set, clean and clear the table, but they cannot sit at the table; and if they are at the table they are relegated to a secretarial position of keeping the minutes, not seen, nor considered an equal.

In this final chapter, the voices of the twelve African American clergywomen are coupled with thoughts from the following scholars: Marcia Riggs, Barbara Holmes, Kelly Brown Douglas, Delores Williams, Jacqueline Grant; this coupling will help to create an understanding of these various oppressive situations while validating the need to develop twenty-first century strategies of resistance for African American clergywomen seeking to pursue their calling, and senior pastorates, in subtle and overtly hostile ecclesial settings. These experiences can be juxtaposed against the caged bird, which Maya Angelou so eloquently speaks of in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and her poem *The Caged Bird*.

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<sup>321</sup> Clay, Elonda. "Confessions of a Ex-Theological Bitch: The Thickness of Black Women's Exploitation between Jacquelyn Grant's "Backbone" and Michael Eric Dyson's "Theological Bitch"." In *Ain't I A Womanist Too?*, by Monica Coleman, 93-106. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2013.

Womanist theologian, Delores Williams, asserts that the Black community's faith emerges, within the experiences of oppressed men and women in the wilderness. "‘Wilderness’ or ‘wilderness-experience,’" she posits, "is a symbolic term used to represent a near-destruction situation in which God gives personal directions to the believer and thereby helps her make a way out of what she thought was no way."<sup>322</sup> Williams also contends that the tenacious stand African American women take in an effort of survival and liberation, while seeking a positive quality of life for a suffering people, are considered traditions of survival/quality-of-life practices.<sup>323</sup> William poignantly declares that the wilderness context, which she speaks of in *Sisters of the Wilderness*, includes surrogacy or loss of control over their bodies in the larger society, and oppression within Black denominational churches. Furthermore, Williams claims that while Black churches "sustain Black women"<sup>324</sup> emotionally and provide 'theological space' for their expression of faith, Black churches also 'suppress and help make invisible Black women's thought and culture.'<sup>325</sup> Developing *strategies of resistance* will enable women in general and clergywomen specifically the ability to claim, their bodies and voices, if they choose. Harriet Tubman said, "I freed thousands of slaves. I could

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<sup>322</sup> Delores S. Williams. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid, 206.

<sup>324</sup> The term Black women and African American women or African American clergywomen and Black/ African American will be used interchangeably; although there is no monolithic Black woman or African American the terminology implies the time which one grew up in; i.e. (baby boomer, millennium or generation X, etc..) the terms mean the something.

<sup>325</sup> Delores S. Williams. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993, xiii.

have freed thousands more, if they only knew they were slaves.”<sup>326</sup> This statement stands true for many women in Black churches whether they are clergy or lay members. These women can be found guilty of “the sin of credulity”, and unfortunately, after years of listening to misogynistic sermons, they become numb and can no longer identify offensive verbiage. If women can become aware of and stimulate their intellectual and revolutionary sensors, and begin to take a strong stance against patriarchy and misogyny, the status of women in the church would change.

### A Discourse of Difference

Ethicist Victor Anderson states, in his book, *Beyond Ontological Blackness*:

Because black life is fundamentally, determined by black suffering and resistance to whiteness (the power of nonbeing)<sup>327</sup>, black existence is without the possibility of transcendence from the blackness that whiteness created. Without transcendence from the determinacy of whiteness, black theology’s promise of liberation remains existentially a function of black self-consciousness (to see oneself as black, free, and self-determine). Therefore, James Cone argues it is whiteness, white racism, and white theology that threatens the nonbeing of blacks, the promise of black liberation remains bracketed both existentially and politically.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> This quote is now considered a disputed quote, which is attributed to Harriet Tubman in Dorothy Winbush Riley, *My Soul Looks Back 'Less I Forget* p.148 (1993). Riley gives a date of “c.1865” but offers no citation. This statement also found in *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience* (1999) by Henry Louis Gates and Kwame Anthony Appiah, p.299. For many years the quote has been attributed to Harriet Tubman, the relevance of the statement stand true in this twenty-first century, given that fact that there are so many “church women” that have been conditioned to hear misogynistic sermons that they are numb and complete unaware when they have been insulted or disrespected from the pulpit.

<sup>327</sup> Anderson’s argument stems from James Cone definition of blackness in terms of Tillich’s semiotics; where Tillich suggests that symbolic blackness must point to something else. Therefore the read of Tillich is that, theological symbols approximate what is of ultimate concern; so according to Tillich, “ When speaking of the ultimate, of being and meaning, ordinary language brings it down to the level of the preliminary, the conditioned, the finite, thus muffling its revelatory power.” To read more about blackness, see Anderson’s *Ontological Blackness*, chapter *Black Theology Project*.

This notion suggests that until we successfully liberate “blackness” existentially and politically, we will not make true strides in the construct of differences that has plagued our society for centuries. Vine Deloria Jr.’s<sup>329</sup> take on liberation theology in *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America* was,

Liberation theology is simply the latest gimmick to keep minority groups circling the wagons with the vain hope that they can eliminate the oppression that surrounds them. It does not seek to destroy the roots of oppression, but merely to change the manner in which oppression manifest itself.

Barbara Holmes’ astute perspective on Deloria’s statement is that he was not alone in his retrospective suspicion of the liberation project, given the movements were devised to “set the captive free.” Holmes asked, but can people be free if they are released from one set of restraints into another, from a box into a maze? This issue appears that freedom had no real content for activist, except for the content borrowed from the political, theological, and economic suppositions of the dominant culture.<sup>330</sup> Holmes’ position is that viewing the world differently requires a transformative view of liberation, without such views; we are left with memories of melodies and incomplete business. Womanist

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<sup>328</sup> Victor Anderson. *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay On African American Religious and Cultural Criticism*. New York, New York: Continuum Publishing, 1999, 92-93.

<sup>329</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr. was a Native-American activist, writer, and lawyer, born near the Pine Ridge Oglala Sioux Indian Reservation in Martin, South Dakota, the son of Vine Victor Deloria, Sr., an Episcopalian priest and missionary who served as archdeacon and assistant secretary of Indian missions for the National Episcopal Church. Although controversial in both scientific pronouncement and his theological sociopolitical arguments, Deloria was widely considered the most significant spokesperson of his time for the Native-American cause, praised as a skillful polemicist and a courageous thinker who spoke with equal passion against both the government’s mistreatment of his people and Native-American submission to U.S. culture.

<sup>330</sup> Barbara A. Holmes. *Race And The Cosmos: An Invitation to View the World Differently*. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2002, 30.

Theologian and Religious scholar, Kelly Brown Douglas, asked an extremely relevant question: “has the black church moved beyond its historical significance and become just another black bourgeois institution?”<sup>331</sup> This study suggests that the Black community and Black churches will not change or successfully experience true liberation until there is a paradigm shift, with a new movement; there must be new goals, methods and a new language to reflect old issues (i.e. sex, class, gender), and current issues that plague our society. Unfortunately, we can surmise that the answer to Kelly Brown Douglas’ question appears to be yes; there is a major decline in the historical significance of black churches. During the Civil Rights movements, Black churches and ministers were on the frontline of all the major protests against marginalization and oppression. It appears that in this twenty first century the fight for injustices are not the priority for many Black churches, and the support for movements like Black Lives Matter; the Women’s March; Same sex marriage; the Dream Act; the People’s Climate March; End the New Jim Crow; to name a few, are left to fend for themselves. The youth of today remind US citizens to stay woke! This call to action insinuates that we are falling asleep at the wheel of justice, possibly because many of us are simply happy with material accomplishments and superficial achievements that benefit the individual and not the entire community.

There is a need to return to the seven principles of Kwanzaa especially the second principle, Kujichagulia, which means self-determination; the principles states we must define ourselves for ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for

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<sup>331</sup> Kelly Brown Douglas. *Black Bodies and The Black Church*. New York, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012.

ourselves. This principle also sheds light on Vine Deloria Jr.'s lament about black theology; if we do not make claims of independence for ourselves, we will find ourselves in the situation we are in now in our churches and communities, revisiting issues of oppression that were never destroyed, only circumvented only to rematerialize; the same message under a different disguise, directive or policy. We must remain vigilant in our fight against all types of injustices, insisting on a humanitarian approach.

African American clergywomen and churchwomen alike must also wake up and begin to acknowledge any inconsistencies, inequities and oppressive behaviors that they have previously ignored, accepted or excused. Women in general and clergywomen specifically, have been relegated to the *Invisible Women* a play on Ralph Ellison's book *Invisible Man*. The danger of the notion of invisibility results in the fact that it thwarts others' attempts to define her; it also dissuades her own attempts to define and express herself. The vigilance toward injustice includes all oppressed groups within and outside the church. The following excerpts form a letter that Otis Moss III penned to his fellow clergymen was timely for the issue of same gender loving people, could and should also be written about the treatment of fellow clergywomen, despite the fact that Moss is a strong supporter of his fellow clergywomen. Otis Moss III wrote a powerful letter to his fellow clergymen. Moss's challenge letter to his fellow clergymen about the LGBTQ community, and President Obama's 2012 statement about same gender marriage and love, was powerful, as it was timely. This letter can be the hallmark letter of inclusion, because this same letter can, and should be written to his fellow brethren about how they treat women in general and fellow clergywomen specifically; where personal biases,

emotional prejudices or doctrines, prevent the progress of the church and participation from all members is a travesty. Racism, sexism and other biases embedded in the evil act enacted by men who believed in doctrine over love and human decency, must be confronted and ended, before the twenty-first century is over. There is a great need to transform the mindset of not just the men of the church, but some of the women in the church also. This ingrained belief that women need to keep silent and should not have leadership over men, nor enter the pulpit (stand at the sacred desk or table; the pulpit or communion table) has been going on for centuries, and we need to begin to cultivate allies, especially male clergy, who are willing to stand in the gap, such as Moss, III who wrote this brave letter to his fellow clergy on the issue of same gender marriage. This letter was in response to his fellow clergymen, who took issue with President Obama's support of gay marriage. He cautioned them to "live their faith and not legislate their faith" because the Constitution is designed to protect the rights of all. Moss III stated, we must learn to be more than a one-issue community and seek the beloved community where we may not all agree, but we all recognize the fingerprint of the Divine upon all humanity. Moss starts:

I tell your brethren who are part of your ministerial coalition to "live their faith and not legislate their faith" for the Constitution is designed to protect the rights of all. We must learn to be more than a one-issue community and seek the beloved community where we may not all agree, but we all recognize the fingerprint of the Divine upon all of humanity.<sup>332</sup>

Moss III challenged them to be sound in their interpretation of the bible:

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<sup>332</sup> Otis Moss, III. "Otis Moss, III Challenges Fellow Black Clergy On Marriage Equality for Gays and Lesbians." *Religion*, May 28, 2012

When we make biblical claims without sound interpretation we run the risk of adopting a doctrinal position of deep conviction but devoid of love. Deep faith may resonate in our position, but it is the ethic of love that forces us to prayerfully reexamine our position.<sup>333</sup>

This challenge also suggest that the clergy must be mindful of the difference between rights and rites; the former was designed to protect diverse individuals while the latter was designed by the faith communities to communicate a theological and doctrinal perspective, they are addressed in separate arenas, civic and ecclesiastical councils. This challenge is also parallel to the biblical claims used against women preachers. Moss III, declared that the institution of marriage was not under attack as a result of the President's word:

Marriage was under attack years ago by men who viewed women as property and children as trophies of sexual prowess. Marriage is under attack by low wages, high incarceration, unfair tax policy, unemployment, and lack of education. Marriage is under attack by clergy who proclaim monogamy yet think nothing of stepping outside the bonds of marriage to have multiple affairs with "preaching groupies." Same-gender couples did not cause the high divorce rate, but our adolescent views of relationships and our *inability* as a community to come to grips with the ethic of love and commitment did. We still confuse sex with love and romance with commitment.<sup>334</sup>

He appealed to them to change their position and to "not allow personal emotional prejudices or doctrines to prevent us from seeing the possibilities of a beloved community." Moss III closed with the question:

Will you do justice, live mercy and walk humbly with our God? Emmitt Till and the four little girls who were assassinated in Alabama during worship did not die for a Sunday sermonic sound bite to show disdain for one group of God's people.

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid

<sup>334</sup> Ibid

They were killed by an evil act enacted by men who believed in doctrine over love. We serve in ministry this day because of a man who believed in love over doctrine and died on a hill called Calvary in a dusty Palestinian community 2,000 years ago. Do not let the rhetoric of this debate keep you from the polls, my friend.<sup>335</sup>

I found this declaration by Moss pertinent, because I believe when you can contain/discriminate against one particular marginalized group especially in the church, countering the social justice philosophy which most Black churches believe themselves to adhere to, it is inevitable that other groups within the church i.e. women will become the recipients of the same if not similar treatment.

### **Strategies of Resistance**

Diana L. Hays asks,

When do we accept and assume the responsibility of creating new worlds, new methods and new understandings, in which to express both our otherness and our sameness to one another? ... Is it not time for a truly contextual theology, even perhaps discordantly polyvocal and polycentric, which lifts up the absent and unheard voices, contexts and experiences that bring new languages, new understandings, new analyses to new and challengingly different questions?"<sup>336</sup> This work strives to be the burgeoning entrance into a new conversation about old issues, one which deals with the treatment of African American clergywomen and their plight in Black churches specifically; and to the broader community and around the world. M. Shawn Copeland says, "For centuries, black female bodies have been defiled, used, and discarded, quite literally as refuse—simply because they are female and black, black and female."<sup>337</sup> Unfortunately, this level of disrespect and defilement occurs so often, usually on a daily basis, so much so

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<sup>335</sup> Otis Moss, III. "Otis Moss, III Challenges Fellow Black Clergy On Marriage Equality for Gays and Lesbians." *Religion*, May 28, 2012.

<sup>336</sup> Diana Hayes, *Response to David Power, O.M.I., in The Multicultural Church: And New Landscape in U.S. Theologies*, ed. William Cenker. New York: Paulist Publishing, 1996, 107.

<sup>337</sup> M. Shawn Copeland. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race and Being*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009,1.

that women become numb to such action and this abnormal occurrence is seen and accepted or overlooked as the normal.

Ethicists Barbara Holmes suggests,

that we consider how we will make new worlds for another generation using embodied creativity, reflexive memory, and trickster resourcefulness. People of color don't need a star leader they need a plan that will not shatter when a bullet finds its mark or the march of time blunts the relevance of individual sacrifices.<sup>338</sup>

This task of creating something new in ecclesial settings will be and is, an arduous task, given the fact that the liberation movement stressed public change, while urging women to raise and solve their disputes privately, according to Holmes and other womanist and Mujerista<sup>339</sup> theologians.

Hays propose the creation of a new world by fully inhabiting our multivalent differences and by envisioning a politics of creativity that gleans as much from First People, shams, poets, and seers as it does from Eurocentric values, vision, and political constructs.<sup>340</sup>

Utilizing a “womanist objective of charting radical subjectivity, generating critical authentic knowledge, and empowering black women to positively affect their life chances; by fiercely and unapologetically hearing their voices and seeing their

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<sup>338</sup> Barbara Holmes. "We'll Make Us A World." In *Ain't I A Womanist Too?: Third Wave Womanist Religious Thought*, by Monica Colman. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013, 188.

<sup>339</sup> Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz a Hispanic theologian coined the phrase Mujerista theology, which included religious experiences, practices, and responses to the daily struggle of life. Latina women keenly aware of sexism, ethnic prejudice and economic repression, used this term to identify themselves and their place and role in the struggle for liberation

<sup>340</sup> Diana Hayes, *Response to David Power, O.M.I., in The Multicultural Church: And New Landscape in U.S. Theologies*, ed. William Cenkner. New York: Paulist, 1996, pg.107.

presence, acknowledging their own agency and sense God within the context that has long ignored their existence and insights.<sup>341</sup>

The insight gained from sitting with this intergenerational, ecumenical group of clergywomen has been invaluable and revelatory. The process of hearing their voices and allowing them to tell their individual stories proved both cathartic and empowering, as the women realized and remembered what they have been through and what they have accomplished. In the process of developing strategies of resistance, there must be a strong awareness of multivalent differences and a keen sense of how to engage in the humane transformation of the systems of oppression, by first understanding how they operate; how they are erected, legitimized, reinforced and transformed over time.<sup>342</sup>

The focus of this dissertation has been on the African American clergywomen's perspective and experiences, rather than society's perspective about African American women in general and African American clergywomen specifically. According to Floyd-Thomas, the departure point for womanist ethical sociological analysis is not deductive (having presuppositions about black women) but inductive (focusing on black women's realities, as evident in the contestable ethical issues they confront, the cognitive dissonances they experience, and the real-lived testimonies they share).<sup>343</sup> Activist Pastor, acting executive Director of UCC Justice and Witness Ministries, Traci

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<sup>341</sup> Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas. *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics*. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2006.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid, 102.

Blackmon, says, “ As a person of faith I have a moral obligation to use my body to sound the alarms against all forms of oppression.”<sup>344</sup> Unless we stand up and speak out against the oppressive forces in Black churches and the Black community, we will find that there will be no liberation for all. Notwithstanding, the fact that we have identified the problems found in ecclesial settings, acknowledged them, and in some cases, written about them, we have not eliminated the problem. We must stand up against these patriarchal, misogynistic compartments, which the church leadership has been ruled by for centuries.

This chapter reveals some of the steps that the participants used or adapted to resist the obstacles placed in front of them. The strategies of resistance developed from the women interviews are to establish: A Desire for Change, Experiences of Discomfort, Rethinking and Reclaiming Language: Redefining Ones Identity, Clarity: Clerical Call and Authority, Assessment of the Cost: Personal and Professional, Creative Imagination: Development of Counter Narratives, Preparation and Practice: Refining Gifts and Skills and Beyond the Pulpit: Nurturing and Mentor.

I would like to suggest that one tactic, which might not be totally effective, is denial; *Priestley-Smith*, Pastor of the First United Methodist Church stated:

I do not see where I can make any beneficial contribution. My experience in ministry, so far, is one in which I have been supported and encouraged by male colleagues. In my journey, I have been blessed; to be protected from the

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<sup>344</sup> PICO National Network (People Improving Communities Through Organizing @PICO network, April 26, 2017 How are our Children? A speech Rev. Traci Blackmon gave during a prayer vigil at Ecumenical Advocacy Days.

unfortunately oppressive experience/environment you describe. If I can help in some other way, I'd be more than happy to.

The notion that an African American woman in the twenty first century can state that she has not faced any racist, sexist or discriminatory experiences is interesting and actually, difficult to comprehend. In the face of our polarize society, a society that only sees differences such as: age, skin color, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender, leads one to ask the question if a woman is in denial or utopia. The church is the second largest patriarchal institution, second to the government, and regardless of denomination, size and location it is male driven and dominated.

### **What is Resistance?**

The intergenerational ecumenical participants have found ways to resist against the strongholds placed in front of them. They have prayed, learned to care differently, remained incognito, started their own churches, fought through the process, and pursued advanced degrees, all in the mist of chaos. The participant's spoke of different forms of resistance they practiced against the powers that were proving to have a 'strangle hold' on them.

Alvarado described her experience in seminary:

So when I went to seminary, my first experience with seminary. I took a class on Pastoral Ministry and by this time I was co-pastor of our church. And the seminary I went to was Southern Baptist Seminary here in our city and their stance on women in ministry was they don't believe in women preachers, pastors

for sure. And so, one of my instructors, I took a class, entitled Pastoral Ministry and my instructor white male pastor, instructor who was also a pastor said, as I'm sitting in this class with predominantly white males maybe one or two African American brothers and I think I was the only woman in the class and certainly the only woman of color in class. And my instructor said to me when he referenced pastors, he says, he looks at me and says; I'm sorry Toni when I'm using the term pastor, I'm saying he, because I don't believe in women pastor. He says this to me in class, and I said to him, well as long as when its time to grade me on my work you grade me fairly, because I'm not here because what you believe I'm here because of what I believe. Needless to say I did get an A in the class!

Clayton recalled her experience at a board/steward meeting:

I am the first woman, the first African American and the youngest pastor. People think that was great, but I say, yeah if I fail they will never call anyone in those three categories again. So this church had all white pastors and a Latino pastor in the past, before me. So, no pastor before to my knowledge and to the knowledge of the search committee had ever had an annual review, but when I was hired an annual review was in my contract, now I wouldn't mind an annual review, if they had a history of doing annual reviews in the past, with all the other male pastors. But because I'm Black, I'm a woman, because I'm young you want to put me on a review. So, I remember the gentleman that was over my review, it was a disaster. I remember one of the questions was do you appear to be in a healthy marriage. I

don't think those questions would have been asked of me, if I were a male colleague. Do you drink too much? I was at a stewardship meeting, and I have a continuing education allotment to go to conferences. So this white woman says to me we would like to have you requesting to go to conferences. I said what do you mean? She said we don't know where you are going. I said I turn in my receipts and my registration forms. She said no, no; we want to start approving the conferences you can go to. And I said, well did you approve for any of the pastor before me, and she said no we didn't see a need. And I said, so you see a need because I am black, I am a woman and I'm young; I said there is an allowance and I'm staying with in my allowance; therefore where I choose to get continuing education is not your choice. She said; Oh no, we didn't mean it like that. No, no, I said you meant it and you felt because at that time I was twenty-seven or twenty-eight, that I'm young enough to be your child that you can treat me as such. So when you are that blunt and bold, then I respond that blunt and boldness. Sometime I think people have that don't mean no harm, they don't even know and so we can bring that to their attention, or that question you had about how do you deal with that experience. It all depends on how that person brings it to me.

Eaton described her experience of devastation and being crushed by the people, but also relayed her mentor's advice to her:

So you know, I licked my wounds a little, I prayed a lot and I sought counsel from Women in ministry. And do you know some of the women I sought counsel from.

Do you know Valerie Bridgeman? Valerie said to me, “Kanyere pastor those who want you to pastor them. At least 70% of the people in that room voted for you, they want you to pastor them. The people that don’t want you to pastor them; leave them alone. Don’t try to... pour yourself into those who can receive you. I thought that was wise counsel! And I began to reorganize myself, aaaah, I also felt like God slathered thick grease on my, you know like, how our grandmothers did when we were going out in the cold. I felt like I had a protective element for my heart and mind. That was the grace of God; and I still believe God graces us, for what God calls up to do. I just felt the grace to lead this, so I wasn’t so crushed.

Cobbs’s experience of standing in the midst of oppression came from a rather old school way of thinking and teaching - get your ordination papers and keep your head down. One of her mentors, Rev. Ella Mitchel, told her:

... She just shared, just some real practical stuff. I think when I was in seminary, before my acknowledgment of being called into the preaching ministry, aaaah the women that had the opportunity to preach in churches behind the pulpit; they got up and were bashing men, talking about the struggle and I really believe, that they had the opportunity to preach, people wanted to hear the word; and I don't think that; that was the appropriate time to just bash men and talk about their struggle. I digested it. I think my role model was Ella Mitchell, because she said to me, when you get your ordination, you just got to be incognito. I didn't know what she meant incognito. She meant get your paper and run. She also said, if they invite

you to the pulpit fine; if they don't fine, just sit down. If they invite you to preach from the pulpit fine, if they say preach from the floor, you just preach from the floor and sit down. Very practical, old school she said you don't have to barge your way into ministry. She would just share some practical things. Because when I was in seminary, I didn't have the opportunity, you know when you do your internship program, you know I was at a Methodist Church and to show you how enriched (entrenched) I was in tradition, this was at a Methodist Church and I was doing the internship and the pastor, Pastor Mc Katrine and I'm still in touch with him today, he said come on up in the pulpit to introduce yourself, I said you want me to get behind the pulpit? You know my mind had to be set free! You know a lot of things that I was so ingrained with; we didn't even walk across the pulpit at our church. So I was so ingrained with so much I had to set myself free from.

Hale found several ways to resist the oppressive forces found in ecclesial settings; first she refused to assimilate and preach in masculine ways:

But I told God I was not going to wear black all the time, I would be wearing pink, I'd be wearing colors, I'm a girl, I'm a diva and that's what I want it to be. I never let that go. I never wanted; I wanted to be very feminine. I'm very clear about that. 'Cause you know men have their own place but women do too. So you know [shrugs], in my conversations with God, I made that clear..., I made that very clear. I said, "look I'll do this but you know I'm not wearing black all the time". Like the men wearing black, Ugh no. I like black, I didn't like—I never had a collar and I don't think I will ever wear a collar. I wear robes but they're

feminine. Specially made, special design. Yea I like robes but again I like to be feminine. I'm a girlie girl.

*Harris found refuge through prayer:*

My grandmother was very open and very honest, and understood the context of growing up African American in the south. She also had a special understanding of her relationship with God and the power of God in her relationship and especially in a racist context that we grew up in. So she helped to form my way of thinking about racist attitudes, roles of women... patriarchal domination...my own personhood, and who I was in the midst of my world. She would often say things like always remember you are a child of God. You are entitled to everything and anything that anybody else is entitled to. She did it in a way that was not vicious, or violent, or seeking to get some kind of revenge. She did it in a way that helped me to understand that this is the context that you are growing up in; however you are not bound and owned by it... I think as I remember it was just an attempt to maintain. But most of my energy went toward umm ...not so much denouncing the sexism but finding ways to work with it and finding ways to work around it and finding ways to see it and know it is there, but still not let it destroy, your desire to go forth and to do that which needs to be done, that which ought to be done. And that required a lot of prayer, lots and lots and lots of prayer... lots and lots of prayer and discernment lots of wisdom (long pause). It kept me on my knees. Yes. Still does (laughs), And I would dare say it was important to have a support system. Umm, a prayerful support system, that could pray you through

ways to deal with patriarchy, and ways to deal with resistance to progress deal with downright raw and meanness and desirers for control. Often times it was older women or it was a prayer group of woman...praying woman. Often times it was a group of people who prayed...sometimes there were men involved...but it usually was a group of people determined to teach you and support you, not allowing anger and bitterness, uh absorb all of your energy but rather helping you be angry and bitter for a season, but ultimately you know seeking Gods guidance and seeking his strength and his courage to do what you felt that God wanted you to do. And to this very day I...I uhh participate with a prayer group the prayer groups have changed over the years; but uhh, being connected with a group of people who pray on a daily basis had been a great source of strength for me.

Harris tapped into a power source that sustains her in the midst of trials; ironically, Harris being a product of her time fails to use gender neutral pronouns when she speaks of God; her God is still a “he.” It is difficult to erase all signs of patriarchal control; it is an ongoing process.

Davis found one of the battles that she had to fight was the commentary on the appropriate attire for women in ministry:

I’m challenged by the way I may dress or I wear heels you know all of the time. Umm, I don’t like wearing suits. So, you’ll hear comments from either men or even from other women. Umm, female preacher should dress like this, like men. Female preacher should preach like men. Umm — I heard this all throughout

seminary and you know going to ITC you're around various denominations, right?

*Stewart says, you must fight that strong fear of rejection:*

Well you know one of the main obstacles I think is rejection. Uhh overcoming the rejection and not allowing the rejection to uh influence our self-worth, value, and the way we view ourselves. You know not allowing it to second guess what God is doing in your life particularity when people use scripture to oppress you, you know. Umm, there are people that get more angry about women in ministry then they do about sin or than they do about the violence that being experienced everyday, you know that's impacting people lives, the senseless killings, you know police brutality. There are people that get angrier about the fact that a woman has a major leadership position, than they do about some of the more pressing existential realities. I think its several things; and one factor is patriarchy.

Finally, Jackson resisted by quitting her job at Beulah Grove Baptist Church after working there eight years and switching her denominational affiliation to United Methodist.

I put in my letter of resignation. That was in March of 2008. In January 2009, I left Georgia and went to Denver Colorado to complete my DMin program at Iliff School of Theology, where I began a new journey in my life. I didn't have the courage to speak it, but my hope then and my hope now is that history will tell those coming behind me that you don't have to take it. Go get your freedom. Go

live in a liberated space. Go claim your life and life to the fullest. That's what I hope history will tell them.

### **A Desire for Change**

As a result of hearing the voices of these clergywomen, one could surmise that the present ecclesial system is not going to give up its position and or standing in the community, therefore the only way for change to take place is to disrupt, deconstruct and construct a new way of being and doing. There are several sub codes that emerged from the interviews that assist with informing strategies of resistance that might provide inroads for clergywomen attempting to break that stain glass ceiling. The sub-codes related to strategies of resistance are: spiritual strength/resilience; lack of respect, dignity, discomfort, fear, anger, rejection and language, these key factors moved the clergy women in various ways, mainly becoming the impetus for these women to push back against the patriarchy and the subtle and overt strategies of containment. The time for justice, the time for freedom, and the time for equality is always, always right now!<sup>345</sup> Our society needs political, social, and religious, systemic changes; the church has always been the forerunner in societal changes, since the social revolution in Marxism, or the Women's suffrage, or the Civil Rights movement. Social change could be driven by

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<sup>345</sup> Robert Eisele. *The Great Debaters*. Directed by Denzel Washington. Performed by Jumea Smollett as Samantha Booke. 2007. Samantha Booke the first women on the Wiley College debate team in 1935, known for the power debate session about the state educational system. Booke's retort that "the state was currently spending five times more for the education for a white child than it is fitting to educate a colored child. That means better textbooks for that child than for that child. I say that's a shame, but my opponent says today is not the day for whites and colored to go to the same college. To share the same campus. To walk into the same classroom. Well, would you kindly tell me when that day is gonna come? Is it going to come tomorrow? Is it going to come next week? In a hundred years? Never? No, the time for justice, the time for freedom, and the time for equality is always, always right now!

cultural, religious, economic, scientific or technological forces. There is shift in the atmosphere; a shift in the times; a revolutionary change is on the wake.

Kelly Brown Douglas declares:

the blackness of the black church is more important than a matter of color or culture. The blackness of this church depends upon its morally active commitment to advance the life, freedom, and dignity of all black bodies. Also, Brown Douglas states, when the church, for whatever reason, becomes alienated from certain bodies, its very blackness is threatened. What is at stake is the black church itself.<sup>346</sup>

Brown Douglas emphatically asks, “If the black church is to maintain its unique identity and its singular relevance in the lives of black people, then it must have the capacity to accept all black bodies, regardless.”<sup>347</sup> She was initially speaking about black sexuality and the LGBTQ body; she came to the realization that alienation of bodies in the church was a larger issue than sexuality. Brown Douglas identifies a narrative of civility<sup>348</sup> as a

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<sup>346</sup> Kelly Brown Douglas. *Black Bodies and The Black Church*. New York, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012,xiii.

<sup>347</sup> Kelly Brown Douglas. *Black Bodies and The Black Church*. New York, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012,xiii.

<sup>348</sup> The narrative of civility according to Kelly Brown Douglas, presumes that the way black people are perceived by the wider society is related to the way in which the black church strives to present this church as an institutionalized embodiment of black civility. Encouraging a degree of decorum within the black churches itself, projects black men and women as civilized and cultured people. The narrative goals are to sustain the significance and respect of the black churches within greater civil society to elevate the social, cultural and even political status of black women and men. She posits, that the narrative of civility is inspired by a commitment to black people’s life, freedom and overall social well being. Unfortunately, while it emphasizes the history and culture, it exalts white church culture. Ironically, it insists on the moral advantage of the black oppressed; yet it incorporates white socialcultural ideas and values. The narrative asserts god’s preferential option for the outsider, yet it also legitimates a white god. Most unfortunate, while it positions black churches as a refuge for black life, repeatedly alienates various black bodies. Brown Douglas concludes, with the fact that this narrative of civility is compatible with the very culture, systems, and ideologies that have disrespected black bodies; therefore making the very institution that was to protect the well being of black people, it in fact creates a hostile culture and maintains a rejected class within the black community, ostracizing and looking down on various bodies. (Brown Douglas, xiii) To read more see: Kelly Brown Douglas. *Black Bodies and The Black Church*. New York, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012.

persisting and controlling narrative in black churches. In order for change to occur, we know that Black churches must reconcile themselves by accepting and welcoming all bodies, regardless of class, social economic status, political affiliation and gender and sexuality; this is the conduit for change within Black churches, a promising start.

### **Experiences of Discomfort: Lack of Respect, Anger and Fear**

Although these four terms: lack of respect, anger, fear and discomfort, appear to be the most unlike tools to utilize in resistance work, there are times when experiences that cause one to reflect, pause, and take stock of life, are so shocking to the physical system, that it leaves one with only one resolve, and that is to fight back. These clergywomen have spoken about the lack of respect they experienced in various ecclesial settings, which often led to intense anger, which they learned to harness and use in such a manner that moved them powerfully forward in their journeys. Alvarado spoke of the slight she experienced in the classroom by her male instructor; and Eaton spoke of the disrespect she experienced in the church from both male and female parishioners alike. Eaton spoke of the anger and frustration she felt and how she licked her wound and found support from her sister circle group and the Women's conference that energized her and restored her resolve for ministry. Eaton also stated that the sister circle was a great gift to her it provided support, the mentoring of each other, sharing resources, and the coaching of each other. These experiences strengthened Eaton's tenacious spirit, a vital tool required for resistance. In order to resist oppressive forces, you must have a tenacious spirit, with the understanding that this work is not for the faint of heart. A spirit

analogous to Jarena Lee, (who realized that she was called to service by a higher source), is a necessary spirit and skill to have when navigating ecclesial settings.

### **Rethinking and Reclaiming Language: Redefining Ones Identity**

Eric Dyson, Professor of Sociology at Georgetown University and ordained

Baptist minister, states:

You are granted no say in and ultimately no position of power all over the church where you give most cash, most money, or tithes ... hegemony means that I dress it [domination] up so deep that I just dominate you and have you stand in line coming back for more; this is a cultural expression of seduction through which complicity with power are secured.

Dyson's description of this hegemonic stance is astute and being a Baptist minister, he knows firsthand the culture and climate of Black churches.<sup>349</sup> Unfortunately, the phenomenon of herd mentality comes to play when generational differences come into play. Interestingly, there appears to be this form of solidarity between black women and men against their children in the hip-hop culture conveniently stigmatizing them for the language they use, forgetting or ignoring the language and treatment of women and the LGBTQ community in the church. Dyson argued that the exploitative intent and actions toward Black women in the music industry, i.e. hip-hop, and the exploitative intent and actions found inside Black religious institutions are similar; he comments on the fact that one form of exploitation is institutionalized and normalized while the other is reviled and stigmatized;<sup>350</sup> however, both produce the same forms of terror and violence.<sup>351</sup> These

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<sup>349</sup> Michael Eric Dyson. "Religions and Terrors." Edited by Adams Graves. *2003 Boardman Lecture XXXXIX*. <http://repository.upenn.edu/boardman/1/>.

exploitative acts, all stem from a lack of respect others and a need to dominate and have power, or to feel powerful especially in spaces where power is limited.

Kimberly Springer, Associate Professor of Women Studies specializing in Mass Media, Social Movements, and Digital Culture, posits,

To be called a bitch is an oppressor's attempt to claim the power to name and dominate someone else. The exercising of power in a heterosexist patriarchal society not only points to gender nonconformity but also to bodies that are out of their proper place, displacing the order of racial and gender hierarchy...<sup>352</sup>

The use of language to humiliate, control and condemn a person or a group of people is the ultimate use of power. Clayton Jenkins shared how one of the angry men in her church called her a bitch in the church parking lot and when she shared this with other men in leadership they justified the use of such language, and were in fact angry with the other male who brought it to their attention, calling him a traitor. The use of language has been a controlling factor since biblical times, there have been binary opposites used to separate people, such as: Jews-Gentiles; Pharisee-Sadducees; East-West; good-evil; and male-female. This subject of language, and the power of language have built nations and divided countries while the art of naming and being named are vitally important in

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<sup>350</sup> Michael Eric Dyson became an ordained Baptist minister at the age of nineteen. Dyson's at twenty-one he worked in a factory and ran a church and went to school. As Dyson matured in his ministry he shared about the conflict he came up against when he shared with his church that he was going to ordain women, Dyson was returned the following Sunday to find that his keys no longer worked and he had relieved of his preaching duties.

<sup>351</sup> Elonda Clay. "Confessions of a Ex-Theological Bitch: The Thickness of Black Women's Exploitation between Jacquelyn Grant's "Backbone" and Michael Eric Dyson's "Theological Bitch"." In *Ain't I A Womanist Too?*, by Monica Coleman, 93-106. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2013, 95.

<sup>352</sup> Kimberly Springer. "Divas, Evil Black Bitches, and Bitter Black Women: African American Women in Postfeminist and Post-Civil Rights Popular Culture." In *Interrogating Postfeminist: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, by Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.

the constructing of a healthy, productive and humane society. Patricia Hill Collins who declares in her article, *What's in a Name? Womanism, Black Feminist and Beyond*, provides another salient example of naming and language with the comparison of Womanism and Black Feminism.<sup>353</sup> Collins addresses the debate about whether black women's standpoint should be named "womanism" or "black feminism"; this choice of naming reflects the diversity among Black women. In fact, some Black women do not care to be called either. According to Collins, many African American women see the terms, womanism and feminism, as having the goal to support a common agenda of Black women's self-definition and self-determination. Barbara Omolade points out, "Black feminism is something referred to as womanism because both are concerned with struggles against sexism and racism by the black community's effort to achieve equity and liberty."<sup>354</sup> Collins asked, why does this naming matters in naming a black women's standpoint? On the one hand, Walker's definition of womanism, shared in chapter 4, 'summons three important yet contradictory philosophies that frame black social and political thought, namely, black nationalism via her claims of black women's moral and epistemological superiority via suffering under racial and gender oppression, pluralism via the cultural integrity provided by the metaphor of the garden, and integration/assimilation via her claims that black women are "traditionally universalist"'.<sup>355</sup> On the other hand, black feminism has various interpretations. Black

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<sup>353</sup> Collins, Patricia Hill. "What's In A Name?: Womanism, Black Feminist and Beyond." *The Black Scholar* (www.jstor.org/stable/41068619) 26, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 1996): 9-17.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid, 10,

feminist theorist and activist, Pearl Cleage defines feminism as “the belief that women are full human beings capable of participation and leadership in the full range of human activities — intellectual, political, social, sexual, spiritual and economic.”<sup>356</sup> Cleage also states, that feminism is nothing more than a belief in the political, social and legal equality of women. Additionally, Collins suggests “black feminism” disrupts the racism inherent in presenting feminism as a for-whites-only ideology and political movement; by inserting Black, it challenges the assumed whiteness of feminism and disrupts the false universality.<sup>357</sup> The use of language and naming again has the power to liberate and develop or it can oppress and annihilate.

This is the call for Black churches to stand in a place they have failed to stand in before; to do, and to be and go where they have never gone before; as they embrace the full humanity of all people in their communities, starting with women, the LGBTQ communities, the elderly and those of abled differently. There must be a recreation of new ways of living and being in Black churches; creating policies, and practices that treat all people as equals, transcending racial, cultural, religious and gender barriers. There is a profound necessity for radical inclusivity, which includes: race, class, gender, socioeconomic, and sexuality. So, Black churches should seek to, in the words of Miguel De La Torre, “enable relationships where all people can live full abundant lives, able to

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<sup>355</sup> William Van Deburg. *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

<sup>356</sup> Pearl Cleage. *Deals With the Devil and Other Reasons to Riot*. New York, New York: Ballantine Books, 1993.

<sup>357</sup> Collins, Patricia Hill. "What's In A Name?: Womanism, Black Feminist and Beyond." *The Black Scholar* (www.jstor.org/stable/41068619) 26, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 1996): 13.

become all that God has called them to be.”<sup>358</sup> To “have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10), Black churches must develop a strong “ethics, seeking to dismantle dehumanizing and destructive forces of racism, colonialism, classism, sexism and ecological degradation.”<sup>359</sup> Therefore, in order to develop strategies of resistance, we must first search for the counternarratives, creating messages that offer a positive alternative to life long negative messages that have been disseminated in Black churches about women and where women are accepted and expected to work in the church and in the larger community.

### **Clarity: Clerical Call and Authority**

Jackson suggests, “Women are groomed to be accommodating, they need to understand that they don’t have to take that shit.”<sup>360</sup> Having clarity of one’s calling and authority is a must. This particular tactic is important for any clergywomen, whether she is a neophyte or a seasoned participant. If, in fact, women are groomed to be accommodating, this is the starting place for women in resisting oppressive forces and systems. A clergywoman needs to be clear without a shadow of a doubt, like bold women before them, that they have been called to ministry. Jarena Lee, Julia Foote and Zilpha Elaw, to name a few, are women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century who experienced stressful spousal

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<sup>358</sup> Miguel De La Torre. *Doing Ethics from the Margins*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2004, 6.

<sup>359</sup> Cynthia Moe-Lobeda. *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013.

<sup>360</sup> A follow up conversation after the initial interview with Dr. Valerie Jackson, in an attempt to get her read on the strategies of resistance that I developed as a result of the interviews with the twelve clergywomen.

and pastor disapproval; Foote was even expelled from her home church. If you are clear and know that you are called, there is nothing and no one that can deter you from your destiny. So, the first step is to firmly stand in who you are and who you are called to be. In addition, to the firm stance in ones calling, she must also be clear of her authority and her place as a leader in ecclesial settings. Several of the participants have experienced questioning their position and authority, which often led to dealing with the imposter syndrome,<sup>361</sup> which in turn can stymie their ability to stand powerfully in front of their respective congregations. Once the clergywoman has clarity of her call and authority, she can move to the next strategy.

### **Assessment of the Cost: Personal and Professional**

Whenever taking on a life-changing task where you are willing to put everything on the line, you must do a cost assessment. Total cost assessment (TCA) is a sound management tool for business devised to make decisions on expenditures and operational procedures; this particular approach includes environmental considerations.<sup>362</sup> When applying the total cost assessment, business owners are required to take in to account every possible impact of a change. I contend that clergywomen will need to take serious stock of their lives, attempting to understand what will be required of them professionally and personally. Despite the differences in denominational polity these different systemic

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<sup>361</sup> The definition of imposter syndrome according to the Cambridge English dictionary; is the feeling that your achievements are not real or that you do not deserve praise or success.

<sup>362</sup> Mike Ukena. *Introduction to Total Cost Assessment*. Printing Environmental Technology, Printers' National Environmental Assistance Center, [www.pneac.org](http://www.pneac.org).

processes are similar when it comes to the final outcome of treatment of women. The role of researchers like me is to provide a birds eye view of the women's lived experiences. Hale and Steward shared how they had to consider whether they were going to get married and have children; they have not as of yet. Jackson had to decide if she was going to remain in the same denomination; she moved from Baptist to Methodist. There may be the loss of family, friends and church friends, or status that certain relationships provided. The major question is, what are you willing to give up for your calling, dreams or aspirations? What changes will you have to consider and what changes will you make to accommodate your transformational moves? Providing a counter narrative allows the listener a chance to consider another way of thinking, believing and understanding, offering them other elements to take into consideration. Providing a counter narrative will require a strong will, and downright bravery. Church people are often some of the most hurtful, obstinate and merciless people you will ever meet. Providing an alternative to old beliefs can be a breath of fresh air; there is always someone that knew and hoped that there had to be a better way of thinking and believing.

### **Creative Imagination: Development of Counter Narratives**

Clergywomen must demand and create counter narrative and must lead the conversations within the churches, going against the old Sunday school<sup>363</sup> narrative. A counter narrative does not necessarily discredit beliefs that have been established but it provides an alternative option to thinking and believing, specifically, about the role of

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<sup>363</sup> When I say Sunday school theology, I'm referring to that basic understanding that one receives from Sunday school where there's no critical analysis, no in-depth study of the particular subject, and the story is just shared and passed down from generation to generation, often never knowing or understanding if there's any validity to the story.

women in ecclesial settings and in the community at large, and other antiquated understandings about the church and church polity. The narratives about a woman's place and the type of work she should do and can do in the church and the larger community needs modification, if not a complete overhaul. Clergywomen and their allies will have to be the trailblazers in providing counter narratives; this task will entail looking at policies and procedures with new eyes, providing a fresh exegetical take on the scripture; and consequently, providing congregations with sermons from a fresh perspective and with new life giving and affirming goals.

### **Preparation and Practice: Refining Gifts and Skills**

Clergywomen must remain diligent attaining all the knowledge and educational credentials possible, which includes their Masters of Divinity and/or Doctorate of Ministry, Doctorate of Theology, or a Doctorate of Philosophy degree. Despite the fact that historically, according to US News a report from the White House Council of Economic Advisers women are becoming more educated and make up a larger portion of the country work force, they consistently earn less than men, even if they have the same level of education, or in some cases hold higher degrees; and unfortunately in some Black churches, a woman can have all the required degrees and formal educational training, while her male colleagues will have none, these are what we call the jackleg<sup>364</sup> preachers. These male preachers will receive a church before it is given to a woman. Regardless of that fact, there is a saying that motivational speaker Les Brown uses; "It is better to be

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<sup>364</sup> Jackleg is a term used in the Black Church to describe an incompetent, unskillful, often dishonest or as the Urban dictionary puts it, a half assed or unprofessional, usually not trained in the particular task they are undertaking; a unscrupulous, dishonest person lacking professional standards.

prepared and never called on, than not to be prepared and called.” Women must stand firmly in their power and knowledge.

Clergywomen will have to address the usage of the scriptures, which interestingly have been used against them, like 2Timothy 2:15, *Study to show thy self approved unto God a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* Usually, it is the male clergy who use this scripture as a weapon of patriarchal control, dividing the word of truth to attack anyone that is not interpreting the scripture in the oppressive manner in which they do. It is unfortunate that Black male clergy are applying the same tactics that were used during slavery and the antebellum era to keep the slaves beholden and obedient; once again we see an example of the oppressed becoming the oppressor. Clergywomen must make the educational preparation, and then stand firmly in their authority and knowledge and giftedness to accomplish the ministerial duties.

### **Beyond the Pulpit: Nurturing and Mentoring**

The final strategy of resistance is to seek out a established and persons willing to take the necessary time to mentor; there are times when the mentor might choose you, but there are other times when you must seek out the appropriate mentor for who you are and your style. The mentor is there to nurture your gifts and guide you around pitfalls, get you through rough times, and, most importantly, hold you accountable to the liberation process and journey you are on. Without this accountability one can find oneself slipping back into the repressive situations and ways of being that one vowed one would never go

back to; because sometimes it seems or feels easier to give up, and give in that to fight.

That is why the mentor is vital to a clergywomen's success.

There are two types of women: the woman that knows she is oppressed and wants a way out; and there is the woman that does not know she is oppressed and refuses to be liberated or change her circumstances because that is the way it has always been. One woman realizes her circumstances are not ideal and she feels compelled to change her environment in order to achieve her calling and personal goals. The other woman is stuck and most likely comfortable in her oppressive situation and often happy to be allowed to participate in subservient ways, and fears rocking the boat, which might cause her to lose the position she is presently stuck in; or she is so steeped in the legacy of tradition, that she is not aware of anything wrong. Not until this woman's back is against the wall meaning she begins to feel discomfort nothing can change her mind or her situation. These strategies of resistance are only effective if the participants are aware of their oppressive status and would like to seek ways to remedy it not just for themselves but also for the entire community and the world. After speaking with clergywomen for this work, and socially off the record, this work of resisting oppressive forces and systems appears daunting, and impossible to achieve, given the centuries of rein that patriarchy and patriarchal systems have had on Black churches and the Black community. Unfortunately, we do not have another twenty years to wait for all people to be treated equally and with respect in black churches, starting with women and the LGBTQ community; these are two groups that are presently oppressed and mistreated in the church.

### **Why Does The Caged Bird Sing?**

In an effort to understand why African American clergywomen continue to stand in the face of oppression, disrespect, rejection, and while being slighted all painful and uncomfortable experiences, in pursuit of their calling; a final question was posed to the participants - Why does the caged bird sing? (The caged symbolized the church and the bird symbolized the clergywomen.) Nine of the twelve women were asked this question; each woman responded in her unique way:

*Rev. Dr. Renita Weems:*

The question that has been posed to me is Why Does The Caged Bird Sing or father just addressing that large topic about the Caged Bird, aaaah singing, and the whole issue of Black women in ministry and finding our voice. I think when I hear that phrase, that important book title of Maya Angelou. I think about what causes a woman to lose her voice, aaaah and what does it take for a woman to find her voice; And, the whole notion of being caged; the whole notion of being stuck; and the kinds of things that causes woman to lose their voices. Now, of course the notion of losing one's voice, assumes that you once had a voice. So what aaaah makes the, what causes the caged bird to lose her voice is; I believe every women is born with a voice and we learn how to exercise it, and or, we find ourselves in situations that cause us to lose our voice, perhaps lose it even before we really own, it for ourselves. I think we live in a society that makes it difficult for women to find their voices, aaaah, to find their authentic self, to feel comfortable in their own skin, aaaah, to ummh, be at peace with who they are, and to even

celebrate who they are. So, I think the whole notion of voice is a metaphor; is a frame for which, we can talk about women's development and women owning themselves, and women's self-development. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sing is a beautiful image, because I think for, Maya Angelou who is, both, a prophet and a poet and a writer, it says, that even when we are caged in, or even when we lose our way, we are still able to aaaah sing, even though we can't fly, we can still sing; even though we don't have mobility, we can still sing. And I think for women in Ministry and at this wonderful movement for the last fifty years, I want to say the last fifty years now, black women in ministry have been finding our voice. Not without a struggle, and despite exterior and interior barriers. Exterior barriers the church, exterior barriers the society, exterior barriers patriarchy, exterior barriers people expectations; interior barriers your own insecurities, interior barriers your own self-doubt, your own questions; oh maybe I can't, I don't know, whatever. But, that coming to self; if you could just find a way, to just keep singing, just keep sing; if you can find a way to just keep singing. If I may, just kinda say this, earlier today at this conference I'm attending, a woman came up to me and said she's pastoring a church in some remote area. Now for me what would be remote, Iowa, Nebraska one of them kind of places, those are remote areas. I said to her, you know, you are the kind of women who really are called to ministry. I said because, I cannot imagine trying to find my voice in Nebraska, I cannot imagine coming into ministry, in a place like, Nebraska and Iowa and you have virtually no support system, no other women, no other role

models and you are able to sing, in that kind of environment, as a black women. I said, I find that remarkable; I find that's nothing, no one but God. And that's nothing but your own kind of strength. It makes me embarrassed, because I came into ministry when there, some way; I was a part of larger movement of women; I had girlfriends who were going into ministry. So, for me it was not hard in that kind of a way. But, when you find these women, that find themselves caged in by circumstances, caged in by their lives and they are able to preach, to sing, to trust God, to do worship, to lead people in worship, to do pastoral care, despite, up against enormous odds. Let me tell you, that whether that door flings open, ever or not, in their lifetime. Cause the door will open! But, it may not be in your lifetime, for women to be able to sing, to believe, to trust God and find their voice. It says enormous about the strength of black women, it says enormous about the God within Black women, and it says enormous about our larger purpose, that's even larger than our exterior circumstances, and the cages, which we find ourselves. So, I say keep singing, keep singing the blues; keep singing gospel, keeping sing pop, whatever it takes, in order for your circumstances not to define you.

*Rev. Dr. Cynthia Hale:*

The reason why I sing! The reason why I preach! The reason why I do what I do is because in Christ I am free. I'm clear that I'm free, others may not realize that I am free because people always try to hinder your us or hold us in captivity free and put their finger on us but because Christ has made me free I am called to

make other free. And ever under restrain I will preach that Jesus is Lord to the Glory of God the father almighty.

*Rev. Dr. Gina Stewart:*

It's interesting that, well, it seems rather ironic that a caged bird would sing because when you think about a caged bird you think about captivity, you think about restriction, you think about limit, being limited in terms of range and motion, but when we consider how our creator made us and wired us. I don't think the caged bird sings or I don't think that the singing has anything to do with the bird's environment. The singing has to do with the bird's ability and the birds' instinctive ability to transcend his or her environment. The bird doesn't sing because they are in captivity; the bird sings because they has a song, and the song that is in the bird's heart, or the song that instinctively comes alive in the bird, knows no boundaries!

*Rev. Dr. Billie Cox:*

I believe that the caged bird sings because she has to sing. You are looking at someone who was molested at ten, who was raped when she was thirteen, who was homeless when she was fourteen, who was pronounced dead when she was fifteen and there was something in me that will not allow me to be quiet and I believe that same thing exist in other women that there is something in us that calls us to call out and cry out that we cannot even though thumbs are on us and feet are on us and there's oppression all around us and we cannot afford to be

quiet. There's something in us. We will die if we are silent. There's something in us that causes us to cry out. I remember when I was sixteen years old there was a spider outside of my window, big spider yellow and black. And I learned over the years I was afraid of it. I caught it and I put it in a jar and I watched it and periodically every three or four years I would find that same kind of spider no matter where I lived that spider would come to the house and be at the window that was basically my window. I remember in 2004, I was at work and I looked one day and there was this spider outside the window, same kind of spider yellow, black, big and I began to ask God - What is the significance in this spider? Because I've seen it too many times for it not to be, you're talking to me. The analogy was and what I believe the spirit said to me was that you see that spider? When he needs to web a web it comes from within him. Everything that you need for this life is already in you, you just have to draw it out, so that you can be successful in whatever I've called you to do. Yesterday, I was packing to come to this conference and outside my bedroom window on my side of the bed I was getting ready to close my blind and there was this giant yellow and black spider. When I saw this spider, I got excited because I know that this means God, He's reminding me that there are books in me and there's more preaching in me and no matter my age (because I use to think that my age would stop me) God still has something in me that He is drawing out of me to take to the next level. That's why the caged bird sings, because it's in us and it has to come out.

*Rev. Dr. Toni Alvarado:*

I sing — I sing for a myriad of reasons; one of the reasons I sing, and I don't mean this in a cliché. But, I really sing because internally, I'm being set free everyday. And I sing because, when I look back over the things the Lord has brought me out of, the things I have survived in my life, ummh, some personal struggles that I had God overcome. I sing because I can rejoice over those things. I also sing because, I know that in my singing, not only am I set free, but it's in in my singing, that I'm allowed to help others sing and set them free. Ummh, I know that what I'm called to do is empower and to release other women and it is ironically in my releasing of them I am also released and I'm set free. And so, I sing because I find my strength in it, I find encouragement in it; I find empowerment in it. I preach because I'm called to preach, I preach because I'm anointed to preach, I preach because God has given me favor and opportunity; not because I've earned it, not because I've been so good, or so wonderful. But because it's my time; it's my time to preach. And I have to preach because that's what God has called me to do. So I sing because it's the call of God on my life, for this season, in this present time! And that's why I sing.

*Rev. Kanyere Eaton:*

You know I don't think we accept fully the notion of being caged, and we sing because we're happy and we sing because we're free, ummh, and we trust that God's eye is on the sparrow. We sing, we preach because we feel fire in our

bones. We sing/we preach because we are deeply ensconced in communities with great needs in every way and we feel compelled to pour out of our souls, to meet the needs of the people in our community. I've heard stories since I've been in the Bronx of stories that I heard in my life, of what people live with and what they live through and how they make it, Andriette is a testament to a mighty God. Even when I'm tired and worn out, I feel compelled to say something to remind my sisters and brothers to lift up their heads. I sing because little girls in my church draw pictures of me, they draw picture of a tall brown woman behind the pulpit with a fuchsia robe [holding her arms out] her arms up and they ascribe words to me 'trust the Lord' and bubble boxes of my words 'God is real'. And I feel like as I stand and boldly proclaim that God has graced me and anointed me to do this; I believe that there's a mighty word in my mouth. I believe, I can declare the day of liberty and the people will actually get on a trajectory toward being liberated. Yeah, it would be a tragedy to close my mouth, because in my mouth is a two-edged sword, you know, because, in my mouth is the ability to speak life and death; it's in my mouth. And I dearly love black people, Andriette; I dearly love black people. And I feel like if Black people are still going to love and trust God after horrible hundreds of years of experiences and history; if they still going to love God, then I want to fan the flames; and doing the work that will help transform the community, by the presence and power of God. So I was saying, when the little children draw a picture it worth standing up there, even when I feel feeble and weak they have an imprint in their minds that the pastor's a woman,

and now when they think about the person that stands behind the pulpit it's a person with breast. You know, who's expressive, who speaks in this way, with their arms and I feel like it gets them one step closer to knowing they can be anything they want. And little boys to know that God's work is not just men's work, God's work is women's work it's everybody's work. I sing because those pictures are all around my wall, and sometime when I worry that the needle is not moving, that I'm not making a difference, I see it in their art work. I would've never grown up drawing pictures of a pulpit with a woman behind it! But these children they draw pictures and they write on the bottom with big letters under it PASTOR. And I'm saying can you believe that, can you beat that? And that's why I keep singing.

*Rev. Janis Grubbs Cobbs:*

I believe it sings, because it can't help but to sing, it can't help but to sing, even when it's tied, like that surgeon having your hands tied; there's still a part of you that sings and someone is going to recognize, someone will notice and see that potential in you and say hey come over here. AND, that's the way it was with me I had to sing, so I found the church that would allow me to sing because it was just within in you. And I really believe that if Mom would have, had the opportunity she would have been a preacher. So she sang through the mission, and the Lord has called me to sing through the prophetic voice of the priestly ministry. But I have to sing, and I sing now through mentoring other women, going into chaplaincy and encourage them to stick with it!

*Rev. Dr. Valerie Jackson:*

I know well what it feels like to be caged; I was caged for a long time. I know well what it's like to not to be completely who I am, not to be accepted. Yet, I must sing, I must continue to be the preacher I'm called to be, because there is life in that for me. I sing, I preach because I know without a shadow of a doubt that the spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to preach liberation to the oppressed. And I have to do it, because I know what it feels like to be oppressed. To preach good news to those who are held captive; I know what that's like; I have to sing, I must preach, because I realize this is not just about Valerie L. Jackson. This is about women in this current age, this is about women coming behind me; this is also, about men who have to be awakened and enlighten, that they are enjoying the privileges of patriarchy, not the privilege of God's kingdom. This is not what God intended, God intended that men and women of all races and sexual orientations and all ages, would enjoy life and enjoy it to the fullest. To enjoy life exceedingly, abundantly above all that they could ever imagine, for these reasons, I must sing, I must preach.

*Rev. Courtney Clayton Jenkins:*

I believe that the cage is the environment but the bird was born to sing, and so the bird does what the bird is called to do regardless of the environment or the context, which it is placed in, and that's why the caged bird sings! Ummh, You know, if it wasn't going to be here, it was gong to be somewhere else, my calling

is my calling and like that bird nothing stops me; you can cage me in, but it doesn't stop the call, it doesn't stop my capacity to do ministry where ever God sets me. So I will say this, while at the conference in Indonesia, there was a pastor from South Korea that they had to sneak in town because, of the religion, so he said that he has evangelized over 3,000 people for Christ. And he said when they would arrest him and put him in jail, he would evangelize and convert everyone in the jail, so they threw him out the jail and he evangelize and would get arrested again, and they threw out. So then, they just said we're going to just stop putting you in jail, because every setting we place you in you turn people toward Christ. That is a caged bird, it doesn't, let me go free, caged me in I'm gonna do what I'm called to do! You do what you're born to do! I just said to my bible study group today, I believe with every fiber of my being, I'm called to be a pastor. I would rather die and be wrong, than to live my life by the opinion of others; and when I past this earth the Lord would say we were supposed to do great things together; but because you placed your gift in the hands of other people rather than me, we missed out on all these things we could've done together. So I rather do it, and be wrong.

### **Closing Thoughts**

These twelve African American clergywomen shared their lived experiences, their journeys in pursuit of their callings, and their quest to unapologetically use their voice. Audre Lorde states, "When I dare to powerful, to use my strength in the service of my

vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.” Disrupting paradigms, shifting mindsets and transforming worldviews and perceptions of those on the margins are vital to the task of liberation when you are demanding equality for all. There is a great need to transform the mindset of not just the men of the church but some of the women in the church also. This ingrained belief that women need to keep silent and should not obtain leadership positions over men, nor enter the pulpit are antiquated ideologies that can only be changed from within. The role of clergy has been historically defined as male, in a field that once was completely male dominated. The gatekeepers have diligently work to keep this discipline gender-specific. My goal through the work of this dissertation was to create a gender-neutral or gender inclusive movement where the ideas of policy, language and other social institution should avoid distinguishing roles according to peoples’ gender, in order to avoid discrimination arising from the impression that there are social roles for which one gender is more suited than another.<sup>365</sup> As a conduit for the voices of African American clergywomen who are subjects of various forms of discrimination, a result of their race, class and gender, I found, when completing the analysis of the themes there was a commonality across denominational line regardless of diverse church polity<sup>366</sup>. As a result of this work several of the women interviewed suggested that this work continue with a ensue documentary on the caged bird. What follows is my creation of a manifesto for the new Black church.

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<sup>365</sup> John Edwards. *Language and Identity: An introduction*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2009. pg. 259.

<sup>366</sup> While there are nine diverse denominational polities encountered from the twelve women interviewed, the effects how each of these women experienced strategies of containment within their specific denominations. However, the focus of this dissertation was on the commonality of their individual experiences and attention to ways the various denominations function will be addressed in future work.

## **A Manifesto for New Black Churches:**

**I Believe...** we all have a calling and responsibility to make the world a better place for this generation and for generations to come.

**I Want to Live, In a World Where...** there's a stand for all people to be treated as equals, transcending racial, cultural, religious, ethnic, and gender barriers, that is who this world should be!

**Here's What I Know for Sure...** women are fearful and wonderfully made,<sup>367</sup> full of so much creative brilliance<sup>368</sup> that over centuries has sustained them against all odds, especially African American and women of color. They have survived atrocities often unconceivable, and have stood the test of time.

**I Am Committed to ...** to the success of all humanity, regardless of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. Success stands for social, political, economic, religious and health stability and equality for all.

**I encourage clergy and scholars alike to stand for justice and equality for all.**

Angelou states:

The caged bird sings because it [she] must. It must or die; and maybe it must and die. I don't know, but it must sing. Sometimes, the melody arrived at in the cage is much more fetching, much more appealing, much more profound, much more poignant than the melody arrived at by the bird on the loose. The caged bird sings with a fearful trill. Its song is heard on a distant hill for the caged bird sings of freedom. There is something universal about that song since all of us are caged in some way or another and so people can hear it, and say "oh yes, O Lord, let that bird out."<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> New International Version Psalm, 139:14

<sup>368</sup> This term 'creative brilliance' is a phrase used by Dr. Valerie Jackson, in her sermons to encourage her parishioner, reminding them of the beauty of Gods diversity; which is meant to be beautiful and amazing, yet we often fight against it.

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<sup>369</sup> Maya Angelou. *Caged Bird*. In Shaker, *Why Don't You Sing?* New York: Random House, 1983.

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## **APPENDIX A**

## Research Questions

### Demographics:

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Sex:** All female

**Education:** \_\_\_\_\_ (MA, PhD, DMin, M.Div., THD)

**Birthplace:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Current place of residence:** \_\_\_\_\_

What is your denomination? How long have you been a member?

When were you ordained? What was your ordination service like?

What are some of the details of your ordination process? Did it differ from your male colleagues?

When did you accept your calling? What is your call story?

How many years have you been working in this present position?

Who, if anyone, is/ are your role models in the ministry?

Who are the leading/prominent female clergywomen, in your opinion? (Last five to ten years)

Have you experienced sexism in the church? How do you define sexism?

If so, what are one or two stories of this experience?

How did you deal with the sexist experience/s? If you had a chance would you handle the experiences differently?

Were there any obstacles during your journey to become a senior pastor? If so, what were they and how did you over come them?

Do you organize or facilitate, or attend any national or local women's conference in addition to Women In Ministry conference?

Why do you believe the Caged Bird Sings?

## **APPENDIX B**



## INFORMED CONSENT FORM: INTERVIEW

You are invited to participate in a study that will assess your experiences as an African American clergywoman. This study is being conducted to evaluate and deconstruct the ideology related to the African American male clergy knowledge and power precepts given theologies of liberation. The researcher is asserting that there is need to determine the source(s) of oppressive behaviors. Results will be used to gain insight into the overall experiences of individuals who have experienced the patriarchal structure as well as deconstructing the contexts and situations, which have contributed to understandings of their personal plight in the Black Church. The researcher is looking for 10-12 established African America female senior pastors and/or co-pastors. Minors (those under 18) will be excluded from the study. The Principal investigator will describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. The principal investigator for this study is Andriette Jordan-Fields, Doctoral Student at the University of Denver/Illiff School of Theology—Joint PhD Program in Denver, Colorado. Andriette Jordan-Fields can be reached at [afields@iliff.edu](mailto:afields@iliff.edu). 314-368-4688.

The study will involve an individual interview. Interviews will take approximately twenty to thirty minutes, not exceeding an hour in length. During the interview, the researcher will ask you several questions specifically concerning your experiences within the ecclesial settings, which contributed to your present ministry and the formation of who you are today. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary.

### **Possible Risks and Discomforts**

The risks associated with this project are as follows:

1. The risk of participating in this project is the possibility of male colleagues and other women, understanding this work as “airing dirty laundry” or usurping male authority; these assumptions can result in the interviewee being ostracized.
2. The interviewee might be black balled by the patriarchal systems. Exposure of the male clergy behavior as it relates to gender issues in the church, has the potential of calling negative attention to the Black Church, which is understood as the bastion of liberation.
3. This research will document the experiences of African American female clergy and these findings will support my dissertation work. The effort to minimize risk or harm and protect my subjects’ welfare will be establish by using pseudonym for the interviewee and their church. Coding will be utilized and finally the interview will be stopped if the interviewee becomes uncomfortable or noticeably agitated, a referral to an Atlanta counselor will take place.

If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue the interview at any time. Dr. Deborah Ortega will be a resource available at (785) 764-2426, should the nature of this study ignite emotions, which are difficult to process. The researcher will also provide a list of professional counseling references for participants. Since the researcher will keep some research files on a personal computer, loss or theft of the computer is a potential risk. However, the computer is password protected and has a tracking device. Additionally, information sensitive documents will be encrypted.

### **Possible Benefits of the Study**

You may benefit from this research by being able to tell your story about your experience as an African American female clergy, and this research will be used to better understand the racialized and genderized experiences of African American clergywomen.

## **Compensation**

You will not receive compensation for this study.

## **Study Costs**

You will be expected to pay for your own transportation, parking, or childcare, if needed.

## **Confidentiality, Storage and Future Use of Data**

Your responses will be identified by a code number or pseudonym and will be kept separate from information that could identify you. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses. Your responses will be recorded and transcribed, and upon transcription of all audio recordings for the study, the audiotapes will be kept for up to 24 months after the completion of the dissertation study in an effort to synthesize the additional findings for presentation and publication purposes. The results of the study will be used in the final dissertation publication, scholarly presentations and article publications.

## **Who will see my Research Information?**

Only the researcher will have access to your individual data. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect. The law requires that any of these offenses be reported to the proper authorities. Although we will do everything we can to keep your records a secret, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Both the records that identify you and the consent form signed by you may be looked at by Federal agencies that monitor human subject research or Human Subject

Research Committee. All of these people are required to keep your identity confidential.  
 Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

Also, if you tell us something that makes us believe that you or others have been or may be physically harmed, we may report that information to the appropriate agencies.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. If you decide to withdraw early, the information or data you provided will be destroyed. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

### **Contact Information**

The researcher carrying out this study is Andriette Jordan-Fields. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may email *Andriette Jordan-Fields* at [ajfields@iliff.edu](mailto:ajfields@iliff.edu). If the researchers cannot be reached, or if you would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) about; (1) questions, concerns or complaints regarding this study, (2) research participant rights, (3) research-related injuries, or (4) other human subjects issues, please contact Paul Olk, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4531, or you may contact the Office for Research Compliance by emailing [du-irb@du.edu](mailto:du-irb@du.edu), calling 303-871-4050 or in writing (University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121).

### **Agreement to be in this Study**

You may keep this page for your records. Please sign below if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the

researcher any questions you have.

I have read this paper about the study or it was read to me. I understand the possible risks and benefits of this study. I know that being in this study is voluntary. I choose to be in this study: I will get a copy of this consent form.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Please initial here if you agree to be audiotaped/video

\_\_\_ Please initial here if you agree to have your data from this study used in future research

\_\_\_ Please initial here if you are or will be 18 years of age or older by March 24, 2014.

*Please note that minors (those under 18) are not being solicited for this study. If you are unable to check this box, you will not be able to participate in the study.*

\_\_\_ I would like a summary of the results of this study to be emailed to me at the following postal or email address: \_\_\_\_\_