

Africana Biblical Hermeneutics

Summer 2021

Panelist:

Herbert Marbury (Presider), Margaret Aymer, Michael Joseph Brown, Funlola Olojede, Justin Reed, Eric Thomas, and Annie Tinsley.

Herbert Marbury: All right. Welcome to the SBL panel on Africana biblical interpretation, African biblical studies. We are excited to present an august panel in lieu of our international meeting. Our panel today will consist of Dr. Margaret Aymer, Dr. Michael Joseph Brown, Dr. Funlola Olojede, Dr. Justin Michael Reed, Eric A. Thomas, and Dr. Annie Tinsley. And I'm excited to introduce our panel. My name is Herbert Marbury. I'm Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East at Vanderbilt Divinity School and I will be moderating the panel. Moderating, I think, is a strong word. I will be facilitating the conversation. Before we begin, I want to thank LaToya Leary at SBL and for all the work that she has done to bring us together and to facilitate the logistics and to make this panel make this kind of happen. So thank you very much for LaToya. And let me begin by way of introduction.

First, Dr. Margaret Aymer serves at the First Presbyterian Church, Shreveport, and as the D. Thomason and Professor of New Testament Studies at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. She's the first woman of color to be promoted to full professor on that campus. Dr. Aymer is an immigrant from the Caribbean, with the roots and many Caribbean islands. Her father and uncle also have done PhDs in New Testament, making her the third in her family with this degree. After 14 years of teaching at a historically black seminary, The Interdenominational Theological Center, Dr. Aymer joined the faculty of Austin Seminary in 2017. Her work includes considering migration, post-coloniality and Islander readings, and black feminist womanist thought in relationship to the New Testament. Welcome Dr. Aymer!

Dr. Michael Joseph Brown serves as the 17th President and Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at Payne Theological Seminary in Wilberforce, Ohio. An advocate for inclusive theological education, Dr. Brown has expanded Payne's educational region to the Caribbean, Ghana, Zambia, and South Africa, graduating the first class in 2020. Prior to his arrival at Payne, he was Associate Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. He spent several years as the Director of Emory's Graduate Division of Religion, and prides himself on the diversity of the student body during his tenure. Dr. Brown is also the author of several books and articles, including *Blackening the Bible: The Aims of African-American Biblical Scholarship*. He's an elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Reverend Brown received a BA from Vanderbilt University and the M.Div. and PhD from the University of Chicago. Welcome Dr. Brown!

Dr. Funlola Olojede is a researcher with the gender unit of the faculty of theology Stellenbosch University of South Africa. Her academic interests include gender and feminist hermeneutics, wisdom literature, Old Testament studies, migration studies, and African biblical interpretation. Dr. Olojede is a fellow of the UBIAS network and she has done research at Princeton Theological Seminary, Alexander Von Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany, and the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam, Netherlands among other institutions. She is the coordinator of the Circle of Concern, African Women Theologians in South Africa. In addition to publishing many of the articles she has also co-edited the book: *Teaching for Change: Essays on Pedagogy, Gender, Health, and Theology in Africa*. Welcome Dr. Olojede!

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Dr. Justin Michael Reed is an Assistant Professor of Old Testament Hebrew Bible at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. He earned his BA in African and African American Studies from Stanford and a Master's of Theological Studies in Hebrew from Harvard. For his PhD from Princeton Theological Seminary, he brought interests together in a dissertation that argues for new interpretations of Noah's curse in Genesis 9:18-29, a text that is notorious for being weaponized against Afro that desperate peoples. Currently, his major academic interests include reception history, ideological criticism and concepts of race and ethnicity as they relate to biblical texts. Welcome Dr. Reed!

Dr. Eric A. Thomas is a PhD candidate in New Testament and Early Christianity at Drew University and the interim pastor of Siloam Presbyterian Church in Bedford-Stuyvesant Brooklyn. His research focuses on minoritized, biblical criticism informed by queer of color critique. He's an adjunct professor at Hartford Seminary, Kean University, and The New School, where he's taught a course called "Queering and Decolonizing Theology" each spring since 2017. In the fall of 2021, he's looking forward to premiering "The Origins and Spiritualities of the Black Lives Matter Movement" also at The New School. When not pastoring, teaching, and completing his dissertation in the midst of pandemic politics protests, he enjoys naps and dreaming of a world where Black futures can be more expansive, joy-filled, and pleasurable than the myriad quotidian quests to survive systems of whiteness and anti-blackness. Welcome Dr. Thomas!

Dr. Annie Tinsley is the Director of Divinity Programs and Assistant Professor of New Testament at Shaw University Divinity School. She has a PhD in Religion and Theology from the University of Birmingham in the UK. Her research interests include rereading biblical literature from an African-American postcolonial perspective. Dr. Tinsley's interests also stem into the cultural linguistic aspects of African-Americans and how language impacted the development of their culture with respect to slavery and the civil rights movement in the United States. Her present research focuses on gentrification and middle passages. Welcome Dr. Tinsley!

Welcome to you all. You all have rich experience and varied interests and I'm looking forward to a robust and interesting conversation. So, let us begin and I'm going to pose the first question. I'll begin with Margaret when I pose the first question to all of us. So, Margaret, if you would, tell us how you first came to focus your scholarship on what I'm broadly calling Africana Biblical Interpretation. What was the field of biblical studies like at the time? What particular questions does this focus help you answer and what attracted you to it?

Margaret: Thank you Herbert. It's good to be part of the panel and it's good to be amongst this august group. I fell into the question of Africana biblical studies. It was not a primary interest of mine. When I went to seminary, it was the 1990s and I happened to be at Union Seminary at a time when Vincent Wimbush, James Washington, and James Cone were all on the faculty, along with Lewis Williams. So it was a time when the question of African hermeneutic, African/African-American theology, African-American hermeneutic, African-American ways of reading were very much present. Vincent began his African-Americans and the Bible project just after I finished my course-work, so I didn't get a chance to take the courses that he was teaching, leading up to it, but I was very much present for that conference. So when I was at Union, this was just a live question. It wasn't an unusual question to ask. I was a bit torn, because my, as I said in my, my bio, my background is Caribbean. It's not African-American so it's Africana, but it's not part of that specific diaspora, branch of the diaspora out of which Vincent and Doris and James Washington emergent and so I always had a problem trying to find ways to connect those things. So I was really at a loss as to what I was going to write about. And then I went to ITC in 2001 and about a month after I got to ITC, 9/11 happened and I lost six months of even beginning to think about my dissertation and I found myself, for the first time in my entire immigrant life in this country in a

majority black space, that was African-American. I'd never been in a majority black space that was African American until that point and I was in my twenties or thirties even. So that was a cultural shock and a cultural shift and the time to get to know a culture that pretty much built this country from the ground up and I began, began to understand some of the nuances and the ways in which people were moving. I was looking for a dissertation topic, a way to frame the question. And I was in the library on the Clark Atlanta campus and I happened upon the writings of Frederick Douglass. I was looking at the narratives and wasn't really seeing much. And then I saw John Blassingame's set of his speeches I started opening them and I started seeing Bible, Bible, Bible, Bible, Bible, and Blassingame hadn't catalogued any of it. So I then started to go, I just went home and started cataloguing how is this man using the Bible? And then how is this Bible acting as a way of speaking to, and speaking about the culture in which he was located. And to me, that makes sense. I come from a family of preachers. I come from a family of scholars, but also a family of preachers and both my uncle and my father used the Bible to speak to the culture. And so I was, I came in through that way into this discussion. And then I taught at ITC for 14 years and you can't really teach next door to Randall Bailey in his department without attending to this stuff because he will tell you. So I was, I was kind of mentored by my students into this discussion. And because I was the only woman in the department, I was the one who was forced to learn about womanism because the men wouldn't teach it, so I did. So that's how I came at it. I came at it as an immigrant in this discussion. What has been interesting in the last few years for me as I've started to have good conversations with people like Steve Davidson and Althea Spencer and Newman Jacobs, [inaudible], some of the Caribana Africana scholars in the discipline and beginning to see how post-coloniality, the questions of neocolonialism and post-colonialism are going to just shape our work from that lens. So I'm beginning to just beginning to put my finger into what is Caribbean theology doing because my, my father, he did his dissertation before all of that became a rich discourse, and I was never a part of that conversation because I left the islands before I was part of that conversation. So that gives you some idea. I feel as if I'm kind of the sojourner in this and I'm happy to be part of the conversation. I'm happy to listen and I'm happy to learn.

Herbert: All right. Thank you, Margaret. I'm going to turn to Michael, unless there are others who want to jump in and participate more improvisationally. If not then, okay.

Michael: Well, thank you everyone for having this panel and for inviting me. I appreciate the consideration. I kind of, I'm similar in some ways to, to Margaret. I didn't start out with the focus on or an interest in Africana biblical interpretation. I was more of a... well, I was at the University of Chicago, a very traditional New Testament program, and my interests were kind of developing along the lines of New Testament and material culture...which is, it's still there. But I ended up getting involved in, at the time, African-American biblical interpretation because there was a series being written. I forget, which publisher it is, but, but Victor Anderson and Anthony Penn were the editors and they wanted a volume on biblical interpretation and they asked me if I would do it. And so I went on a quest to learn everything I could and read a study and it was not only illuminating, but, but as influenced my, my scholarship ever since. And so I've been very excited to see how this discipline is working itself out and where it's going in the future, especially now, given my present circumstance where I keenly see how it empowers our students.

Herbert: Thank you. Let's go now to Funlola. I think Funlola, I think you're still on mute.

Funlola: Oh, okay. I'm so sorry.

Herbert: That's quite all right.

Funlola: Yeah. Just a word thanks to Benny for asking me to join this conversation and I'm delighted to be a part of it. I would say that I didn't originally start out as an Old Testament scholar. I'm a late comer to theology because my background is in linguistics. But I will say I came into Africana biblical hermeneutics by default. You know, I was co-opted into it by my supervisor, Professor Andrew Postman, who is retired now and happens to be white man, an African white man, so that was quite something, because this was in 2007. Now I was focused on doing an exegetical study for my doctorate dissertation, because I just, I like the texts the way it is just pure, you know? But you gently and definitely steered me into contextual hermeneutics space, you know, and at that time I was helping out in the department with a compilation of a database of scholarly works in Old Testament and New Testament in Africa. So while doing these compilations, trying to get all the authors, what they had written about in both Old and New Testament, it was not difficult to notice that "Africana", I say "Africana" in quotes, I'll explain later, biblical hermeneutics was not only short of female biblical interpreters in Africa. You could count on your fingertips the number of female scholars who showed interest in the Old Testament and specifically in wisdom literature, which I eventually focused on. So there was this urgency in my heart to fill that gaping hole in this aspect of biblical interpretation. So in other words, I'm not talking about African biblical interpretation as a whole, but specifically the feminist area. So my dissertation, therefore, turned out to be a contextual, theological, and feminist interpretation of the figure of woman wisdom in the book of Proverbs. So, I'm not just an Africana biblical "hermenoid" but specifically feminist. So I like to always nuance that.

Herbert: Thank you Funlola. Let's turn now to, let's turn now to Justin.

Justin: Hi, everyone. So when I started learning about biblical studies in the 2000s, it was after Michael had already published that book on, that introduction, *Blackening of the Bible*. And so I started learning about the discipline at a time when I feel like I should have known more about African-American biblical interpretation as a subset of Africana studies in general, Africana biblical interpretation in general. But my path, like a few of the people have mentioned already, did not begin with my own people, with what I was already naturally interested in. So I came to college, thinking I want to study things that are about my people, so I got a major in African and African-American Studies. And from growing up, I've been in spaces where the Bible was important. But the type of attention that the churches, well, the church I went to growing up gave to the Bible didn't match the type of critical inquiry that I was passionate about in school. And so I didn't, I had no idea that people were asking those type of questions of the Bible, until halfway through undergrad, I started to take, I realized there were and started to take classes that had to do with biblical studies and in those contexts, it was white males, who, and Jewish males who had very historical critical goals and pursued "traditional" forms of criticism that were teaching me. And so I was under the impression that this is what biblical studies from an academic standpoint looks like. And at that point, I felt like I had two passions and the two would never meet. So when I started my Master's degree, I assumed, okay, I'm going to choose between which of these two passions, well I got a BA in studying black people so now I'm going to study the Bible for this Masters. And it was towards the end of my Master's degree and at the start of my coursework for my PhD, that I started to find the resources of scholars who were asking the type of questions and engaging with the texts in ways that felt refreshing and felt natural from my own context. And so some of the things that I was starting to see ranged from, you know, in my church context, growing up, going to an AME church we saw ourselves in the Bible, we thought of the people in the Bible as black and so there were interpretations by people like Charles Cofer, who were trying to put some scholarly rigor behind that type of claim. And I saw these are the same things that my people are asking about, and then there was also, there were also interpretations that I came to see as more nuanced and personally more interesting that went beyond identification and are thinking about, okay me as a contextualized being in front of this text as a reader, how does that influence what I

see in the text differently from another contextualized reader. And specifically, what about the black experience is a part of that? And that was, to me, such a powerful perspective, the thing that I really held on to, because it's an assertion that there's something valuable about my life experiences that I'm bringing to interpreting the Bible. And so in some ways, I matter. And so does another person for their, for their specific experiences. And that was something that I felt was missing from the traditional way, in which I learned about the Bible before that. And so for those reasons, I really latched on to what I was learning about African-American biblical interpretation when it came across my field of vision.

Herbert: All right. Thank you, Justin. Well, let's turn now to Eric.

Eric: Thank you and thank you to the organizers for this invitation. It's great to be with you all. I think that as a student at the ITC, I celebrate that, that moment in time, Dr. Aymer, where we were able to do an entire course on womanist biblical interpretation and like spend 14 weeks only on womanist and black feminist biblical scholars, and so that was a celebration. And it might've been in that class or, or kind of doing later reading where I think it was Emilie Townes, in the *Womanist Dancing Mind*, who said, "let us be expansive in our particularities." And I think that that was the, the, the context of that was she was speaking to American womanist scholars about the plight of women, Black women in the diaspora, which of course made me think about same gender loving people in the diaspora. As someone who kind of grew up in the 'Paris is burning' kind of generation, I recognize that there are certain privileges that I have as a same gender loving man who lives in New York, who can go to clubs and bars and affirming churches. In comparison to sodomy laws that are still very present in Africa, in context to the ways that mobs commit violence upon queer people in the Caribbean. And I was noticing that like some of this violence is biblical, like they would take the queer person and chop them up into pieces like Judges 19. And what is that about? And so there was a connection I felt like not only was I wanting to identify myself in that black church experience of, can I get a witness? Like I know I was there, but I wasn't finding myself in Dr. Blount's text, but also to be connected with queer folk in Kingston who are living in sewers and in places. And so the first things that I started writing about what we're imagining the man with the Legion in same gender loving perspective, especially considering the way that the community is okay with allowing him to be a living person in a dead place and being invested in that. And a later essay for Fordham University Press like "outside are the dogs" of Revelation, and the way that Mugabe calls people, queer folks, pigs and dogs and feeling that kind of connectedness. And continuing to, to wonder about the implications for biblical interpretation, for people that are on the continent and that are in the Caribbean countries whose lived experiences are not being represented or not being asked for, right. And I think another part of that is I want to make sure I get in the hallways of SBL. So where it started out for me, was finding the place usually in the basement, where African-American biblical interpretation was happening and finding the place, usually in the basement where African biblical interpretation was happening, and the same for postcolonial, and the same for contextual. And it felt to me like Africana happened as we passed each other in the hallways going to our particular parts and I think that that's also what the potential of Africana biblical interpretation as we are still forming it, can be. Thank you.

Herbert: Thank you, Eric. Finally, let's turn to Annie.

Annie: Hi. Thank you Benny and all who thought enough of me to select me for this. I tried to get out of it, Benny... it's not that I don't want to do this, I just don't feel comfortable in this type of environment, but going back to the question. The only HBCU I went to was Hampton. Since then I've been in PWIs and now I'm at Shaw, which is basically the mother of HBCUs. When I realized what I wanted to, it was something that I didn't want to do. I did not want to be the voice African Americans. I didn't want to be that black voice because I was in this white society most of my postgraduate days. And so, when I got into this it was kind of like a fluke. I was in an Old Testament class with Dr. Leo Purdue at TCU. He was

talking about post-colonialism. It just struck me that it was something that needed to be pursued. I was, I have always been in the New Testament. It was prophesied that me at my last school that I'm going to be in Hebrew Bible, but I was like "no". Nothing wrong with it. I have always been a critic of Pauline studies and a critic of those writers, not writers, but the writers of the letters. Because I kind of felt that some voices were not being heard. If, you know, the letters were written and published, but you never heard what the problem was except through the letters. And so when we started talking about post-colonialism and marginalization, it just struck me to say, Hey, this is something that I really could pursue. And I started out with, you know, the book of Colossians and this whole Colossian heresy thing. And I, I debunked that, it's like there's no, there was no heresy there because we didn't hear from them, we heard from the writer, who was supposedly Paul or somebody who was like him, so I wanted to, I just wanted to pursue this. I wanted to pursue post-colonial studies. And at that time, there were not many African Americans or black people doing that. As a matter of fact, I tried to get into, into my PhD program here in the States and it was really nobody who was seriously looking at that. So, I applied to a couple of schools overseas and lo and behold, Sugi found out what I was doing. And he asked me if I would... if he could work with me and you know, that he called me from the UK, I'm in Texas, and many said that I took the phone said [mock screams with excitement] because I had come to know that he is like, no, you know, the guy. I was able to study, study with him and it just started there. I'm just so excited to be able to do this and I just, I didn't want to be the voice of black America. I did. So I always say that and from an American black American African-American perspective I want to make that clear. I, not that I'm ashamed of that, just that I am not that voice, even though it felt like it at that time. And that's how I pursue my work. I pursue my work from my perspective that that is inclusive. Because when you think about post-coloniality it, it... Black Americans didn't really, didn't really feel it then, but conversations now have, have come to show us that this is a global thing and that from what I see the problem began with colonization and how that has impacted. And so the Bible for me, I'm still searching still looking at instances of empire, and imperialism, and not just one, but a black perspective, but it's how, how empire has impacted the writing, the canon, how all of that has impacted that this study of biblical studies. Thank you.

Herbert: Thank you, Annie. And so, now that we've made our introductory remarks and displayed our varying points of entry into, into the enterprise, let's let the conversation begin. I am, I'm no longer going to call on you because class doesn't start for another two months and I'm sure that since we've all just finished our semesters, we'd like to move away from that format. And so, let me throw out the next question. And I'll invite you all to respond as you're so moved and respond to each other as you were so moved and engaged. What is your sense of Africana biblical interpretation at this moment? And what do you see as exciting? And what do you see as limiting? And I want to think about that question broadly, of course, but I also want to think about it in a, in a more focused way that is in terms of scholarly possibilities, that is, as I think about that, I'm thinking about the means and possibilities of publication and what can we publish, and also professional opportunities, that is, can we get tenure writing this stuff? I mean, I think, you know, some of the practical concerns that, that we all think about in the back of our minds, as we are being moved and led by, by the spirit, and to pursue our academic questions and cultural questions. So, let's begin there.

Eric: I'm going to be brave and jump in, and just say, I think that what's exciting about Africana biblical interpretation now is that we have the opportunity to create our agendas, if we take that opportunity when we, you know... Africana studies always poses the question from whence does it, does Africana come? Right, and so is it from, from, from the continent to the diaspora, from the diaspora to the continent. Is it both? Is it simultaneous? And I think that the answer to all of that is yes. Right. I think that there are opportunities for us to lay claim to what, what does it mean? Especially to be a person of African descent,

post-Pandemic, post 2020, post the Trump era? What does racialized capitalism look like? What is the status of the immigrant look like? What is the status of the person of color scholar in the academy look like? I mean, Herbert, you asked a question about tenure. And I mean, you know, I think we should ask a question about tenure, frankly, given some of the, the news that we've seen. And so perhaps and again, I'll be the junior scholar and perhaps be the naive one here. Whereas the 20th century was a period of time where African American, and Caribbean, and African scholars, and post-colonial scholars were trying to prove to the academy that we can be Bible scholars. Now that we know that, now that we know that we can get on some other kind of stuff. How do we rebuild our, our, our folks? How do we enrich and ennoble our, our, our people on our own perspectives and to say to the SBL, this is what it is? And I'll stop there before I get myself in trouble, but I think that this is, we don't...the master's tools will not dismantle the master's house.

Michael: I'm glad Eric went first. I didn't want to give him the impression that I was actively publishing in the area, but one of the things I've, I've noticed is that it kind of a really great expansion of Africana biblical interpretation into all kinds of areas that didn't exist when I wrote *Blackening of the Bible* and some of which I would hope, I would hope it would come to fruition and I think it has, and in many respects, especially around LGBT contextual interpretation. So, I'm really grateful for that. I think the limitation is, is what it, what it's always been, which is the curriculum and the imaginations of scholars to see and to think about what is "valid" or "adequate" biblical interpretation. You know, I will say that, although it probably, it would seem, it would seem heresy to some, to say that you don't teach in the kind of traditional historical critical model, and maybe you don't do away with that entirely, but it is, it is, I think, not only possible, but advantageous to bring in the importance of contextualized interpretations. And, so why not require it? I know at my institution, we require that that you take it. It's, it's, it's not, it's not a negotiable course. And so in that sense, we're, we're telling our students and the world that we see this as being on par with any other form of biblical interpretation. As far as tenure goes, I mean, well, there are two questions there, I think. One is what's the future of tenure? Now, I think at research one schools, that's probably not a, a big question. Now, but for other schools, just, it, it, it is an existential question and one that, that I think we're gonna, we're gonna see fewer and fewer tenured positions going forward. So, maybe that's maybe, I don't know... maybe that's not as pressing as we sometimes think it is. But I think if we, if we thinking about tenure as a process in which our work gets compared, gets judged by our peers who are doing that kind of work, I think that the environment is much better now than it was back in 2005 when *Blackening* came out, you know, where you had to explain why it is that you thought this was a worthy endeavor. I think now that's not as much of a question and there are people out there who can, who are, who have standing, who can analyze your work. And so I think that, it's become more acceptable among, let's say our, our, our peers who are, who are not of color, but let me say this too, though. And this was always something that stirred me and that is, if one of my colleagues who was not of color wrote a book that was, that was esoteric and people didn't understand necessarily what the book was trying to do, they got tenure because they were considered brilliant. If, if, if, if we in doing the same kind of thing, people scratch their heads and wonder. And I think that, that, that, that day, I hope as it's passing away.

Annie: Yes. Mike, I think you have a point really good point there when you speak about being noticed, I think that's what you were saying by, by the whiter world, I'm saying the white world. I think that was what's happening now with us as, as black Americans and black scholars is that we're listening more to each other. It's not so important to many of us that others hear us, as long as we hear each other. And that makes us a majority, rather than a minority. And the other thing, as far as younger scholars, I mean, the conversations I've had with younger scholars have been amazing. I mean, I was like, whoa. Well, I have a student who wanted to rewrite the canon. This is like, you know, all that, apocryphal work, you know? It's

out there. Why, why, why do we, you know, and I had to. It gave me pause because that's kind of thing that, you know, that I looked at. But as far as tenure goes, it was, I've given up a bit on that working at an HBCU, but the contract keeps coming, so I'm good. But the, the idea that that tenure was such a big deal and it held such a hold on, people that, you know, you, you wouldn't want to apply to a school unless they had tenure and not thinking that well, what can I do at this school now? How can I impact the students? You know, that kind of thing. But, yeah, that's it, that's what I had to say.

Michael: Can I jump in Annie? I agree with you. I think, I think you're, you're, you're, you're right. You're spot on. And, and what you were in, what you were saying.

Margaret: So for me, one of the things that's been interesting and exciting is to see the advent of a kind of self-reflective post-coloniality. And I'm thinking particularly of the work of Shanell Smith. I'm thinking of the work of Shively Smith. I'm thinking of the work of [inaudible]. I'm thinking of the ways in which Black descendants of slavery in this country are also looking at the role that this country plays in the oppression of black people outside of this country. And their positioning in that. Whether or not, they want it. Whether or not they chose it. You know, I, as I used to say to my students at ITC, my cousin died in Panama, in the war. His grandfather was a Panamanian, but he went to war because that was the way that he could get money to go to college. And so you've got wonderful parallels between the, the Jews who decided to become a Roman soldiers, right, in the ancient world out of all of this. So this kind of self-reflective post-coloniality, what Shanell Smith calls, "ambi-valence", I think it was very, very rich, very fertile ground for beginning to have a kind of a more expensive, more self-aware conversation of our place as African diasporic people at the center of Rome. Living in Rome and participating in that to whatever extent that is for those of us who live in this country. So there's that one piece. I think that's really, really amazing. I'm so grateful for, especially on the continent, the push for open access materials, because not only does that benefit those who are outside of this country, it deeply benefits scholars in this country, to have access to what's going on in Stellenbosch, to have access to what's going on in Petersburg, you have access to what's going on all over the continent, have access what's going on in the Caribbean. When we didn't have access before those conversations were cut off. Now we can actually, you know, grab those. We can get onto *HTS* and the other journals out there and read what's going on and the scholarship and the discourse outside of this country. That I think has the potential. If we're intentional about engaging that, of really reshaping the way we talk to each other, about what we mean by Africana of biblical studies so that it doesn't become a kind of myopic focus on one culture or, or mythos of a lost past that may not have really existed in the first place. So there's that. There was a third thing, but it will slosh back around, so I will stop there.

Eric: And I just want to just add to that, that not only the afterlives of slavery in the United States, but the afterlives of the missionary project outside of the United States and, you know, just being amazed, Margaret you've been through Matanzas in, in, in Cuba where, where it's brought to our attention that in the ports where the, where the ships came would also be the Catholic church, or other churches, which would, which would baptize the inhabitants and send them on to where they were going. And to think about things like the Westminster Confession of Faith that is happening at the same time as the Protestant reformation and all of these, all of these kinds of like church father commentaries that become kind of the bedrock of historical critical while they are participating in this kind of missionary project to Africa, Asia, South America, the Americas, and to kind of reflect back on, like, what are the aftereffects of those things, I think are part of this project as well.

Margaret: This was the third thought I had it came back around, I knew it would. Vincent started something that I don't think anybody fully took him up on. Which was the idea of thinking about lived life and actually studying lived life. He did this with art. He did this with history. He did this with, you know,

theater and literature and all that other stuff. It would be fascinating and I think it would be rich if folks, instead of allowing the studies of the black church to be in the Africana studies department, and then having Bible be something separate, if we were to pair up with a sociologist, to do that kind of work that was observing and taking data and actually looking at particular churches and how are they engaging with texts in particular ways that's data-driven and not simply anecdotal. There's nothing wrong with anecdotal. There's nothing wrong with claiming our own lived history, but it's always particular, right? It's always a peculiar history. And it's always coming through one person's experience, one group's experience of what it means to be black in America. What would it, what would happen if we were to start thinking sociologically about actually studying this, actually observing how Bible is used, actually observing how people interact with us? I had, they taught a course with a sociologist on my campus this semester and one of my students observed services that were online from a black church. And then she went and read Vincent's book and she said, oh, I get what's going on. And she began to piece stuff together. It was wonderful. She was able to see this as part of a phenomenon and not simply a way of reading the text. But also a phenomenon of language of engagement with the world. So there is, there is still a thing, a fertile ground there that needs plowing. Okay.

Funlola: I think Margaret is talking about transdisciplinarity here for, which I totally agree with. But something that I find a bit more limiting, is in terms of what she mentioned about access, open access. We might talk about open-access, but we know that when we talk about Africana biblical interpretation there's the difference between the biblical interpretation on the African continent and the African diaspora and the, in terms of the geopolitical socioeconomic differences in both spaces. So now what, what is limiting, what I find limiting, for those of us on the African continent in spite of the open access is the paucity of literature, that we have to build on here. Yes, we can borrow from our comrades in the diaspora and try to compare and, but because there are state differences anyway, then that becomes limiting when we don't have sources that go further back. You know, most of the things we build on are like 30 years. Maybe if you 40 years and that's all. So for upcoming scholars, that's quite limited when you don't have, you know, enough to, to work on come this end.

Justin: I feel like one of the exciting areas for African-American biblical interpretation that's really generating some good publications has to do with Vincent Wimbush's push for looking at the, not necessarily only as you mentioned, Margaret, the data-driven sociological study of living interpreters, but also the voices of African-Americans across our history. And I think there have been great publications recently that push for looking at those voices. And what's particularly exciting about that is its relevance to today. I think that biblical studies sometimes voices an anxiety of irrelevance to say, oh, you know, how are we going, what are we going to do to make sure that our discipline stays important or has some meaning to those outside of small circles of academics? And the type of cultural study or a reception history or whatever you want to call it, that is happening in African-American biblical studies has connected with a current moment of people saying, hey, how can black people use the resources that we have access to change ideologies that will influence us in a positive way right now, considering existential threats to black life. And in biblical studies, I don't know that a lot of sub-disciplines and biblical studies are thinking about that, but Africana biblical studies has resources that go towards that. And so I find that very exciting. And it also fits with the something that I heard from multiple people today about how your introduction to and interest to, interest in Africana biblical interpretation has had something to do with the fact that it seemed relevant to you coming from the Caribbean, coming from thinking about where are the queer voices and people are being murdered in mob violence. Like these are, these are the questions that inform us and it makes it, it makes a difference in terms of what research we do. And fortunately, I think that that's exciting because it's impactful in ways that other areas of biblical studies aren't automatically impactful. I don't know much about tenure.

Michael: Let me, let me say too. I appreciate you talking about it being impactful, because I think, and I don't know how Margaret and Herbert feel about this, but coming through, most of my professors didn't care if there was any relevance at all to what was going on in the text and what was happening in the present.

Herbert: No. I agree with you. Since you raised it, I agree. Most of my professors weren't interested in that, they were interested in this academic question that they understood as disconnected from, from the real lived world and because it was disconnected from the real world it was pristine and that was the object. I think I only had one professor in my graduate program who was concerned about the so what question and that was of course Renita Weems, but certainly as a seminarian, both out Randall Bailey and Charles Cofer were always interested in those questions and, and would push us toward the, the, so what question or what is the, what are the consequences for real lived experiences? And I think that for African a biblical interpretation, one of the, one of the characteristics that, that makes it unique is that, you know, we hold that question as, as a significant criteria for doing the work. And so in many ways it is antagonistic to another part of a larger enterprise in terms of his motivations and impetuses. And I think that's a good thing.

Margaret: And so Vincent was my doctor father, so, that was kind of a guiding question at Union, obviously. In fact, he's the one who taught me to read texts that way. I remember reading Burton Mack's book or somebody else's book and he would say yes, but there's no conversation whatsoever about what's going on in the world around at this time. And, you know, that was such a constant drum beat behind his work. That that kind of so what question was a driving question. It's kind of why it was hard for me to find a dissertation topic because what I really wanted to do was something Caribana, but I couldn't find the resources. I didn't know where to look and I didn't have anyone to guide me in that direction. And that was a, so what question for me? Why is this rather than if I'm not doing something that matters? So I, but I, but I hear what you're what you're saying, because I will tell you that my colleagues here at Austin Seminary and here where I teach I'm in the unusual position of having three other colleagues, all of whom are of color in Bible at a white seminary. And all of them would say exactly what, what Herbert and Michael just said, especially the one who graduated from Harvard. This particular question was a non-starter. As to tenure, I think part of the tenure issue, I know some schools are getting rid of it, but for those schools that do have it, I think it is incumbent upon those of us who have made, made it through to that point to be accessible to junior scholars and to make sure that we have their backs. Because we have to be the arbiters of what is acceptable work. We cannot allow that to be simply something that white folks do. We have to be able to save from our positions with our full titles, you know, President Michael Brown, you know, Professor Herbert Marbury. We need to be able to say with that fullness that, you know, we are scholars. We are seniors in the discipline, and this is excellent work in the discipline that's moving the discourse. It's on our shoulders to do that. So to the extent that people are here, [INAUDIBLE] Yeah, I think it's the job of senior members of our guild who are of color. And we're still a very small minority, but we're not as small as when my father did his part, when we were able to count everybody on two hands back in the 80s.

Herbert: No I fully agree with, I would certainly echo with both you, Margaret, and Michael, and certainly with Justin has said, I think it's, it's absolutely important that, that we take up the mantle and to, and become arbiters and, and advocates really rather than gatekeepers, because in doing so we help move the field, and move the field in ways that, toward the direction of the questions of the other scholars. I came along at a time when I think we're probably on the cusp of being, of being more being free enough to ask different questions. When I came along, the dissertation was still my initiation into the academy. And so I still, at that point had to demonstrate my historical critical and philological chops if you will. I'm

so glad that day has passed and, and in many quarters. But so I didn't get to write the book I wanted to write with my dissertation. I didn't get to write that book until I wrote *Pillars* years later. And I, I could respond to question. I, and specifically, I remember responding to questions from, in *Blackening the Bible*, questions that Vincent Wimbush had asked an African-American Africans and African-Americans in the Bible, and questions that Hugh Page had asked in the Africana biblical commentary. And so I took those as the impetuses for my project. I wanted to write and it felt good to be able to take as those impetuses mandates from three African-American scholars.

So let's move to the next question. What would you say are the contributions of Africana biblical interpretation to the discipline of biblical studies as a whole? And when, I pose that question, I'd like for us to not to conceive of the discipline of biblical studies as a whole as somehow centering the historical critical enterprise that rolls out from the enlightenment project. So I, I hope we can think of the discipline of biblical studies far more broadly, in terms of post-colonial studies, in terms of minoritized biblical criticism, in terms of the various contextual studies that we, that we engaged today. And, and, and I would say also that certainly the historical critical enterprise is also a contextual study. We, we rarely identify it that way, but it is merely a contextual study. One that's often been antagonistic to our own cultural survival, but a contextual study, nonetheless.

Justin: If I can speak briefly, I would say, one of the big things is what you just pointed out in asking the question, an important contribution has to do with the contextualization of interpreters of making, making it apparent to those who are learning biblical studies that, hey, this, every, every approach in this discipline is informed by contextualized interpreters. And Africana biblical interpretation is not the only one who has pushed for this idea, but for me in terms of teaching the classroom, it serves as a, as a helpful example for showing students that idea. I'm able to draw from, I think jeez... Mitzi Smith's introduction to *Insights into African-American Biblical Interpretation*, I think that's the title. But it's an introductory work that's kind of recent and in the introduction to that book, she points out from the very beginning, the importance of the person doing the interpretation and how that makes a difference in terms of what's put out of the text. And the difference is not it's not just a matter of interest.... I'm sorry, that's not the best word...it's not just a matter of, that, which is fascinating. The difference is, that she starts with, has to do with power in terms of slavery. Actually Herb, in the beginning of pillars, *Pillars of Fire and Cloud*, you do something similar with the, the book being silent for... I forget how to say his last name...

Herbert Marbury: [James Albert] Ukawsaw Gronniosaw

Jordan: Thank you. Yes. And it's the same idea that he perceives the book and has to speak for it. The white enslaver, perceives the book and asked to speak for it and who they are makes a huge difference in terms of how they speak for the book. And for my students who are just learning about biblical interpretation, that's huge because I'm telling them you can't just hide behind, well, this is what it says. You have to take some responsibility and we all do. So to me, that's one of the huge contributions that, that I take when I teach biblical studies. I'm not just talking about Africana biblical interpretation, but I use us and our readings, as an example to say, hey, this is an important component of interpreting the Bible for anybody in any context.

Margaret: And I think you can trace that from *Stony the Road*, the two volume set that, the three volume set that Fernando and then Marianne Tolbert put out in 1993, which I think was a pivotal text for those of us coming into seminary at that time. The reading from this place set because that set, was exactly that discussion, was shifting to saying everybody is coming from a place, right. And everybody ought to be owning that place and, and, and considering how that place affects the way we read. I think also, the, the importance of autobiography allows us to see different things and to ask different questions. Right, when

you're an immigrant and you're reading a text about people moving, you ask different questions than when you have been raised in a country, all your life. When you are a person who has been minoritized and you see another person being minoritized in a text, you ask different questions and a person who's been in the majority all your life. When you are a woman, reading a text or when you were queer reading a text, you asked different questions from your own lived experience. And if those questions are not invalidated, and you are given permission or you take permission because sometimes you have to take permission that hasn't been given to you and ask the important question... but when those questions, when you take those questions and those questions are invited or you make them valid, then it changes the way you read. And it not only changes the way we read, it changes the way everybody else reads. We cannot unread things now.

Michael: I agree. I agree. I'm sorry. Do you want to go ahead Funlola? Okay. Okay. When I was working on *Blackening*, I, I decided to teach the class on the interpretation, only using black scholars. And they weren't doing anything different per se. I mean, Cofer is still a historian, you know, Bailey still a literary critic, I mean, you know? And, but the resistance I got, even from the black students. And so it wasn't until like halfway through the course that I think people got it. They started to understand what it meant to be a contextualized reader, but, but it was very rough at first and it, and it was, and it, and it was really puzzling to me because the only difference was color. That was it.

Funlola: Yeah, I think I agree with what all who've been saying that context matters. That's, that's one thing that African, Africana biblical interpretation as brought to the table. And for me, I will say this particular type of interpretation it shows us, it shows the whole world, or the whole guild that no one, no single group, or no single generation has a monopoly of interpretation. You know, and that there is no superiority of interpretation so because you do historical criticism does not make a contextual criticism inferior. So I think the insistence of black voices in these last three decades to be heard has shown that yes, context matters, but there is no superiority here. And we are going to be continued to be heard. I suppose then the issues of post-coloniality, decoloniality, womanist interpretation, those are the things, the critical contributions of Africana biblical interpretation. Of course, this is done with voices from the origin like from Asia and other spaces, but context matters. I think that is the very central part of the contribution of ideas.

Annie: Yeah. I want to say the historical criticism is what got me where I am as far as looking at imperialism. And so what was meant to, to stop us from thinking outside of this box that they try to put us in really uncovered a lot of things in scripture for us. And we need to speak about it because it's and we do because it is, it is in that context that you find the imperialism, you find the racism, you find those hidden voices, those hidden things. Like, like, Michael, when you were talking about *Blackening*, when I brought that to my students and show that it was the same kind of thing, right. Nope. He wasn't black. They wasn't black, you know, Solomon didn't marry no black woman. And so, you know, I just see that sometimes when things are put into place to, to block you, I think as people of color and as people of different genders and different persuasions are able to see how we can use that to really uncover some things that I will, they only think that people are, we're trying to hide. I look, I look at a scripture and I'm very suspicious and looking at what it, what are they trying to hide? What, what are you not saying? You know, why did you say it that way? You know, and I tried to get my students to see that. And look at how to set that, you know, how did, why did they use that interpretation, you know, that word, you know, that kind of thing. So I just want to thank you, Michael, for that, that, that book because I like to shock my students and that really, that really brought out some stuff with that, man. I had one student even cry because she was upset with what she had been taught. She was like you, are you serious? I'm saying Dr. Michael Brown said so, it's good.

Funlola: Annie, would you, would you say that you using the masters tools to pull down the master's house then?

Annie: Yes, ma'am. That's what, that's, what I've been doing since they brought us over here.

Eric: There's also the potential to rearrange our relationships with power, right? We're talking about the way that we have been given the syllabus and our, our ability to choose other scholars, right. I'm kind of thinking about one of Randy Bailey's tirades, ah, you got all these scholars writing the work, why aren't you citing, citing those scholars? We're, we're able to actually re-canonize or, or organize so to redo something that has been done, but to create the, the, the council of scholarship that we're going to consult for the purpose that we have. I think that that's a very different kind of orientation toward the scholarship. I think in terms of these relationships with power to Margaret's point of about being able to be kind of like ambassadors and arbiters and not gatekeepers. I think that that's a choice. I think that those are opportunities. I think that it's a way that Africana people can, can be in the world, which is very different than this Dr. Muhtar, Dr. Fatter kind of, you know, hazing, and kind of way that we've seen before. And I think it's also relationship with community, right. Again, Margaret, what is your community of accountability? What is your community of accountability? How are you showing up? And what is your public facing scholarship saying to real live flesh and blood readers as we visit churches, as we visit community groups, as we speak in webinars and participate on panels? There's a way that Africana kind of can exist in an otherwise, to kind of borrow from general Western other folks, and otherwise way of being. And I think that that is, those are the big contributions to biblical studies from Africana biblical interpretation.

Margaret: Let me add two others. One is a redefinition of reception history. And I'm thinking of what Justin was talking about earlier, too. Reception history for so long has, has traced itself through the Protestant white church. And how the Protestant white church has attended to the question of how the Bible should be read pre and post Holocaust. And perhaps after Vatican II, right, adding the Catholics in on that. Africana biblical interpretation has said Old Elizabeth is reception history, Frederick Douglas is reception history, Harriet Tubman is reception history, Sojourner Truth is reception history, and Otis Moss is reception history, King is reception history, you know, Septima Clark is reception history, that we don't have to limit reception history to White Protestant Churches. Reception history comes through particular lines of people. Right. So in the Caribbean, I would say William Wattie, Joyce Bailey, I would say Horace Russell of blessed memory who just passed these our reception history. I would say Noel Dexter, the hymn writer, is reception history, because he is reinterpreting text through the lens of Caribbean language and culture to make him the need for the people. That is reception history. So we, we get to, we have exploded with it. The other thing I want to hold up, and I we can't have this conversation without calling her name, the Good Reverend Dr. Wil Gaffney. Creativity. The audacity of creativity. The way in which Wil has fundamentally shaped the womanist question, whether or not you agree with her. It's both audacious and extremely creative. And that, and her, her brilliance in Hebrew Bible has forced other people to pay attention. So I think we need to talk about the way in which just the plain creativity and the audacity of that creativity is a gift that we have given to the academy also.

Annie: And I'd like to what, what comes to mind, what we're saying is that it's kind of a touchy point with, with some people, is the term "Africana". And that's what, when I, and when Benny asked me to, to do this, it brought me back a little bit because many black Americans do not identify with Africa. And so, when we, we have to, I think we have to be careful in, in that, you know, I read Callahan's book, *The Talking Book*, and how he terms it as we are children of, yeah, children of slavery. And that's where our history actually began. And so I just want to put that out there. Not everybody agrees with that. I'm just saying that that is something.

Funlola: I would add something in that line of definitions of what Africana is for those who identify as Africana, then I think another contribution of Africana biblical interpretation is this idea that okay if we consider the Bible as a kind of universal text now, it's used everywhere by many people all over the globe and also historically as well. The, the fact that modern interpreters from Africa or Africana interpreters are able to say, yes, this text, it's not just, it's not just the universal document, there are African voices in the text itself. And if African voices and African people or Africana people, if you, if we want to stick to the term are represented in the text, then the voices of their offspring should not be muted also. That's they, they have to be heard. And those voices have to be heard loud and clear. So I think interpreters, modern interpreters like Adamo, you know, they brought that to the fore and they fought all their academic lives to ensure that they were had that Africana people are not muted. So I think that's a big contribution as well.

Herbert: All right. Well, thank you all for a robust, engaging and thoughtful conversation thus far. All right, we turn to our final question. And this is sort of a, you know, where are we going, how my mind has changed, how my house remained the same, and what are the next steps sort of question. But, how can the discipline of biblical studies become more diverse and inclusive and not just biblical studies as a whole, but Africana biblical studies in particular? So, how can the large enterprise expand? How can we do some, do some self-critique, some introspection here? And think about ways that our own enterprise might need to expand. Where are the edges, in other words, where we marginalize?

Annie: I don't know if this is really happening, but, if we can listen more to each other. We're not a mono person. You know, and so we don't, you don't all think the same about, about certain things, but sometimes we are afraid. I know that when I've come, I've come into the academy kind of late, you know, I taught in elementary school, high school, whatever, had children, you know, then came back. And so, the voices that, that week that we have right in this room itself., you know, being able to, to listen to each other and, and critique each other without getting, you know, I've had so many, so many people who are coming to my life, you know, through the academy that have been very supportive and I have been tentative to speak about certain things. You encouraged me, Margaret, to, to, to speak. You know, just to speak, you know, and I'm seeing that if we can continue on that path where we can accept each other for who we are and not fall into that trap of the crab and the barrel kind of thing, but the identity thing, you know, we don't have to identify, we can just be.

Jordan: What I have to offer is not as much a critique of an area for a self-improvement, as a celebration of something I've seen in the past and I think is continuing to make the discipline more diverse and inclusive. And that is Eric mentioned, what are we doing with our public facing scholarship? And Annie mentioned Wil Gaffney's work. And when I think about that sort of thing, I know I've talked to current scholars who, who will say, Renita Weems just a sister away. Really gave me the idea. Hey, this is something I could be a part of, I could be involved in. And I, I feel the same way when I share. Wil Gaffney's womanist Midrash with not just students, but I share it with people in churches because I feel like this is a way in which biblical scholarship can be very thorough with the work that she does and also accessible to people who are not just at seminary. And I think about that. I think about Yolanda Norton's Beyoncé Mass. And I think about these as, as things where someone who, people who have diverse interests and ideas might see that and say, oh, biblical scholarship might be a space where who I am is welcome. And that's before ever, you know, already being, getting one of these degrees. These are people that are outside of those spaces. And so I think that that is one thing that we are, some of us are already doing well that will can continue to contribute to bring in diverse and inclusive voices.

Michael: If there's going to, I don't, I don't know if this is, I wouldn't say this is a self-critique, but I will say from what I've noticed from my vantage point, is that, a lot, quite often, African-Americans and other

people of African descent don't realize that they actually have an interest in biblical studies until sometimes like their second year in seminary. And unfortunately, given the language issues that it almost it's like almost too late. And if you look at our competitive PhD programs, I mean, let's just be honest, there's a secret time limit, if you're over a certain age, they're not going to take you, you know. And so I think that we're going to have to, that's going to be something we're going to have to negotiate in the future. You know, How are we gonna, how, you know, how are we going to introduce languages earlier? If that's the way we're going to do it or some other way. I'm not going to, I'm not trying to be heretical here in that sense, but, but, but as long as the, as we require this kind of old school language acquisition, then I think we're, we're, we're, we're barring the inclusiveness we really we're really trying to get after.

Annie: I so agree with you because now that I'm teaching the language, rather than studying language, you go to Blue Letter Bible or all these things there, and you can just interpret it, you know, and see all these different ways to use it. And I think, I think it was, it, it may have been, and I'm suspicious deliberately done to hamper people or to cause people to not study to go into biblical studies. Cause I was told that that is the most difficult PhD to get, and because they said that, of course, I pursued it. But, you know, that's the mindset that I had, that, you know, these languages, you're not only that, you know, you had to have two modern languages that, you know, but you can take them over the summer. You know, so how important would it be if you can take it over the summer? But it was these stipulations that I put that and put it in our place.

Margaret: I've got a ditto that question about the languages. The gift at ITC was that we had a whole year to teach Greek and whole year to teach Hebrew. And as long as we had a Presbyterian seminary that wasn't going away. Because the Presbyterians needed it. But the, the, the side effect of that was that we were able to give students enough time to actually sit with what is this language and how does it function? And we were able as a result to prepare folk, like a Herbert Marbury, like an Eric Thomas, to go on to do Doctoral work. Even here at a Presbyterian seminary, where all our Presbyterian students have to do two languages, they get one semester and it is fast and then they don't pick it up again. Wait, unless you're coming in with languages, they don't have a chance of entering PhD work from here. You know, so this question of languages and language acquisitions may actually be a question of attending to the churches and saying to the churches, if you want scholars in Bible, we need to teach language. And maybe setting up language courses in the churches. Because that may be the only way to get folk ready to get into seminary. Seminaries are cutting language options left and right in this country. And then classics departments are disappearing from places like Howard.

Michael: Let me, let me say, let me say it really quickly and say, as an administrator that is true. But, it just in particular theological education is under so much pressure now that it is, it is really difficult to determine in some ways, which, which way, which way to go right. And we have to be a lot more creative. And that's one of the things we're trying to think through here is how do we include language acquisition, even though it's not required for ordination, and that's usually how you get those classes? Right, they're required for ordination. Even though it's not required for ordination, how do we introduce language? Right? And I think, and Margaret, that might be a good point. We have a lay leadership institute that we just launched and that might be, there may be a possibility, there may be possibilities there, we can introduce people to biblical languages. You know, but it's, but, but it is, it isn't a necessity if we want people of color to continue to come into the guild.

Margaret: And that's it. Exactly. Michael, I think the, the gift of the black church, in particular to the extent that I can speak to that having been at ITC for 14 years, is a very strong lay leadership and a very, a deep passion about the Bible. And if you go to the pastor, and you say, you know, you've got some creative, young people who should be thinking about becoming professors of Bible, we need to get them

the languages and let's get some languages going on this church, I think you'll find a lot of the church mothers will come along with. The last time I taught Greek here online, I had five people auditing the texts just because they wanted to. They were not even taking it for credit. One was a grandmother in a black Southern Baptist church who just always wanted to know. So I think we underestimate, and this is also the way, the way in which we talk about ourselves, right. We underestimate that these languages are not esoterica for the church. It's something that, that, especially in the black church, people have got caught walking around, calling God Jehovah Jireh, now with all of the problematic of that, but they're, they're, they're pulling like, Jehovah Sabbaoth, and I want to have a rhema work. They care about these things, right? This is, this is something that's part of the tradition of the church but we're not offering to like, correct and shape that in any way. So, I would say, go for it.

Annie: Margaret, what I would, I think though is the way that it's taught is a big problem. You know, it's just like being like, I took French for seven years now and, I only, it only, it only rang to me when that song, Marmalade”.. “Voulez-vous coucher... I was like what? Okay. So when it became relevant, and I think that that needs to be the part of teaching language, it has, it has to show relevance immediately. Otherwise, you lose people.

Margaret: You're absolutely right. I remember teaching on the perfect tense. I don't know if you were in this class, Eric. I don't know. Kevin McKeethan was in the class, is just who I remember, I was teaching in the perfect tense at ITC. And Kevin was in the back row and he just flips his locks at me and says, “Doc, I have verbed, you have verbed. Who talks like this?” And, you know, it was in here I'm going to call on God, it was a God moment, I turned back to him and, and said, “I have been to the mountain top. And I have looked over.” And, you know, this is ITC by the time I got to ITC in the Promised Land, they were having a praise service. But then we were able to stop and say, okay, what is the difference between I went to the mountain top and I have been to the mountain top? And all of a sudden the perfect tense clicked in, in a way that it would not have, it was not culturally relevant. So you're exactly right.

Eric: Can I just jump in and perhaps embarrass Margaret to this point about languages? I think that one of the most significant moments in my entire life, and I'm going to be 53 on June 23rd, was when we were in our Greek class and we had this whole, we, we celebrated communion. And the text was written in Greek on the board. And Margaret performed the communion for our Greek class. And, and there's something about I pass on to you, what has been passed on to me. As we sat in the Charles Cofer room and the Hugh Page room, like there's something about the, the shoulders upon which we stand, who were told you're black and you can't do Bible. You're black and you can't do languages. You're black and you don't know what this Hebrew is. And for us to be able to recognize those words and those verbs and those phrases and participate in this original language was something that you can only imagine what that must've been like to, to be a part of that. And I can't wait to stand up in front of a class to say, I pass one to you what has been passed on to me. And I think that that's the power of Africana biblical interpretation. As it has to we'll figure ourselves out with the languages. Then we'll figure ourselves out with the tenure, but I mean, this whole, I pass on to you what has been passed on to me for the purpose that you can go out, go ye therefore and, and pass it on to others, I think is the power and the potential.

Herbert: Eric. Thank you for an appropriate last word. So, thank you all for your contributions. I particularly thank LaToya for all the work that you've done to make this conversation possible. Thank you, Benny Lieu for the invitation and for getting together this panel. And I thank all of you for your contributions to the conversation. Certainly, this has been insightful; t's been robust and engaging. Thank you more so for your contributions to the field and your ongoing commitment to perpetual inclusiveness, that is, opening the doors for those who are coming behind us and dismantling those structures that constrain us. Thank you also for doing what I call, and I think this is what we all do in Africana biblical

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studies, the work of facing down the empire. And I look forward to spaces and places where this conversation will continue. Thank you all.