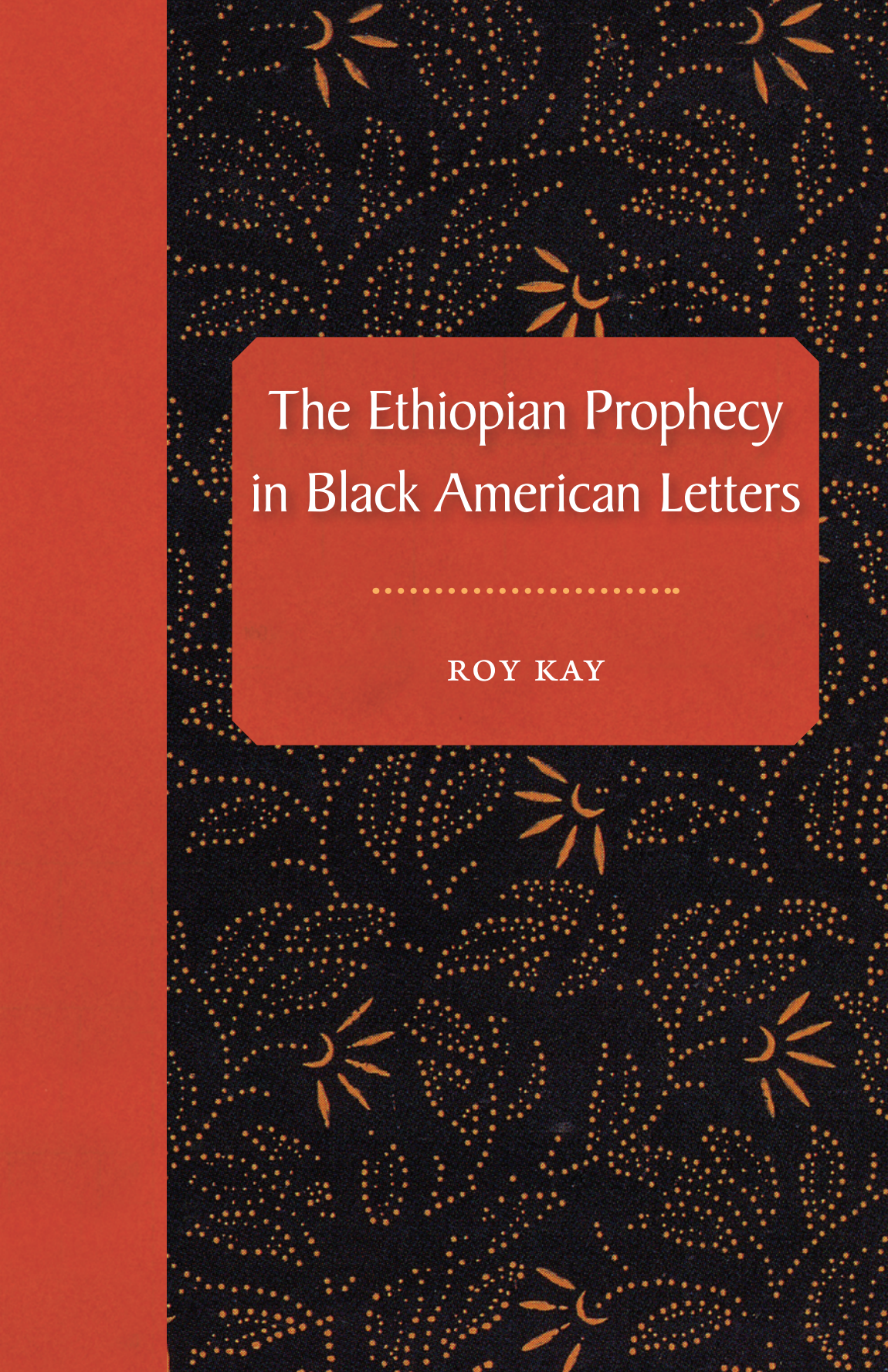




The Ethiopian Prophecy in Black American Letters



ROY KAY

The Ethiopian Prophecy in Black American Letters

History of African American Religions



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Preface

It was through my exposure to the scholarship of John Cartwright in 1983 and the work of John Wright in the late 1980s that I became familiar with the significance of Psalm 68:31 (“Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God”) in black letters. Cartwright applied an interdisciplinary approach employing history, sociology, and theology to the articulations and institutions of black religious feelings and thoughts in America.¹ His work focused on a handful of major topics: the Frazier-Herskovits debate over African retentions in black American religion and culture, the histories of the major black Christian denominations in the United States, the histories of black sectarian religious movements, and the emergence of black and liberation theologies in the Western Hemisphere. In almost every one of those topics, Cartwright focused on what he called “the Afro-Asiatic myth,” a figure of thought derived from interpretations of Psalm 68:31.

This emphasis on the significance and prevalence of Psalm 68:31 in black American religious thinking was thought provoking. Although I was familiar with the Bible, especially the Old Testament, I had never associated the Christianization of the slaves, missionary work in Africa, the Garvey movement, or the Nation of Islam with this verse. In all of my previous experience with religious and biblical textual analysis, no attention was paid to Psalm 68:31, its hermeneutical tradition in black letters, or its role in figurations of Ethiopia in modernity. Moreover, its literary, historical, and cultural significance was so outside of my intellectual experience that I never paid close attention to its appearance—as either a citation or an allusion—in texts I read prior to encountering Cartwright’s insights.

My next extended encounter with Psalm 68:31 took place in the late 1980s. For Cartwright, the black vernacular was used as the oral—and even at times anthropological—library of black American culture. He

focused on folktales, the blues, spirituals, oration, signifying and the dozens, dance, conjure, spirit possession, and numerous other oral forms considered by many scholars to be representatives of black religion and culture in America. These elements of black vernacular were heightened and transformed, and more importantly for me, brought into the realm of literature by John Wright, whose scholarship was heavily indebted to the developments in the study of black American literature initiated by Robert B. Stepto's *From Behind the Veil*, Stepto's and Dexter Fisher's *Afro-American Literature*, and the early work of Henry Louis Gates Jr. Wright's scholarship intertwined close literary readings of canonical black text with literary figures and terms derived from the Anglo-American tradition, black literature, and the vernacular. He meticulously pointed out how the black literary canon not only signified on itself, but also on its literatures of reference (Anglo-American and British literatures and the Bible). It was within this literary context that Psalm 68:31, which Wright referred to as the "Ethiopian Prophecy," was presented as one of the most significant and frequently alluded to biblical verses in black American literature.

Even though Cartwright and Wright worked in different academic disciplines and used different methodological approaches to black culture and literature, they shared a number of similarities as scholars in the humanities and as black professors in the predominantly white world of academia. First, they had both witnessed the entry of Black Studies into the university in the late 1960s, and both were working hard for the institutionalization of (what was then called) Afro-American studies as an academic discipline in the university. In constituting the object of knowledge for Afro-American studies, both promoted spiritual blackness, instead of biological blackness, as contained in the various articulations of the black American vernacular. In other words, they both argued for the existence of a black racial consciousness that was informed and enlivened by black oral tradition, and both agreed that this consciousness and its effects were proper objects of knowledge in Afro-American Studies. Second, they both adhered to a modern understanding of history as a story about the spiritual and material progress of a people that is unfolding in time under the force of an agent toward its telos, or purpose. For Cartwright, the telos of history was the redemption of the race. For Wright, it was the formation of a black literary canon, poetics, and critical theory. Furthermore, because history was a fixed temporal sphere that lent itself to being represented in narrative form, it could be understood hermeneutically.

In short, history could be interpreted as a narrative. The interpreters and writers of these narratives were modern individuals, usually scholars or agents of institutional knowledge.

Despite Cartwright's and Wright's formidable intellects, penetrating insights, seductive narratives about black people and black literature, and lucid interpretations of Psalm 68:31 and its role in black culture and letters, I found myself moving away from a purely hermeneutical, author-centered, and subject of knowledge-based perspective on literature with its legitimating grand narratives. I was moving toward a view of literature that focused on the materiality of language and reading, articulating a sense of the emergent in life and literature, and the replacement of grand narratives with small provisional narratives that would be adequate for their moment. I had not given up on the hermeneutical projection of modernity and narrative *per se*, but I believed there was more to reading than interpretation. I was convinced that something foundational and formational occurred in the event of reading that had to be attended to before interpretation itself was produced. Furthermore, I was suspicious of the subject-object paradigm that legitimated the modern hermeneutical project itself.

Without writing a book about why I am writing this book, I believe—even at the risk of repeating an often-told story—that I should succinctly explain my problem with the modern subject-object paradigm and its relationship to reading. Legitimate knowledge in modernity, as Martin Heidegger explains in his essay “The Age of the World Picture” (1938), is a product of two interrelated concepts: representation and interpretation. Modernity grounds itself by setting epistemological and ontological certainty in human consciousness—a consciousness in which the activity of thinking is the activity of representing. The subject of knowledge (the modern self) brings the world before him in his mind to stand as an object of knowledge, a mentally graspable image. To know the object is to interpret it. Knowledge becomes, under the hegemony of representation, a hermeneutical endeavor in which the subject of knowledge either extracts the truth from objects of knowledge or assigns truth to them. In either case, in modernity, the subject of knowledge determines the nature and meaning of knowledge because he is responsible for bringing objects of knowledge into existence.

The ability of the subject to construct the world as a cognitive object is the work of consciousness. This consciousness simultaneously fixes the

world as an object subject to its laws and posits an author of these laws: the thinking subject. In addition, the subject is also an object, a representation (something set up within the world picture), for self-reflection even though he simultaneously presides over the world from an abstract, godlike perspective. Through the use of reflexive pronouns such as “oneself,” “himself,” and “itself,” Heidegger reveals what legitimates the objectification of the world and the emergence of the individual as a godlike being in modernity: the reflexivity of the thinking subject itself. The transformation of a given intuition into an object and the setting of this object before a prior concept (a representation) is reflexivity. The cognitive faculties produce the world as an object of experience and the modern subject, also a representation and product of the mind, subsumes this object, and hence knows it.

The subject-object relationship is related to hermeneutics in that knowledge is a product of the subject of knowledge who observes, gathers, and then interprets objects of knowledge. The subject’s ability to see, grasp, penetrate, and understand objects of knowledge is predicated on the proper distance between them, or perspective. The subject of knowledge has perspective on objects of knowledge, and the former subsumes and defines the latter by his discourse. This discourse is about the representations, and at the same time above them. Verticality and position are keys to modern knowledge, but they are also idealized, and hence ahistorical. The subject of knowledge is godlike in his vision and he literally stands nowhere. It is as if his perspective is aterrestrial, or out of time and space.

When this paradigm is applied to literary texts or any graphic writing, reading can only be seen as interpretation. Readers either extract meaning from a letter, a poem, or a novel, or they attribute meaning to them. What is erased in this encounter of text and reader is the materiality of a letter’s, a poem’s, or a novel’s *grámmata* (the graphic silent signs) and their medial nature. Furthermore, due to the materiality of the graphic sign, reading as a physical activity must have a concreteness to it that is prior to its abstraction as text and its interpretation as an object of knowledge. In this book, I intend to show how Psalm 68:31 was read from a terrestrial position before it was interpreted from an aterrestrial perspective.

One final point: in the late 1980s I also encountered the work of Henry Louis Gates Jr., in particular his essay “On the Blackness of Blackness: A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey” (1983). In this essay,

Gates took a familiar character, the Signifying Monkey (a character I had known since childhood), and interwove him with critical literary theory that refigured the study of black American letters. More importantly for me, Gates articulated a sense of “blackness” not as an essence or entity, but as a figure, “as a function of its signifiers” (*Black Literature and Literary Theory* 316). Gates’s movement from essentialism to metaphor was a breath of intellectual and political fresh air for me. The idea of a racial essence (or an essence of any type) smacked of a religious belief—something one professes, but cannot prove. I (pushed and pulled by many different and conflicting worldviews), as a human being, was more complex than the category of race and its narratives could ever begin to account for or contain. Furthermore, essentialism, in all of its various articulations, seemed to be at the ideological root of modern violence and oppression in the United States and throughout the world. I have continued my struggle with essentialism in this book. I believe that a close reading of the citations, allusions, and interpretations of Psalm 68:31 in black American letters will show that race—in particular the idea of the black race and the associated notions of racial continuity, racial consciousness, and the black voice—is a figure, and that this figure also disfigures and dissembles.

While I take credit for any faults in this manuscript, there are many people who have been instrumental in its production. First and foremost, John Cartwright and John Wright inspired this book. Tony Pinn believed that this study of Psalm 68:31 in black American letters was important and supported the project from start to finish. Ronald Judy spent innumerable hours conversing with me about orality, the blues, reading, Benjamin, and literature. Librarians Matt Bowers (University of Minnesota) and Janet Van Tassel (Merriam Park Public Library) provided research assistance, and Joe Green and Stephanie Kay held my prose to the fire. I am grateful for the patience and support of the editors and staff at the University Press of Florida: Heather Turci, Allyson Gasso, Michele Fiyak-Burkley, Ray Brady, Kara Schwarz, Amy Gorelick, Catherine-Nevil Parker, and Meredith Morris-Babb. Finally, I want to thank my children, Rachel and Jasmine, for understanding that papa is upstairs working, and my wife, Stephanie, for her words of encouragement throughout the long process of writing and rewriting this book.

Introduction

The Inch and Ells of Psalm 68:31

Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God

Psalm 68:31

Frederick Douglass's initiation into the world of reading is a well-known story in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), second only to his battle with Covey in dramatic significance. Douglass's introduction, at the hand of his mistress, Mrs. Sophia Auld, to what he calls the "mystery of reading" is probably the most important personal event in his life as a slave: Douglass explicitly links the emergence of his intelligence to reading. This "mystery of reading" accounts for Douglass's understanding of his historical situation, his critique of the institution of slavery, his will to be free, his resistance to Covey, and his subsequent escape from slavery. When telling the story of how he acquires literacy, Douglass includes Master Hugh's censure of Sophia for teaching him or any slave how to read. Recounting Master Hugh's words, what Douglass characterizes as "the true philosophy of slavery," he writes: "If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. . . . Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world; if you teach the nigger . . . how to read the bible, there will be no keeping him; it would forever unfit him for duties of a slave . . . learning would do him no good, but probably, a great deal of harm—making him disconsolate and unhappy. If you learn him how to read, he'll want to know how to write; and, this accomplished, he'll be running away with himself" (146). Just as Master Hugh predicted, reading makes Douglass unfit for slavery because it situates him in the world differently than when he was illiterate. It transforms Douglass's subjectivity and differentiates his understanding of the world from that of his fellow, illiterate, slaves.

Staying within the diction of Master Hugh, Psalm 68:31 is the “inch” and the figurations of Ethiopia derived from the verse are its “ells.”¹ The indeterminate nature of reading and the allusionary and plastic properties of figures form diverse and contentious trajectories of Psalm 68:31. From Phillis Wheatley’s 1774 letter to the Rev. Samuel Hopkins to Alice Walker’s 1982 novel, *The Color Purple*, the readings, interpretations, citations, and allusions to Psalm 68:31 play a significant role in the emergence of black subjectivity, the creation of black letters, the articulations of black engagements with the world and the black imaginary, and the formations of black collective identity. For some black readers, the verse variously signifies the spiritual and intellectual uplifting of black Americans and Africans, the emigration of black Americans to Africa, emancipation from slavery and colonialism, citizenship for black Americans, and African autonomy. For others it signifies a literary motif, myth, parody, or prophecy of a new global order for the twentieth century. Through figural readings of Psalm 68:31, black readers attempt to figure out their respective moments and histories, and to give meaning to meaninglessness.

In this book, I will analyze this most significant verse in two different ways. First, I will engage in a close reading of the interpretations, citations of, and allusions to Psalm 68:31 in black American letters and map the various figurations and disfigurations of Ethiopia that are configured in black American letters. While my mapping of the configurations of Ethiopia derived from Psalm 68:31 will be extensive, it will not be exhaustive. There are two reasons for this. First, as Albert Raboteau points out in his essay on nineteenth-century black religious thought, Psalm 68:31 is “without doubt the most quoted verse in black religious history” (*A Fire in the Bones* 42). The sermons, newspapers, pamphlets, personal letters, and private writings that employ Psalm 68:31, but which are inaccessible to scholarly analysis because they have never even been indexed, catalogued, edited, or seen for many decades, are beyond the scope of my research. In fact, a number of texts containing Psalm 68:31 have probably been lost or destroyed before they could be preserved. Hopefully, future archivists will save the existing texts that employ Psalm 68:31 and remain tucked away in black churches and organizations, and these papers will be organized and made available for scholarly study. Second, the fiction of mastery of printed materials is an academic dream of modernity. Even though Psalm 68:31 is only one verse from the Old Testament, in the age

of mass printing and now digital technology, all knowledge is expanding so quickly that it is autonomous from human beings and our attempts to contain and master it. Hence, this book can only be a critical and close reading of Psalm 68:31 and its configurations in institutional black American letters and some noncanonical writings.²

Furthermore, I want to read Psalm 68:31 and its configurations against the grain. Most hermeneutic studies of letters, be they the interpretation of a poem, a novel, or an essay, read these works from the point of view of the writer and attempt to answer the question: “what does the poem, the novel, or the essay mean?” While interpretation will constitute a significant component of this book, my analysis of Psalm 68:31 and its configurations in black American letters will also focus on this verse and its citations, interpretations, and allusions that are made to it from the point of view of reading. I contend that, in the quest for meaning which is central to the humanities, two major products of reading are condensed or even erased: the resistance of language to itself and readers, and the emergence of historical subjectivity. Contrary to the modern grand narrative of the presence of subjectivity prior to reading—the narrative of the autonomous thinking subject who is the ground of epistemological certainty and ontological stability—I will show how black readers became historical subjects, situated in their worlds and in “language in its concrete living totality” through reading, particularly through reading Psalm 68:31 (Bakhtin 181). It is in their engagement with this verse that configurations of Ethiopia emerged for black readers, and these configurations changed how black readers dwelled in the world with other human beings and before God.

How does my dual focus on Psalm 68:31 inform the style and organization of this book? *The Ethiopian Prophecy in Black American Letters* is a messy book because it attempts to reconnect two activities and their effects that are estranged from one another: reading and writing. At times my analysis will focus on presenting the black reader as a historical subject; at other times, I will be engaged in interpreting the interpretations of readers of Psalm 68:31.³ In both cases, I will show the relationship between reading and writing. I will demonstrate, through an analysis of Psalm 68:31 in black American letters, that reading and writing are not identical to one another, but that they are engaged in a relationship of difference that results in the interfacing and interaction of our bodies and minds.

Given my focus on reading and writing, I will concentrate on literary sources. Black American oral tradition will not play a significant part of my analysis. I know that the motifs of slavery and the exodus, and figures such as the Israelites, Noah, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Jesus play a prominent role in black vernacular culture. Spirituals, folklore, and Gospel music bear witness to the importance of these biblical themes and figures in black American culture. Nevertheless, these themes and figures are different from the appearance of Psalm 68:31 in black American letters. Whereas the former function as oral stories that exist and are passed around by black people, the citations, interpretations, and allusions to Psalm 68:31 have a graphic ethos about them. Even though Psalm 68:31 makes many different morphological appearances in black American letters, the literary nature of the verse is foregrounded. Many writers draw attention to it being a specific biblical verse they are citing, alluding to, or interpreting. For instance, many readers of Psalm 68:31 specifically focus on the adverbial significance of “soon” in the verse. In black oral culture, this type of graphic specificity is absent. Moses goes down to Egypt to tell Pharaoh to release the children of Israel (“Go Down, Moses”), Joshua defeats the city of Jericho (“Joshua Fit De Battle of Jericho”), and Jesus is crucified and buried (“Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?”). These songs highlight the generalities of the biblical stories, but they do not pay attention to their graphic material nature. In fact, the organizational breaks of the Bible into chapters and verses are completely absent in the spiritual, in folklore, and in Gospel music.

I am familiar with Theophus Smith’s *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America* (1994) and Allen Dwight Callahan’s *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible* (2006) and their respective analyses of Psalm 68:31 and its relationship to the folk, that is, the black vernacular, tradition. Their concerns are not mine. I see their books as a significant part of a larger study of black culture and consciousness in the tradition of John Blassingame’s *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (1972), Eugene Genovese’s *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1972), Lawrence Levine’s *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (1977), and Sterling Stuckey’s *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (1987). Smith’s and Callahan’s unique contributions are their interpretations of the dominant role of the Bible and its reconfiguration

as either a conjure book (in Smith) or a talking book (in Callahan). The scope and focus of this book is more limited and literary. I am examining the relationship between reading and writing through an analysis of how black readers read Psalm 68:31, the material and figural effects of their reading, and the waxing and waning of the configurations of Ethiopia, derived from readings of Psalm 68:31, in black American letters. The literary medium is central to my analysis and argument, whereas the specificity of media is not significant to either Smith's or Callahan's interpretations of biblical motifs and themes in black American culture. Despite our different approaches and intellectual concerns, I will not ignore in the course of this study Smith's and Callahan's interesting interpretations of Psalm 68:31 and their larger arguments about the role and status of the "black" Bible in black American culture.

Methodology: Figural Reading

Smith's *Conjuring Culture* is the first book, to my knowledge, to associate "figure" and "Ethiopia" in a scholarly analysis of Psalm 68:31. Following a trajectory of scholarly works from Werner Sollors's *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (1986), Northrup Frye's *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (1981), and Sacvan Bercovitch's *The American Jeremiad* (1978) to Erich Auerbach's insightful and influential essay "Figura" (1944), Smith writes that figuration will constitute one of the major organizational and methodological frameworks for his study of the place of the Bible in the "black North American religious experience" (3). Adhering to his thesis, Smith makes a compelling argument for how black Americans transformed the Bible into a book of conjuration, "a book of ritual prescriptions for reenvisioning and, therein, transforming history and culture" (3). For Smith, the black tradition of reading the Bible is performative, theatrical, and pharmacological. He argues that a conjuror in black American culture is also known as a "root doctor"; a person who utilizes roots and herbs to create magic and medicine for the purposes of bringing about both therapeutic and malevolent effects on others (4–6). In the tradition of black theologians before him, Smith hopes that *Conjuring Culture* will aid in future biblical conjurations by black American readers and a new paradigm for religious studies. To further his notion that the Bible is a conjure book for black Americans, Smith argues that black

people in America, from the colonial period to the ministry and activism of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., understood themselves, their history, and their leaders through figural understandings of the Bible.

It is Smith's notion of the figure of Ethiopia and figuration that I find interesting and full of possibilities. First, reading Ethiopia as a figure is another way of presenting it as a sign in a continual relationship to other signs. The figure of Ethiopia repeats another sign and in so doing produces a different sign, and hence more signs to read. The figural sign, in this case Ethiopia, is a relational sign. It repeats another sign, but is not reducible to or substitutable for it. In short, figural signs are asymmetrical to one another. If they were not, the relational nature of the figural sign would be destroyed. Thus the figural sign is singular. Put differently, the figure of Ethiopia never coincides with itself or with what it signifies. The figural sign is neither original nor final, and its meaning is heterogeneous to it. Moreover, it has the possibility of signifying for as long as it is meaningful to its readers.

Second, the figural relationship of one sign to another—be it antecedent or subsequent—brings with it problems of time: what is the relationship between figural signs? What does the dialectical difference between figural signs signify? Is the differential distance between the figural signs empty or not? What is the relationship of figural signs to the future? These questions suggest that the dialectical nature of the figural sign makes it something other than a representation or a graspable object of knowledge. It is something dynamic, and has the possibility to produce innumerable readings and interpretations without a final meaning. With the figural sign, reading and understanding are always at stake. No figural reading can be casual; it is reading in a state of emergency.

Smith's use of figure owes a debt to Auerbach's essay "Figura." In the next chapter I will discuss the significance of Auerbach's notion of figure and its relationship to Ethiopia; however, I must first address the debt of the previous paragraph to the notion of figure articulated by Walter Benjamin. A contemporary of Auerbach, Benjamin presents an interpretation of the figure that differs from the *figura* of Auerbach and is in opposition to the modern organization of knowledge and its anthropomorphic trajectory.⁴ A number of Benjamin's writings articulate this figural intelligence, such as *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," and "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Nevertheless, the piece that is most helpful for my use of figure comes from "On

the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress” from Benjamin’s *Passagen-Werk*. In these notes Benjamin writes:

It’s not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation [sondern Bild ist dasjenige, worin das Gewesene mit dem Jetzt blitzhaft zu einer Konstellation zusammentritt]. In other words, image [Bild] is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now [des Gewesene zum Jetzt] is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent [Bild (,) sprunghaft].—Only dialectical images [Bilder] are genuine images [Bilder] (that is, not archaic); and the place where one encounters them is language. (*Arcades* 462; *Gesammelte* 576–77)

Just as in Auerbach’s study of *figura*, Benjamin associates figure with reading. Only instead of the reading being imposed from above (God), figures emerge and are made readable in the performance of reading itself. This reading is neither a reading of an *always already there* figure that is merely waiting to be read by a reader, nor a reading of a figure “self-sufficient and secure” causally linked to other figures that constitute knowable unfolding time. Benjamin’s figure is a singular event, unique unto itself, that is readable, as another of Benjamin’s notes explains, “only at a particular time” and that occurs in the “the now of a particular recognizability” [“das Jetzt einer bestimmten Erkennbarkeit”] (*Arcades* 463; *Gesammelte* 578).

This “now of particular recognizability” is not the past shedding light on the present or the present knowing the past as an object of knowledge, rather it emerges in the dialectical relationship of “the what-has-been” [das Gewesene] and “the now” [das Jetzt]. This dialectical relationship between “the what-has-been” and “the now” forms a constellation, or a figure, that is at a standstill and can be grasped as something legible, that is readable. The figure is an excess of time. It is chronological time, or what Benjamin refers to as “homogeneous, empty time,” “the continuum of history,” and “historicism,” contracted in on itself.⁵ “The now” is filled with the fullness of “what-has-been” in summary fashion [“einer ungeheueren Abbreivatur die Geschichte der ganzen Menschheit zusammenhaßt”] to the point of explosion; this is the contraction of time.⁶ The figure, pregnant with contracted time, is resistant to chronological time, but more

importantly, it is pure agency. This agency is other than language, tradition, culture, or consciousness; and the reader is subject to it.

In modernity, time is castrated of its agency by the agency of the thinking subject and is domesticated to merely a background for events to take place in. This is the “homogeneous, empty time” that Benjamin continually refers to in the last essay he wrote before his death in 1940. Benjamin’s figures are not temporal and do not take place within the flow of chronological time. Rather, the figure disrupts chronological time because it contains contracted time and its possibilities. Moreover, the figure is something to be read. According to Benjamin’s articulation of time as contained in the figure, readers are made aware of it when it presents itself, and they can grasp it as a configuration [die Konstellation], but they cannot understand it or its possibilities. This constellation is neither “the what-has-been” nor “the now,” but an asymmetrical figure, or what Benjamin calls a “historical index,” “messianic time,” and “Jetztzeit” [now, but not yet] that does not signify on the world or events in the world, but indicates that something has taken place or made itself present in the world in time and space.⁷ The deictic gesture of the historical index, the materiality of historical time, is devoid of narrative and meaning; it merely stands by itself and indicates its presence. As such, it presents an opportunity for the reader “to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history—blasting a specific life out of an era or a specific work out of the lifework [um eine bestimmte Epoche aus dem homogenen Verlauf der Geschichte herauszusprengen; so sprengt er ein bestimmtes Leben aus der Epoche, so ein bestimmtes Werk aus dem Lebenswerk]” (*Illuminations* 263; *Illuminationen* 260).

Concerning history and time, Benjamin does not identify “what-has-been” with “the past” and “the now” with “the present.” To do so would have reinscribed the figure as “temporal,” or what he calls in “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940), the “causal connection between various moments in history” that produces a history that tells “the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary” (*Illuminations* 263). By employing the deictic terms “what-has-been” and “the now,” Benjamin moves outside of the abstraction of interpretation and time and events as objects of knowledge to the concretization of history (the figure) and its readability [zur Lesbarkeit] (*Arcades* 462; *Gesammelte* 577). The readability of the figure presents the reader with a decision: either domesticate the figure by changing it into an object of knowledge or recognize the possibilities of

agency and lived experience, and attempt to shatter homogeneous, empty time through the figure. The Apostle Paul is an example of the latter type of reader. He announces the eventfulness of Christ. The event of Christ transforms chronological time into messianic time.⁸

As the previous paragraphs suggest, Benjamin's articulation of the figure also has ramifications for the nature of the reader. Due to its singularity, emergence, and eventfulness, the figure stands before the reader and his reading. The figure brings the reader into existence as a historical entity. Benjamin writes, "each 'now' is the now of a particular recognizability" (*Arcades* 463). "Now" as a deictic adverb indicates "at this time that is here" and "at this present moment that is here." In Benjamin's notes, "now" points to two materialities, the figure and the reader, or the intelligence capable of recognizing and reading the singularity, emergence, and eventfulness of the figure. No longer does agency reside in the transcendental modern subject who is fully formed before his encounter with the figure and subsumes it to representational categories. A reader in Benjamin's notes is brought along and emerges historically through the agency of the figure and its configuration. In addition, a reader seizes the eventfulness of the figure "to blast open the continuum of history" (*Illuminations* 262). Accordingly, all figures are singular, all readings are singular, every reader is singular, and every reader is a potential revolutionary.

Benjamin compares the singularity of the figure, its presentation in time and space, to lightning [*blitzhaft*]. Lightning is something that visibly takes place and emerges due to the coming together of negatively charged electrons and positively charged ions in the atmosphere. Lightning strikes are sudden, singular, and transitory; they are usually described as taking place in a "flash." They produce energy and light, and they can destroy or even kill, but they do so without a purpose or a *telos*; they just take place. If the figure is analogous to lightning, then Benjamin's figure lacks duration, consistency, stability, causality, and purpose; it is filled with the energy of agency that is capricious and beyond the knowability of the reader. According to Benjamin's notes, reading has little to do with meaning and understanding; it is of another nature. Reading is a performance, a recognition of the readability of the figure at a specific time and place.

In modernity, the autonomous subject is conceived to be a stable Archimedean point who comprehends all knowledge, but this idea does not correspond with Benjamin's notion of the deictically anchored reader. In his notes, there is a dispersion of standings or articulations that bring the

reader into subjectivity, but these do not lend themselves to epistemological certainty or ontological stability. Benjamin's reader can see the configuration of the figure, he can point to its flash, but he cannot know it as an object of knowledge because he lacks a stable—that is an abstract—point from which to experience the figure. As Terry Cochran explains in *Twilight of the Literary* (2001), Benjamin's figuration of history dispenses with the "community of interpretants, [the] unfolding of meaning in time, [and the] sense of a temporal tradition," or modernity's investment in the autonomous, and hence, abstract subject, and the hegemony of representation and history as progress toward an idea (94).

The Ethiopian Prophecy in Black American Letters focuses on reading. I cannot overemphasize the importance of Benjamin's articulation of the figure, the reader, and readability for my engagement of the literary instance of Psalm 68:31 in black American letters. Before I proceed with my examination, Benjamin's articulation of the figure and its emergence in reading necessitates a review of reading itself. To accomplish this task, I will refer to the work of Jesper Svenbro and Wlad Godzich about the nature of reading among the ancient Greeks.

Reading and the Greeks

As the word *grámmata* indicates, writing for the ancient Greeks did not speak, embody, or encrypt a voice. Rather it was a silent material sign, an inhuman pointer that indicated, demonstrated, and signified (Godzich, "Reading" 131). As something that did not speak, writing constituted an otherness to the reader. The material effect of this otherness was that all reading was done aloud. To make writing sonorous, the reader gave his voice [lógos] to the mute signs, thereby making them speak by giving them speech. According to Svenbro, writing for the ancient Greeks was "first and foremost a machine for producing sounds," "The writing *lacks* a voice that is added to it to *supplement* it. . . . The voice is the instrument that allows the 'listeners' to the text (if there are any) as well as the reader himself to become acquainted with the content of what is written. The written word cannot, on its own, communicate that content. By using his own voice, the reader thus adds a *lógos* to what is written, a *lógos* that makes it possible for the writing to become a succession of sounds intelligible to the listener, but a succession of sounds that lacks any internal life, just as the writing does."⁹ For the Greeks, reading was ventriloquism, and

the giving of speech to the speechless creating the illusion that the mute could speak. Reading in ancient Greece meant the reader gave his voice over to the preexisting letters and, in so doing, the reader's voice was filled with, and then articulated, them. The act of reading was an engagement with a mute entity.¹⁰ The Greeks discovered that the only way to negotiate mute writing was to read it; and reading in ancient Greece signified supplementing writing with *lógos*, or speech. That was the case because in ancient Greece writing was a "machine for producing *kléos*—'acoustic renown.'" ¹¹

Svenbro argues that silent forms of reading emerged in the fifth-century B.C.E. He explains in *The Craft of Zeus* (1996) how the voice was transferred from the reader back onto writing which then also underwent a transformation. When writing was read aloud the text emerged in the reading because each reading constituted a unique sonorous event. The "text" in ancient Greece was not synonymous with the writing in and of itself: it was a product of the interaction between a reader and writing. Every reading, the interlacing of writing and speech, constituted a text (Scheid and Svenbro 126). Silent reading altered this notion of text and redefined it as the graphic entity in and of itself prior to any reading. The transference of speech from the reader to the writing created the illusion that it contained a voice, and therefore presence: "The Greek who reads silently hears the 'voice' of the writing in front of him in his head, as if the letters had a voice, as if the book were a talking object. . . . From now on writing and the voice seem to be lodged in the same place, . . . the reader now listens, in his head, to a text that seems to be addressing him autonomously" (127). The illusion of the talking book was nothing other than the figure of *prosopopoeia*, and what lacked the presence of voice, that is writing, became the locus of it.

The reverberations of this transfer of speech from the reader to the writing remain a fundamental characteristic of reading. Writing becomes recharacterized as transcribed speech instead of an inscription of utterances that are graphic and not oral in nature. The erasure of the incommensurable difference between writing and reading remakes reading into a conversation between two oral presences, the talking book and the reader. Erasing the difference between writing and reading domesticates the nature of reading and removes the sensation of violation the reader experienced at being possessed and displaced by the inhuman entity of writing and its structures when he lent his voice to its voicelessness. Treating

writing as a speaking entity also posits meaning in the text. Before the illusion of the talking book, reading was interactive, the meeting of two incommensurable materialities (*grámmata* and *lógos*) that produced an event of meaning. With the illusion of the talking book, the meaning of the book is posited as the speech inside the writing (the living soul within the dead letters), and the reader is merely one who extracts the meaning that is put there by the author.

Returning to the initial Greek sense of reading, if reading is giving one's voice to writing that is already there, there are a number of significant consequences. First, because the reader is penetrated by the writing in the act of reading, he becomes the deixis of what he reads. In ancient Greece, as Svenbro demonstrates in vivid detail, one of the ways the relationship of the reader to writing was characterized was through the figure of pederasty. The writing was the active and dominant figure, the lover [*erastés*] and the reader was the passive and dominated figure, the beloved [*erómenos*]. In the act of reading, the writer's writing penetrates the reader and the outcome is the sound of the reader's voice given to the writing (*Phrasikleia* 187–216). Despite the sexual nature of the figure of pederasty and its associations with reading, it should not be understood as a salacious or titillating figure, but rather as one that indicates the performative nature of reading.

Second, living centuries before Descartes' mind-body split, the Greeks lived bodily in the world and their experience of literacy was material. Reading was sonorous and perceived as physically intrusive. It was not a purely mental activity in which the mind either apprehended or represented the spirit, and hence the meaning, of the writing. Greek reading situated the reader in the world as an entity subject to writing (materiality that was already there) and as a responder to what he has read. The giving of the reader's voice to writing submitted the reader to it, and the reader was invaded by what he gave voice to, and in doing this, the reader became a historical subject. Put differently, the anal penetration of the writing constituted the reader's sense of self, a self that emerged when the reader was penetrated by a foreign materiality.

Of course, when the process of reading is narrated, it usually becomes a story of cause and effect: the writing that I read displaces me from myself. As Godzich, echoing Nietzsche, points out, this story erases the very constitutive moment from which the subject emerges: "The intrusion experienced by the reader precipitates a sudden awareness of the self as this self

is in fact invaded. . . . The sense of self is constituted in such a moment. . . . Natural causality suppresses the importance of the moment of the constitution of the subject by leading to the inference that there had to have been such subject all along for it to experience itself as invaded" ("Reading" 132). Instead of the reader being a subject existing before reading, the reader is constituted as a subject in reading. In other words, readers are not historical subjects until they read, and it is this material encounter that constitutes readers as subjects.

We should recall that in oral societies, the storyteller is the site of *deixis*. In his performance of tradition the storyteller situates himself in the chain of tradition as a previous hearer, thereby legitimating his authority to tell the stories. These stories belong to the collective memory of the people and constitute "an oral storehouse" that contains all their stories, myths, and the *raison d'être* of their existence. In the commemorative performance of the storyteller he literally makes tradition resonate via his voice and animates the memory of the people. Hearing the story—that is, witnessing the performance of the storyteller—situates the hearer as a historical person within the memory of tradition. The voice of the storyteller is the vehicle linking the hearer to tradition.¹² What takes place in oral societies is not what is at work in reading. The reader gives his voice to writing, usually in the form of a phrase, which is merely a portion of the graphic library that since the invention of moveable print is of infinite proportions. The spatial metaphor of "the library" is an attempt to signify the vastness of writing, but it misrepresents it in doing so. The graphic library is without walls, floors, and ceilings; it is infinite. By giving his voice to that which is at once other than and outside of the reader (writing), he is literally in-scribed as a historical subject ("Reading" 132–33). The reader's inscription as a historical subject and into the infinite graphic library makes him a deictic link in a graphic chain that he cannot understand or control. Furthermore, reading situates the reader to that which is around him. Godzich reminds us: "[Reading] is deictically to anchor ourselves in relation to that which is around us, and such a deictic anchoring requires that to the phrase we voice we counterpose another phrase, that is, that we become the link in the concatenation of these phrases, with all this implies in terms of selection, organization, and ruse. It is not the transcendental positions of meaning that matters; it is how we deictically anchor such meaning as obtains around us" ("Reading" 133).

The use of the word "phrase" is deliberate. According to Svenbro, it is

derived from the Greek verb *phrázein*, a word that means an act of non-acoustic communication. He emphasizes that *phrázein* is synonymous with *semáínein* [to signify] and *dēloûn* [to show], but it is never synonymous with *eipeîn* [to speak] or *légein* [to say] in ancient Greek (*Phrasikleia* 8–25). The nonacoustic nature of *phrázein* is reiterated in the word *phrén* which means “silent mental activity.” In other words, a phrase is that which merely indicates, but does not speak. Concerning reading, phrases are what possess us when we lend our voice to *grámmata*. The act of reading deictically anchors us and from this position in time and space “we counterpose another phrase.” Reading is a linking of phrases, and we are the articulation between them (“Reading” 131, 133).

Hence, reading is a process in which the reader faces the tangible materiality of graphic marks and gives his voice to them. To give one’s voice to writing means the reader’s body, the reader’s materiality, must make what is silent into something sonorous. The graphic marks possess the reader’s voice, and in so doing, make him a historical subject, a reader anchored in time and space. The voice neither subsumes nor erases the graphic mark. In giving voice to what is voiceless, reading creates the illusionary effect of appearing to “copy” the voice in the text. This illusion of the “talking book” is the illusion of presence in the graphic marks themselves, the spirit of the grapheme. But the relationship between writing and the reader’s voice is “an unresolvable dissensus,” or continual interactive difference (“Reading” 133). In addition, because the reader gives his voice to the voiceless in the process of reading, as a materiality outside of the reader inhabits him and he gives it phonic form, reading as a material performance has two effects. First, reading anchors the reader in time and space. All readings are a depositioning and a repositioning of the reader. Only an abstract reader, a Cartesian subject, can maintain the illusion of not being anchored and reanchored in time and space when he is reading. For this actually to occur, all future readings would have to be already preinscribed in the reader even though he has not read them yet; such a reader would be godlike.

Second, reading is a material performance so that the historical subject can be engaged in the world around him through the figures of reading. If the figure of Ethiopia emerges in the process of reading Psalm 68:31, then the counterposing of phrases that occur in black American letters that cite, allude to, and interpret this verse are instances of readers trying

to read the time in the configurations of Ethiopia and engage their world through their reading.¹³

Consequences and Possibilities of Figural Reading

The dominant story of modernity concerning subjectivity is that the modern subject is grounded in continual, autonomous consciousness. Descartes writes the paradigmatic story of the modern autonomous subject in *Discourse on Method* (1637). In language exceedingly straightforward and clear, Descartes announces the birth of the autonomous thinking subject whose continual consciousness is the bedrock of epistemological certainty and ontological stability. He “discovers” this subject through introspection in his famous story of doubt: “I resolved to pretend that everything that had ever entered my mind was no more true than the illusions of my dreams. But immediately afterward I noticed that, during the time I wanted thus to think that everything was false, it was necessary that I, who thought thus, be something. And noticing that this truth—*I think, therefore I am*—was so firm and so certain that the most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics [*sic*] were unable to shake it, I judged that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking” (17). According to Descartes, the autonomous thinking subject, graphically represented as a stutter of the first person pronoun “I,” is the one who observes and notes the presence upon which it stands: its continual consciousness. The emergence of “I” as not merely a grammatical subject—a pronoun that indicates the speaker or writer of a sentence—but as the subject of continual consciousness, radically redefined the meaning of the first person pronoun. Descartes presents truth and being as abstractions, that is, representations, which emerge in the human mind and are resistant to temporal and spatial changes. Central to his story is the foregrounding of the thinking subject’s autonomy; Descartes discovers what has always been inside of him. Modern subjectivity comes from within, not from outside, the subject.

With some reworking, Descartes’ story of the autonomous thinking subject will become the dominant and hegemonic story of the modern subject. All claims of true subjectivity and agency in modernity, to be legitimate, must be Cartesian in nature.¹⁴ This applies to black subjectivity also. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. demonstrates in his watershed critical

and theoretical work, *Figures in Black* (1986), the story of the autonomous thinking subject and the material evidence of its mental reflectivity (writing) was used as the measuring rod to determine the humanity of the world's races. Jefferson, Hegel, and numerous other modern thinkers denigrated Africans and blacks in America as spiritually and morally inferior to western Europeans and whites in America due to the absence of graphic writing.¹⁵ In response to the accusations by these men, Gates argues that blacks wrote to counter the negation of their humanity and to demonstrate that they too possessed autonomous continual consciousness like all modern human beings. In Gates's introduction to *The Slave's Narrative* he explains the relationship between writing and black subjectivity: "The narrative, descriptive 'eye' was put into service as a literary form to posit both the individual 'I' of the black author, as well as the collective 'I' of the race. Texts created authors, and black authors hoped they would create, or re-create, the image of the race in European discourse. The very *face* of the race, representations of whose features were common in all sorts of writings about blacks at the time, was contingent upon the recording of the black *voice*. Voice presupposes a face but also seems to have been thought to determine the contours of the black face" (Davis and Gates xxvi).

Even though Gates's argument makes sense as an account for the emergence of black writers, writing itself is subjectless; writing does not have a voice nor does it give a face. To the contrary, writing defaces what it figures when it configures faces or anything else. Writing and faces are two different materialities that are incommensurable to one another. When writing attempts to represent a face, it does not produce a face but presents the linguistic figurations of a face that are not a material human face. Within the logic of modern subjectivity and the conceits of the referential capability of writing, modern subjects can represent their thoughts with writing. Descartes' *Discourse on Method* is an example of writing representing the mind of the writer. Nevertheless, Descartes' subjectivity, the black subjectivity that Gates finds in black American literature, and modern subjectivity in general are all abstraction, representations cut off from a concrete material articulation. Many of the literary texts that I examine in this book either make the claim—or others have made it for them—that they represent the autonomous black subject. This abstraction is not the primary focus or interest of this study. I am interested in the emergence of concrete "black" subjects who emerge in the process of reading.

Black readers, in general, read the same *grámmata* as their masters and the other Anglophone readers of their era. The Bible, in English translation, was a central text (and often the first) that literate blacks read. In reading the Bible, black readers emerged as historical subjects, inscribed by the writing that they read. The inscription of Psalm 68:31 took on a special subject constituting significance for black readers, as demonstrated by the appearance and dissemination of the configurations of Ethiopia in black American literature. The Bible and English writings in general became literatures of reference for literate black Americans and, as such, provided a panoply of genres, styles, themes, forms, and characters to be rewritten. As black writers wrote, they added to a literary storehouse from which subsequent generations would, dialogically, read and rewrite.

This is what Douglass describes in *My Bondage and My Freedom*. As a reader, Douglass is the deixis of what he is reading. He gives his voice to writing and in so doing is deictically anchored in time and space as a historical subject, “I.” Douglass actually presents reading as an activity in which he is penetrated by the writing he is reading, out of which his sense of himself as a self emerges. In the process of giving voice to writing, Douglass posits the existence of a self that has been at once both violated (penetrated) and displaced. Moreover, because reading situates Douglass in time and space, it provides him the coordinates to understand his historical predicament in the world. Lastly, as a deictic anchor Douglass not only gives voice to the phrases of the writing he is reading, but he links a counter phrase—his riposte—to what he has read.

Master Hugh rightly sees reading as a type of “Pandora’s Box,” because once the slave can read it is nearly impossible, short of killing him, to rein in the expanse of his reading. Not only are there infinite possible readings of the Bible which Douglass could make, but it is also an infinitesimal fragment of an infinite graphic memoria where phrases such as “all men are created equal,” “give me liberty or give me death,” and “liberty, equality, and fraternity,” and the speeches of Sheridan, Lord Chatham, and William Pitt in the *Columbian Orator* reside and can be read by Douglass and applied to his situation (*My Bondage* 160).

My Bondage and My Freedom presents the nature of reading and how Douglass’s emergence as a historical presence, anchored in time and space, is situated relationally to the world around him by a linguistic riposte, an oppositional reply to the writing he has read. In his story, the reading of Psalm 68:31 is not connected with his emergence as a historical

and anchored subject thoroughly entrenched in the world around him. Nevertheless, decades before Douglass's birth into the world historically via reading, linking, and riposting, other black readers had made a similar discovery: that reading anchored them in the world, and in so doing, provided a position from which they could respond to it and their situation. For many black readers, Psalm 68:31 became a dominant heteronomic subject constituting text that would be the basis of how they made sense of their world, their history and destiny, and themselves. This book examines how the reading of Psalm 68:31 and its material and dialogic effects have functioned in black American letters to produce anchored historical counter phrasing subjects.

In the chapters to follow I will map out the configurations that emerge when black readers read Psalm 68:31. Moreover, I will indicate the situatedness—the heteronomic nature of subjectivity—of these readers in their readings and interpretations of Psalm 68:31. In chapter 1, I will present the emergence of the figurations of Ethiopia in Christian letters. Patristic exegetes of Psalm 68:31 are the first to draw attention to this verse and what Ethiopia signifies through their figural interpretation of scriptures. Their readings of Psalm 68:31 establish institutional figures of Ethiopia that will reverberate in Anglophone Protestant Christianity in modernity and continue to echo in the interpretations of Psalm 68:31 in black American letters. They initiate the sense of Ethiopia's plasticity as a figure and the continual and indeterminate nature of reading. In other words, patristic exegesis institutes the figurations of Ethiopia, and in so doing, produces more signs to be read and figured out.

Chapter 2 traces how three Anglophone Protestants, George Fox, Samuel Sewall, and Cotton Mather, used the patristic figures of Ethiopia to make sense of and place the New World people of color—particular the Negro slave—within the scope of God's redemptive plan. Psalm 68:31 is an important verse in the writings of these men. They reiterate some of the patristic figurations of Ethiopia, but because they are modern writers living in the New World who are faced with problems of slavery and coexistence with non-Christians, they re-read Psalm 68:31 and refigure Ethiopia. In their hands, the figure of Ethiopia is shaped into signs of Negro emancipation, conversion, and submission, which are some of the figural indices of race in America from the Colonial period to the Civil War.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on how black readers seize Psalm 68:31 and take over the figurations of Ethiopia established by the Church Fathers

and white Anglophone Protestant exegetes of the verse, changing it into a figure of spiritual redemption and intellectual uplift. For many readers of Psalm 68:31 in these two chapters, this verse foretells the future of black people in America and Africa, their conversion to Christianity, and their acquisition of the English language, culture [*Bildung*] and scientific knowledge [*Wissenschaft*]. Hence, the interpretations of the figure of Ethiopia in these chapters admonish “Ethiopians” to act, to convert to Christianity, and to become literate. These interpretations are narratives in the Aristotelian sense. They involve persuading “Ethiopians” to make these changes in their lives. In short, chapters 3 and 4 discuss interpretations of Psalm 68:31 that emphasize how conversion, literacy, and scientific knowledge will make the lives of “Ethiopians” better. In this way, “Ethiopians” will be brought within the trajectories of modernity and Providence.

Chapters 5 and 6 will follow the transformation of the figure of Ethiopia from the religious and cultural spheres to the spheres of the social and the political. Whereas the configurations of conversation and literacy had to do with the interiority of the Ethiopians, the configurations of freedom, equality, and political autonomy revolved around the social and political interaction of blacks and whites in the United States, and Africans and Europeans in Africa. In chapters 3 through 6, I will also show how black exegetes of Psalm 68:31 attempt to harden the figure of Ethiopia into concepts, or representations of personal identity and racial, national, and religious substances.

Chapter 7 will analyze the poetic configurations of Ethiopia in black American literature. Starting in the middle of the nineteenth century, black American writers began to employ Psalm 68:31 and their readings of it in poems, plays, romances, and novels. Many canonical works such as Delany’s *Blake*, Hopkins’s *Of One Blood*, Griggs’s *The Hindered Hand*, Du Bois’s *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, and Walker’s *The Color Purple* make Psalm 68:31 the central biblical intertextual reference. This chapter will show how the poetic usages of Psalm 68:31 helped to articulate notions of black Cartesian subjectivity, black history, myths of Afro-Asiatic heritage, and black collective identity. Chapter 8 will focus on the various parodies of Psalm 68:31 that began during Reconstruction and continued until the early 1980s. The fact that Psalm 68:31 and its configurations had become figures of parody suggests that within black American literature they had become representative of, or institutionalized as, a black literary motif. The last chapter will examine the consequences of reading, linking

phrases, figuration, and heteronomic historical subjectivity for questions of personal and collective identity.

One final introductory comment I would like to make is that reading is the entrance into an infinite graphic and now digital “library” of writing. Due to the intertextual nature of writing, reading always “kicks” the reader from the writing he is reading to other writings. It is impossible to discuss Psalm 68:31 without mentioning the other major biblical themes, figures, and citations that appear in black American letters. For instance, the exodus theme is sometimes referenced in the configurations of Ethiopia’s freedom, equality, and autonomy; the figures of God and Jesus often appear in the configurations of Ethiopia’s conversion; and Acts 17:26 (“And [God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth”) is cited or alluded to in figurations of Ethiopian humanity. Nevertheless, these related themes are not the primary focus of this book. My topic is Psalm 68:31, how it was read, the figures of Ethiopia produced from it, and the emergence of historical counter phrasing subjects in black American letters.



Early Jewish and Christian Figures of Ethiopia

Psalm 68:31 is one of nearly four dozen references to Ethiopia or Ethiopians in the Bible. To be precise, in the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible)—where the vast majority of references to Ethiopia and Ethiopians are found—the place is called Kush and the people are referred to as Kushites. “Ethiopia” and “Ethiopians” are English words transliterated from Greek that signify, respectively, a place at the southernmost end of the known world and a people who are phenotypically dark.¹ Ethiopia and Ethiopians are the standard translations of Kush and Kushites employed in the Septuagint, the New Testament, the Vulgate, and a number of European vernacular translations of the Bible. The terms are also used in non-Christian translations such as the Soncino Press editions of the Babylonian Talmud (1938), the Midrash Rabbah (1983), and the Jewish Publication Society of America’s 1955 translation of the Tanakh. Nevertheless, Ethiopia and Ethiopians are not merely descriptive words for a place and people; they are figures that come into English with histories, and they are products of centuries of refiguration.

The refiguring of Ethiopia and Ethiopians owes a significant debt to their hermeneutical importance for both ancient Jewish and Christian interpreters. The flowering of rabbinic Judaism after 70 C.E. and the rise and success of Christianity among non-Jews brought a new attention to God’s Word. Rabbinic Judaism developed the notion of the dual Torah (the written and oral Torahs) and rabbinic interpretation focused on two dominant concerns: proper action, and the Messiah and the messianic age. Rabbinic writings and interpretations of Torah, in its multifaceted sense, continually asked the questions: what does God require of His

people of Israel? How does He want us to fulfill the Torah? For example, one merely has to read the Talmud, Tractate Pesahim (Paschal Lambs), to see these two questions in discussion among the rabbis. This Tractate addresses the laws of Passover and concerns what actions must take place, when they must take place, and how they must take place. Concerning the Messiah and the messianic age, rabbinic literature is filled with thousands of references, descriptions, speculations, and hopes about this person, this period, and their importance for both Israel and the world (Neusner 1984). The Messiah and the messianic age are central figures in Jewish prayer. Jews are obligated to pray three times a day and in one of these prayers, the Amidah, the gathering of exiles, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, redemption and deliverance through a Davidic King, and the return of God's Presence (the Shekhinah) to Zion are foregrounded.

Parallel to rabbinic interpretations of God's Word are Christian interpretations of the Bible. The writings of Christian exegetes on God's Word are as diverse and voluminous as those of the rabbis, and dominant themes can be found in Christian writings in the same way they are found in rabbinic writings. It behooves us to remember that Christianity began as a Jewish movement that had to differentiate, justify, and explain itself in relationship to other Jewish groups. Through both allegorical and figurative interpretations, Christian interpreters of God's Word demonstrated how and why Jesus is the Christ; why Gentiles, for the time being, have displaced Israel in God's plan; and the anticipation of Christ's imminent return. Paul's writings are an excellent place to find these characteristically Christian exegetical themes. In Romans, Paul argues that the law and the prophets are fulfilled in Christ. He cites the relationship between Adam and Christ to prove his point. Adam, the first man, sinned and brought death into the world that "pervade[s] the whole human race"; but he "foreshadows the Man [Jesus] who was to come." Christ negates Adam's sin and its consequence through his redemptive death and resurrection (Romans 5, 6). God has not abandoned Israel, but due to Israel's deafness to the Gospel and blindness to the truth, "salvation has come to the Gentiles" (Romans 11:11). According to Paul, God's salvation is universal. To prove this, Paul cites Isaiah 59:20–21 and the story of Abraham. Abraham, the father of nations, is someone justified by his faith who prefigures the spiritual orientation of the messianic age (Romans 4, 11). Furthermore, Christians live in the shadow of the end of time, or what Paul calls "the Day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 1:8). These three themes of Christ

Jesus, Israel's status, and the timing of Jesus's return are echoed in Paul's others writings, the Gospels, Acts, and throughout patristic literature.

Auerbach's Analysis of *Figura*

Even though Paul's writings set the hermeneutical trajectory of Christian biblical interpretation, Erich Auerbach's essay, "Figura" (1944), demonstrated how figural interpretation became the hegemonic hermeneutical method and historical point of view of western Christian exegetes from the fourth century through the Christian Middle Ages (34). Given the fact that the Christian Bible has an Old and New Testament, Church Fathers had to determine the relationship of the testaments to one another. One might be tempted to think that patristic writers effaced the historical and national narratives of Israel contained in the Old Testament with spiritual and allegorical interpretations to buttress the revelation of Jesus as Christ, the belief in his death and resurrection as the new covenantal relationship between God and humanity, and the claim of the church as the New Israel. Even though these are theological and hermeneutical positions of the church, the figural interpretative method of patristic writers understood the two testaments as symbiotic and necessary to one another.² Before Auerbach clarified the institutional importance of the figure to patristic writers, he traced its emergence, transformations, and significance to pre-Christian Latin writers.

According to Auerbach's philological analysis, in figure's earliest Latin appearance, it denoted "plastic form" (11). That sense of figure was not static due to the origin of the word. Derived from the stem instead of the supine, figure connoted "something living and dynamic, incomplete and playful" (12). Prior to the Hellenization of figure, it was used as a synonym of *forma* [form]. The introduction of Greek created a wedge between the two words, but it did not separate them. For instance, form translated the Greek *morphē* and *eidos* ("the form or idea which 'inform' matter"), and figure translated *schēma* ("the purely perceptual shape"), but figure also took on a conceptual sense like the word form (14–15). Moreover, figure translated the Greek *plasis* [molding] and thereby brought it into the semantic sphere of "statue," "image," "portrait," to impinge on the domain" of Latin words such as "*statua* and even *imago*, *effigies*, *species*, *simulacrum*" (15). In the works of Lucretius, figure was stretched to signify "model" and "copy," and it is used in his discussion of atoms and their incessant

movement (17). Cicero introduced figure into the realm of rhetoric, but it was Quintilian who fully developed it. Before Quintilian's alteration of figure in *Institutio oratoria*, Ovid further expanded the sense of figure by using it as something "mobile, changeable, multiform, and deceptive" (23). Quintilian's differentiation of tropes and figures added to the protean nature of the word. For Quintilian, tropes were "words and phrases" used in a nonliteral sense, the substitution of "words for other words," while figures were "a form of discourse which deviated from normal and most obvious usage," the discourse of verbal allusion and dissimulation (25–26). Or, as Auerbach described Quintilian's use of figure: "The art of the hinting, insinuating, obscuring circumlocution, calculated to ornament a statement or to make it more forceful or mordant" (27).

The pre-Christian Latin senses of figure reverberated with patristic writers and their interpretation of the Bible. They further accented the protean nature of figure and established the hegemony of figural interpretation in the Catholic tradition. Weaving a story of figural interpretation through Tertullian, Augustine, Paul, and Dante, Auerbach demonstrates how figure continued its semantic expansion in patristic literature. Without presenting the numerous hermeneutical examples Auerbach provides, I would like to focus on the figural relationship between Oshea, son of Nun and the man Moses renames Joshua, and Jesus, as representative of figural interpretation. According to Tertullian:

For the first time he is called Jesus. . . . This, then, we first observe, was a figure of things to come. For inasmuch as Jesus Christ was to introduce a new people, that is to say us [Christians], who are born in the wilderness of this world, into the promised land flowing with milk and honey, that is to say, into the possession of eternal life, than which nothing is sweeter; and that, too, was not to come about through Moses, that is to say, through the discipline of the Law, but through Jesus, that is, through the grace of the gospel, our circumcision being performed by a knife on stone, that is to say, by Christ's precepts—for Christ is a rock; therefore that great man, who was prepared as a type of this sacrament, was even consecrated in figure with the Lord's name, and was called Jesus. (28–29)

Jesus and his salvatory grace are concealed within the person of Joshua, the law, and the Israelite experience of wandering and entering into the land of Canaan. What is crucial about this sense of prefiguration and

figural reading in general is that Tertullian emphasizes the historical reality of persons and events of both biblical testaments. Joshua is not a spiritual or immaterial person in the Old Testament who serves as an allegorical sign of Jesus Christ. He is a historical entity whose character contains the future in the person of Jesus Christ, another historical entity; and Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the hidden content contained by Joshua. Therefore, both characters and events are interdependent on one another. The relationship of the figure and its fulfillment are symmetrical to one another in that they are similar. Auerbach writes, "Here the naming of Joshua-Jesus is treated as a prophetic event foreshadowing things to come. . . . The man [Joshua] who appeared as the prophetic annunciation of this still hidden mystery [Jesus and grace] . . . was introduced under the *figura* of the divine name. Thus the naming of Joshua-Jesus is a phenomenal prophecy or prefiguration of the future Saviour; *figura* is something real and historical which announces something else that is real and historical" (29).

The relationship of these two real and historical events is mediated by time in Tertullian's figural reading; however, there remains a problem. The messianic event is paradoxical; it has happened with the resurrection of Jesus, but it is not complete because the full presence of Christ in the world has not yet taken place. Christianity finds itself in a type of messianic interregnum. The messianic age is "now, but not yet," or what Benjamin refers to as "Jetztzeit" (*Illuminations* 261, 263). The future of the Christ contained in Joshua is only partially fulfilled in the person of Jesus. The "now" of Tertullian's reading is taking place in time before the Parousia, and therefore before the fulfillment of the first part of the messianic event. Whereas the figural relationships of the Old Testament to the New Testament, or the Gospels to Christian ritual, are symmetrical, the promise of the Parousia is asymmetrical to its fulfillment, because it has not yet taken place. Auerbach demonstrates that Augustine, while keeping Tertullian's figural hermeneutics, must accent the method to account for the "ultimate fulfillment." The figural relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament still holds; the Old Testament prefigures the New, and the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old, but the relationship of the New Testament to the end of the world and Final Judgment is yet to be fulfilled (41).

In Tertullian, figure and fulfillment are two interdependent historical poles. With Augustine's addition of the third pole ("ultimate fulfillment"),

the latter is without a real and concrete historical event that accompanies the former two historical events. Auerbach calls Augustine's modification of Tertullian's method an abstraction and a movement away from the material nature of figural interpretation (41ff). Nevertheless, Augustine can maintain the integrity of figural interpretation by referring to the nature of God instead of the nature of scripture. Whereas humanity differentiates time, God does not. The past, present, and future are merely God's eternal, timeless present. Our future is God's present, and what seems to be disfigured to us and lacking a real historical event is not disfigured to God. Because our future is God's present, God knows his present and has already determined what will take place. The future is not foreknowledge to God, it is knowledge because it takes place in His present and He knows it. Therefore, the Christian reader can only have a relationship of faith to the scripture and the future. As historical beings, Christians can only have faith in God and his promised Parousia; it is not something they can know through reading, and the promise of the unfulfilled Parousia becomes an index of the indeterminacy of writing and signification that the church domesticates through its institutional reading of the scripture. Without a historical telos the ultimate meaning of the figure cannot be determined. This is what the numerous and contentious Protestant figural readings of Psalm 68:31 demonstrate. Without the ultimate fulfillment taking place, the pole that would be essential for determining the meaning of the figure is absent, and because this is hermeneutically the case, the signifier is free from the signified.

Four major points about Auerbach's essay should be emphasized. First, "figure" is a multifaceted word with many significations—among them the discourse of indirection and allusion. Figure is open-ended and a semantic wild card. Second, the figural method of interpretation of scripture differs from "the spiritualist-ethical-allegorical" method (55). Whereas the former is concrete and historical, the latter is abstract and conceptual (53–57). Third, figural interpretation and the figural view of history constitute the hegemonic understanding of the Bible and history from late antiquity through the Middle Ages. They are the structures of knowledge that attended the Christian tradition in Western Europe prior to modernity.³ Fourth, to clarify that figural interpretation and the figural view of history are orders of understanding incommensurate with modernity and its view of interpretation and history, Auerbach differentiates the figural from the modern:

Thus history, with all its concrete force, remains forever a figure, cloaked and needful of interpretation. In this light the history of no epoch ever has the practical self-sufficiency which, from the standpoint both of primitive man and of modern science, resides in the accomplished fact; all history, rather, remains open and questionable, points to something still concealed, and the tentativeness of events in the figural interpretation is fundamentally different from the tentativeness of events in the modern view of historical development. In the modern view, the provisional event is treated as a step in an unbroken horizontal process; in the figural system the interpretation is always sought from above; events are considered not in their unbroken relation to one another, but torn apart, individually, each in relation to something other that is promised and yet not present. Whereas in the modern view the event is always self-sufficient and secure, while the interpretation is fundamentally incomplete, in the figural interpretation the fact is subordinated to an interpretation which is fully secured to begin with: the event is enacted according to the idea model which is the prototype situated in the future and thus far only promised. (58–59)

Auerbach makes it exceedingly clear that the figural and the modern are incommensurable ways of understanding history and interpretation. For the former, past concrete events are singular, and stand in relationship to singular future concrete events that they prefigure, but are “not yet present” (59). Figural history is vertical because the future “is already fulfilled in God” and “has existed from all eternity in His providence,” but as experience to be lived by human beings, it is incomplete and unfulfilled (59). God decides the future from above and before it happens. In this cultural milieu, the Christian exegete who interprets figurally recognizes figures through “*intellectus spiritualis*” (32ff). The figures are embedded in the Bible to be read, and figural interpreters—be they Paul, Augustine, or Dante—are graced intelligences who read the signs. The concrete events of the Bible are the impetus for figural interpretation itself. Christian exegetes see the figural relationship between events and identify them as such, but they do not, create them (53). For the latter, events are causally related to one another and are contained in the horizontal, or linear, unfolding, of time toward its telos. This is the narrative of history that is part and parcel of modernity. Instead of the figuration of events revealing

themselves to interpreters who apprehend it, in modernity, interpreters are ones who comprehend. They are subjects of knowledge, who not only determine the nature, dimensionality, and meaning of events through representational thinking, but also have shifted agency from God to human beings.⁴

Rabbinic and Patristic Figures of Ethiopia

Separated thematically and even methodologically in their overall approach and understanding of God's Word, it should not be surprising that Jewish and Christian interpreters of Psalm 68:31 read the verse completely differently from one another. Both traditions read Psalm 68:31 as a significant passage, and both agree that Ethiopians are phenotypically different and that Ethiopia is a geographically remote location. However, the images of Ethiopia and Ethiopians derived from their readings of Psalm 68:31 are vastly dissimilar. Even though both traditions construct images of Ethiopia and Ethiopians, it is the figural readings in patristic literature that will reverberate among Anglophone Protestant Christians beginning in the seventeenth century and continue to echo in black letters from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. The Christian interpretation of Psalm 68:31 is greater and more significant in the sense of sheer volume and influence than the Jewish reading of this verse, but I will begin with the latter.

Psalm 68:31 is linked to discussions of the messianic age and its universalism in three major Jewish texts: the Midrash Tehillim (Midrash on Psalms), the Exodus Rabbah, part of the Midrash Rabbah (Great Midrash), and Pesahim (Paschal Lambs), a tractate of the Babylonian Talmud. According to the rabbis, in the messianic age, Ethiopia will bring gifts or material wealth to the King Messiah in acknowledgement of his Kingship and Ethiopia's subjugation to him. In Exodus Rabbah and Pesahim, the Messiah accepts the gifts from Egypt, who enslaved the Israelites, and then he graciously receives gifts from Ethiopia, who did not enslave Israel (*The Babylonian Talmud* 611). The bringing of these gifts by Egypt and Ethiopia to the Messiah will inspire all nations of the world to bring gifts also, but only Rome's gift will be rejected because it razed the Temple in 70 C.E.⁵ Midrash Tehillim echoes, yet refracts, Exodus Rabbah and Pesahim. Employing a philological reading of Psalm 68:31 that focuses on the word *ḥašḥmanim* [Princes], Ethiopia will bring gifts, animal sacrifices,

or money to God, thereby acknowledging his sovereignty, but Ethiopia will also worship God, “Here ḥašhmanim is taken as made up of ḥašim, ‘they that are in haste’ and of mēmunnim, ‘they that are ready’: Thus they shall come in haste, ready to be proselytes. So, too, the end of the verse implies that Ethiopia shall hasten and run to reach out her hands toward God” (*The Midrash on the Psalms* 549). The final point about ḥašhmanim that Midrash Tehillim makes is about phenotype. Employing the figure of metathesis in which the *het* and *alef* are transposed, rabbinic interpreters claim that the word is *ašmannim*, or “‘men burnished by the sun,’ and thus means ‘black people,’ referring to the verse *The sons of Ham: Ethiopia and Egypt* (Gen. 10:6)” (*The Midrash on the Psalms* 549).

The refiguring of an Ethiopia who will acknowledge and submit to the Messiah, or of an Ethiopia who will worship God that is derived from readings of Psalm 68:31 by the rabbis is a significant transformation of the figure of Ethiopia. The rabbinic figure of Ethiopia is something projected into the future, the messianic age, or, according to the Midrash Tehillim, “When the kingdom of Edom [Rome] is destroyed” (*The Midrash on the Psalms* 548). As discussed earlier, this historical problem does not exist in Christian interpretations of Psalm 68:31 because in the Christian story the Messiah has already come. In patristic literature, Ethiopia and Ethiopians are important signs within Christian hermeneutics and the Christian understanding of history for several reasons. First, Ethiopians are a figure of difference. They represent all nations that are neither Christian nor Jew. Ethiopians are a synecdoche for all unconverted Gentiles. Furthermore, as representative Gentiles, Ethiopians are disfigured due to sin. Second, Ethiopians are also a name for Gentiles who have become Christian. Third, since Ethiopians are the furthest away geographically from the light of Christ’s salvation, their conversion to Christianity represents the universalization of the gospel and ultimately signals the conversion of the Jews. Lastly, patristic interpretations of Psalm 68:31 usually associate this verse to a number of other biblical verses such as Numbers 12:1, Song of Songs 1:5, Zephaniah 3:9, Jeremiah 38:1–13, 39:15–18, I Kings 10:1–10, Acts 8:26–40, and the genealogies of Genesis 10:6–14 and I Chronicles 1:8–11.

One of the most influential patristic interpreters who refigured Ethiopia is Origen of Alexandria. In the process of explaining the Song of Songs, particularly verse 1:5, Origen makes a reading of Psalm 68:31. Addressing the verse, “I am black and beautiful, O ye daughters of Jerusalem” both allegorically and figurally, Origen sees the speaker, the Bride, as the

Gentile Church which is black with sin, but beautiful because she has converted and repented for her sins (*Song of Songs* 276). Origen writes, "She is called black, however, because she has not yet been purged of every stain of sin, she has not yet been washed unto salvation; nevertheless she does not stay dark-hued, she is becoming white" (*Song of Songs* 276). The Bride's penitence gives her what Origen calls "Ethiopian beauty" (*Song of Songs* 277). It is in his movement from blackness to Ethiopia that Origen references Psalm 68:31 and a half dozen other references to Ethiopia from the Bible to explain "Ethiopian beauty": Numbers 12:1, Psalm 72:8, Zephaniah 3:10, Matthew 9:18–26, 12:42, I Kings 10, and Romans 11:11, 31.

In Numbers, a story is told that Aaron and Miriam "murmured" against Moses because of his "Ethiopian" wife. Origen reads this narrative as a figure of the current state of the world. Aaron is a figure of the Jewish priesthood, Miriam is a figure of the synagogue, and Moses's Ethiopian wife is a figure of the Gentile Church. In this relationship, Jews feel passed over by Gentiles due to God's redemption of the world through Christ, so they murmur against Him. Origen cites Zephaniah 3:10 "From the ends of the rivers of Ethiopia shall they bring offerings," Psalm 68:31b "Ethiopia shall get her hands in first with God," and the story of Jesus's healing of the hemorrhagic woman before Jairus's daughter (who was the president of the synagogue) as proof of the Gentiles' movement toward God and God's movement toward them. Ethiopia, a synecdoche for converted Gentiles, who come "from the ends of the world" to hear and obey the words of Jesus (prefigured by Solomon), is being healed before sick Israel (*Song of Songs* 277–78). In other words, Origen interprets *Song of Songs* 1:5 to be about Gentiles converted to Christianity, their displacement of the Jews in God's plan, and the latter's resentment over this state of affairs.⁶ In the language of *Song of Songs*, Origen explains the displacement of Israel by Ethiopia, "the Gentile Church," in that the Bridegroom—or Christ—loves the Church more than Israel (*Song of Songs* 277). The darkness of the Bride is twofold: spiritual and physical. Her spiritual darkness is the result of her years of living in the "double foulness" that is continual sin and her physical darkness due to being burnt by the sun.⁷

According to Origen's commentary on the *Song of Songs* 1:5, phenotypical blackness is really not at stake. The color of the Ethiopians is natural and the result of being burnt by the visible sun (*Song of Songs* 107–09). The Bride is black like an Ethiopian, but her true blackness is of a spiritual nature. The true sun, the Sun of Justice, an Origenian metonymy for

Christ, blackens the Bride's soul because she was sinful and did not stand straight (*Song of Songs* 107–10). Like all Gentiles, even though she has converted to Christianity, the Bride has a black soul that the Sun of Justice will whiten.

Subsequent Church Fathers such as Cyril of Alexandria, Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine reiterate the importance of spiritual blackness without linking it to physical blackness. Ethiopia is black, but her blackness is spiritual and a synecdoche of all Gentiles and their spiritual blackness. Cyril writes in his explanation of Psalm 68:31 that “quod insuper Æthiopia gentes omnes peccato nigrantes significet” [“Ethiopia signifies all peoples black in sin”].⁸ He elaborates on the nature of Ethiopian blackness in his commentary on Habakkuk 3:7, “The *Ethiopians* refer to the idolaters, whose life is of the flesh and the earth and is involved in unclean things. Ethiopians are like that; instead of having the divine light in their minds, they are, as it were, black at heart and dark in their thinking” (Cyril of Alexandria 383).

Jerome's homily on Psalm 86 (87) echoes Origen's and Cyril's reading of Ethiopian blackness as sin. Explaining verse four of the Psalm, “Of Philistia, Tyre, Ethiopia: ‘These were born there,’” Jerome immediately asserts that it concerns “the calling of the Gentiles” (140). Since Ethiopia is a synecdoche for all Gentiles from which Christians are descended, Jerome continues, “At one time we were Ethiopians in our vices and sins. How so? Because our sins had blackened us” (140). For Christians, or former Gentiles, Ethiopian blackness is washed away by God: “We are Ethiopians, therefore, who have been transformed from blackness into whiteness” (140). It is within this context that Jerome understands Psalm 68:31. The extension of Ethiopia's hands to God is her conversion to Christianity (140).

Ambrose also reads Ethiopia as a synecdoche for all Gentile peoples and a metonymy for sin. In his writing on the Holy Spirit, Ambrose makes two interrelated points that are common to the Christian worldview and reading of scripture. Namely, the Jews do not understand the scriptures because they “scorn the Son”; and scripture foretells the conversion of the Gentiles through the figure of Ethiopia (135). Ambrose makes these points through a reading of Jeremiah 38:10–11, Psalm 68:31, and Song of Songs 1:5: “we, namely, sinners of the Gentiles, formerly black with sins, and once fruitless, have brought forth from the depth the words of prophecy which the Jews had thrust, as it were, into the mire of their minds and

of their flesh" (135). Here Ambrose cites Psalm 68:31 and Song of Songs 1:5 as evidence of prophesied Gentile conversion and Gentile sinfulness. He continues, "Black through sin, beautiful through grace; black through normal condition, beautiful through redemption; or surely black by the dust of their exercise" (135). As is the case with Origen, Cyril, and Jerome, Ambrose's Ethiopian blackness is a metonymy for sin and Ethiopia is a synecdoche for Gentiles in general.

In Augustine's engagement with Psalm 68:31, the color of Ethiopia is not pertinent to his interpretation. Ethiopia, as a synecdoche of all Gentile nations, is more important for understanding the verse as a hidden figure of Gentile salvation through faith according to God's plan. Augustine foregrounds Ethiopia's blackness in his exposition of Psalm 74:13–14. These verses of the psalm praise God for subduing primordial chaos (sea monsters and the leviathan) so that order could be established on earth.⁹ In many respects, Psalm 74:12–17 is a song that re-sings the first creation story in Genesis, but more is suggested in Augustine's reading of these verses. God's defeat of primordial chaos prefigures His defeat of the devil. The leviathan, which Augustine calls "the dragon," is the figure of the devil. Augustine's translation of the psalm reads, "Thou hast broken the head of the dragon . . . Thou hast given him for a morsel to the Ethiopian peoples" (Schaff 346). The reference to Ethiopia leads to Augustine's discussion of phenotype, conversion, and figuration: "What is this? How do I understand the Ethiopian peoples? How but by these all nations? And properly by black men: for Ethiopians are black. They are themselves called to the faith who were black; the very same indeed, so that there is said to them, 'for ye were sometime darkness, but now light in the Lord'" (Schaff 346). Augustine reiterates the figures of Ethiopia common to patristic literature: Ethiopia as the synecdoche for all Gentiles, the blackness of Ethiopia, Ethiopia's salvation, and the allegorization of Ethiopia's blackness. Just as Origen posited that the Bride's darkness would lighten through faith, Augustine's exposition of Psalm 74:14 suggests that physical blackness is different from spiritual blackness, and that of the two the latter is the problem, not the former. Notice that Augustine writes, "Ethiopians are black," which is merely a description of their color and nothing else. The blackness that is in need of whitening is their Gentile soul: "they are . . . called to the faith who were black." Augustine's use of the past tense indicates that it is spiritual blackness that God calls to faith. Ethiopians

remain physically black, but they were spiritually black before their faith in God through Christ.

The conversion of Ethiopia to Christianity also explains the second half of the verse, "Thou [God] hast given him [the devil] for a morsel to the Ethiopian peoples." Linking the cursed serpent of Eden and the dragon of verse 14, which are both struck on the heads and are both the devil, Augustine quickly associates Moses's rod/serpent and its swallowing of the Egyptian magicians' rods/serpents as a figure of Christian Ethiopia consuming the devil: "Thus the devil is being consumed with the loss of his members. This was figured also in the serpent of Moses. . . . Let there be perceived therefore even now the body of the devil: this is what is coming to pass, he is being devoured by the Gentiles who have believed, he hath become meat for the Ethiopian peoples" (Schaff 347). Augustine allegorizes this figure when he explains that Ethiopians do not literally consume the devil, but rebuke him: "What is, bite him? By reproving, blaming, accusing" (Schaff 347).

Ethiopian blackness as a metonymy for sin in Augustine's work should not distract from his reading of Psalm 68:31. In *Exposition on the Book of Psalms*, Augustine's interpretation of Psalm 68:31 reiterates the figures of Ethiopia already presented by Origen: Ethiopia as a synecdoche of all Gentile nations, Ethiopia as a remote land, Ethiopia as a convert to Christianity, and Psalm 68:31 as a prophecy.¹⁰ Augustine identifies Psalm 68:31 as a prophecy of Christ's universal salvation. Egypt and Ethiopia, the two places mentioned and personified in the verse, signify "the faith of all nations, from a part the whole" that will be ambassadors for Christ. Psalm 68:31 prefigures the universality of the Gospel and Christ's commissioning of both Israelites and Gentiles to be "preachers of Christian peace." Furthermore, Ethiopia, "which seemeth to be the utmost limit of the Gentiles," will be justified and saved through faith that will precede the works of her hands. For Augustine, the verse reads, "Ethiopia shall come before the hands of her to God," which he interprets to mean that Ethiopia will "believe in God" and this belief will negate the sins she committed before her conversion (Schaff 298). In short, Augustine is reading Psalm 68:31 through Paul, specifically Romans 3:28: "man is justified by faith quite apart from success in keeping the law," or the idea that Ethiopia shall literally come to God through faith "before" Ethiopia as a Christian nation will do Christian works.

Patristic figural readings of Psalm 68:31 refigure Ethiopia and Ethiopians. The ancient descriptive figures of Ethiopian phenotype and Ethiopia's geographical location south of Egypt, themselves far from stable, are transformed into figures of Christian history and God's providence. Both Jewish and Christian exegetes read Psalm 68:31 as an indication that Ethiopia will change its relationship to God. The rabbis interpret the movement of Ethiopia's hands almost literally; Ethiopia will bring gifts to the Messiah thereby acknowledging his sovereignty, and other nations will follow suit. Some rabbinic readers see the verse as a prophecy of Ethiopia's conversion to Judaism: a foreign people [goy] will become part of goy Israel [the people of Israel]. The figural readings by the Church Fathers understand Ethiopia as part of God's plan for universal salvation. In patristic literature, Ethiopia and Ethiopians are a synecdoche for all Gentile nations, both before and after conversion, and hence also a metonymy for sin. Gentiles, due to their worship of false gods and their inability to stand straight, are sinners; they are black with sin. The phenotypical blackness of Ethiopia is merely a shadow of her sinful soul, a visible cloak that hides her invisible spiritual state. Phenotypical blackness in and of itself is meaningless and does not have a place in God's providence. Ethiopia also becomes a figure of the converted sinner, the Gentile peoples who have come to Christ through faith. The converted, penitent, but unwashed Ethiopia, is the black and beautiful Bride of Christ. The daughters of Jerusalem are jealous of her status, and Aaron and Miriam murmur against her position within God's plan. Moreover, the conversion of Ethiopia to Christianity is prophesied according to the patristic exegetes, and Psalm 68:31 is one of the verses that prefigures the coming of Ethiopia to God. Ethiopia will enter into God's new order, introduced by Christ, before Israel.

2



Managing Blackness

Protestant Readings of Psalm 68:31 in Colonial America

The conversion of Ethiopia is the realization of Christianity's explicit universalism. In the Christian view of history, salvation is universal. Through his redemptive death and resurrection, Christ, as the New Adam, erases the sin of the original Adam, the father of all human beings. Hence, Christ is the new father for all people who are reborn in him. His redemptive death and resurrection are events prefigured in Jewish scriptures, and they indicate that human history is subject to God's providence. Starting with Paul and continuing through the Church Fathers to the emergence and success of Protestantism, it is a Christian conceit that Christ was first revealed to Israel (both through the shadow of the scriptures and his life in Galilee and Judea), which rejected him, but that his message, crucifixion, and resurrection, were universal as foretold in Jewish scripture. In short, salvation through Christ is given to all peoples.

The appearance of Psalm 68:31 in the writings of George Fox, Samuel Sewall, and Cotton Mather initiates the reconfiguration of Ethiopia in British and colonial English letters. The earliest recorded New World usage of Psalm 68:31 occurs in Protestant sermons and dialogues about the Negro and Indian. Pricked by the presence of Negroes and their enslavement in the Americas and the quest to evangelize the world, Protestant conscience—largely Quaker and Puritan—addressed the question of the Negro's spiritual fate and legal status at the end of the seventeenth century. Protestant writers frame their worldview, their conscience, and their Negroes within the textual boundaries of Genesis to Revelation, the imaginary limits of their biblical hermeneutical prowess, and their ability to objectify the world as subjects of knowledge. For Fox, an early

advocate for the manumission of Christian slaves, Christian masters have a covenantal obligation to Christianize their slaves and the Indians: “And therefore Christians, you that have received it, do you preach the everlasting Covenant, Christ Jesus, to the Ethiopians [*sic*], the Blacks and Tawny-moors [Native Americans], as Philip did” (*Gospel Family-Order* 16). For Sewall, slavery was wrong because whites lacked both the legal and moral authority to enslave Negroes, their brothers and fellow human beings: “It is most certain that all Men, as they are the Sons of *Adam*, are Coheirs; and have equal Right unto Liberty, and all other outward Comforts of Life. God *hath given the Earth [with all its Commodities] unto the Sons of Adam, Psalm 115.16 . . .* thee outward Estate of all and every of their Children [Adam and Eve’s], remains the same, as to one another. So that Originally, and Naturally, there is no such thing as Slavery” (Sewall 7–8). For others, such as Cotton Mather, slavery was not morally objectionable, but it was unconscionable that Christian masters would not bring their Negroes, who were their neighbors, to the truth of the Gospel and Christianity: “Truly, to Raise a *Soul*, from a dark State of Ignorance and Wickedness, to the Knowledge of God, and the Belief of Christ, and the practice of our Holy and Lovely Religion; ’Tis the noblest Work, that ever was undertaken among the Children of men. . . . O all you that have any **Negroes** in your **Houses**; . . . Let not this Opportunity be Lost” (*Negro* 1–2). Despite Fox’s, Sewall’s, and Mather’s different understandings about what should be done with the Negro, the Bible served as the authorizing text that legitimated their contrary interpretations and positions, and provided the ground where their interpretations gathered.

Slaves and Servants are Family Members

The synchronization of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, English colonization of the New World, the establishment and holding of African slaves by Anglophone masters, and the centrality of the Bible and reading the Bible to Protestantism brought about the reemergence of the Christian figures of Ethiopia derived from Psalm 68:31. In 1671, George Fox, the founder of the Religious Society of Friends or the Quakers, admonishes Christian masters to “preach Christ to your Ethiopians [*sic*] that are in your Families.”¹ Fox’s *Gospel Family-Order* is a sermon given to Christians living in the New World, specifically Barbados, which gives examples of Christian piety and how to Christianize Black and Indian slaves and servants. Using

the figural method of interpretation established by Paul and institutionalized by the Church Fathers, Fox argues that biblical slaves who were members of Jewish households were subject to the covenant that God made first with Abraham and later with Moses and the Israelites at Sinai. In the former instance, Abraham circumcised every male in his household regardless of whether they were his sons or his slaves. In the latter, all of Israel agreed to the covenant at Sinai and therefore the law applied to the Israelites, their slaves, and all strangers within the land of Israel. Fox cites the deuteronomic requirement that everyone (son, daughter, slave, slave-girl, and alien) and everything (ox, ass, cattle) within an Israelite household must keep the Sabbath.

Fox's citations of biblical characters, laws, and stories are figures that inform the age in which he wrote and his Christian audience. According to Fox, Christians are "circumcised with the Spirit," observe the Sabbath because "Christ is the *Sabbath* and *Rest*," and are members of the "*new Covenant*." Therefore they should "outstrip the *Jews* in their Families, in bringing all your Families, and Strangers, and Sojourners, Hewers of Wood and Drawers of Water into the New Covenant of Life" (*Gospel* 4, 7–8). Christians are under the same obligation toward their slaves as was required of those under the old covenant, the biblical Jews. The reason that Christians are obliged to fulfill the family laws of the old covenant is that they *are* the fulfillment of it. Framing Christian obligation within the figure-fulfillment dynamic, Fox writes, "Now mark and consider this all you *Christians*, that profess the New Covenant, *Christ Jesus*, . . . must you not gather all your Families together, . . . that they may all hear, that they may all learn this, and that they may all fear God, and observe and do the Law and the *New-Covenant*, as the *Jews* were to do the old, which is a Figure of the new: and therefore be not you negligent, nor-sloathful [*sic*], nor careless in this, but do your Duty, and see that all your Families may do their Duties" (*Gospel* 8–9).

Fox's evangelical language concerning Ethiopia differentiates him from patristic exegetes. The conversion of Ethiopia to Christianity is not treated as a prophetic certainty, something that will happen before the end of time and which already exists in God's providence. Fox exhorts the men at Thomas Rous's house and his Christian readers to actively convert the Ethiopians in their midst. In numerous parts of his sermon, Fox tells the masters and mistresses of households to "teach," "instruct," "preach," and "bring" Ethiopians to Christ so that they can "hear" and "learn" about

the New Covenant and “fear” God (*Gospel* 5, 8, 9, 16, 23). Fox proposes the formation of Ethiopians as Christian human beings to make them conscious of God and the New Covenant, and to learn their role within God’s providence. Fox does not just want Ethiopians to believe in God, he wants them to “know” Christ and His significance for their lives as one would know an object of knowledge: “Bring them [the blacks] to know the Lord Christ, and the Light and Grace of Christ, by which they may come to know him that dyed [*sic*] for them, and that shed his precious Blood for them, and was buried, and rose again for their Justification” (*Gospel* 20).

Fox’s evangelism is twofold. On the one hand, Fox admonishes Christians to convert Ethiopians and form them into Christian human beings, and claims that Christians are obligated to do so. On the other hand, he also makes jeremiads against those Christians who profess Christ, but do not live up to their covenantal obligations. Citing deuteronomic passages that threaten the biblical Jews with destruction if they fail to abide to the covenant, Fox figurally applies biblical jeremiads to Christians who withhold Christianity from Ethiopians, especially the ones within their households: “So now consider this seriously, how God would have all Families to call upon his Name, especially you that call your selves *Christians*, . . . therefore see that all your Families do call upon the Name of the Lord, it concerns you very much; if you do not, *ye may expect the Lord’s Fury will be poured out upon you and yours.*”²

Following the figural logic of the relationship between the biblical Jews and seventeenth-century Protestant slaveholders, Fox argues that his audience and fellow Christians must emancipate their Christian slaves. He points to the law of the old covenant that released Israelite slaves from Israelite masters after seven years of service. Basically, Fox claims that Christians should not hold one another as slaves.³ Hence, the Ethiopian slaves should be emancipated, but if Christians do own slaves, Fox admonishes them, because they are “Spiritual Jews,” to be moral and humane masters. Christians should allow their slaves to marry to avoid the immorality of Sodom and Gomorrah or the Canaanites, and they should employ the Golden Rule with their slaves (*Gospel* 17–20).

It is evident from Fox’s language that he was well aware of the figural method of Christian interpretation and the significance of the word “figure” itself.⁴ More important than his use of “figure” is the way in which he opposes and links the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, the biblical Jews and seventeenth-century Anglophone Christians living in the New

World. Paramount in the style of Fox's discourse is his use of the deictical adverb "now." Now, of course, signifies "at this time that is here" or "the present moment that is here," and this is just how Fox uses it. His style of argumentation is to discuss a biblical character or story and its relationship to God's covenant and to follow this discussion by admonishing his fellow Christians to fulfill their obligations to God's covenant "*now!*" Fox's "*now*" is in direct relationship to figures revealed in the Bible that are or should be fulfilled in his present moment. In tones reminiscent of Paul, Fox suggests that time is contracted in 1671. The Parousia is near. The Jetztzeit of the moment demands the Christianization of Ethiopians and renewed faithfulness by those who are already Christians. Fox exhorts the slaveholders in Barbados to seize the moment and the opportunity to fulfill God's word. It is in Fox's dialectic between "then" and "now" that Psalm 68:31–32 is cited and explained.

As in patristic interpretations of Psalm 68:31, Fox weaves other biblical references to Ethiopia together to make his point about the verse. Fox prefaces his figural interpretation of Psalm 68:31–32 with a figural reading of Amos 9:7, Jeremiah 38, and Acts 8:27. The trajectory of Fox's reading is to first humble his Christian audience by making them figural Ethiopians: "Now consider this, if the Children of *Israel* transgress the Law of God, were they not accounted as *Ethiopian Children*: And so you Christians now, who profess *Christ* in Words, and transgress his Law of Love, of Life, of Faith, and the New-covenant, *are you not to the Lord as Children of the Ethiopians*: what Difference's between you? [*sic*]" (*Gospel* 13–14). The figures of Ethiopia as the Gentile Church and as a metonymy for sin are as old as Origen's *Commentary and Homilies on Song of Songs*: Fox's Christian contemporaries are also in rebellion against God's law, yet this figural reading of Amos 9:7 is not an end in itself, for Fox also wants to address the conversion of black Ethiopia to Christianity.

To do this, Fox cites the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, a representative of Candace, the queen of Ethiopia, in Acts (8: 26–40). The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch by Philip is a figure of what Christians should do to their "Ethiopians"; Christian masters should convert their slaves (*Gospel* 14–15). To make his case, Fox relates the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch to Psalm 68:31–32.⁵ Reading this verse within the framework established in patristic literature, Fox writes, "Now consider this ye *Christians*, the Prophecy of *David*, in that you may see the fulfilling of it (*viz.*) that *Ethiopia* should soon stretch out her Hand unto God for you;

see by the *Eunuch*, when he was converted, his Hand was soon stretched out to God" (*Gospel* 15). New World slavery has put Ethiopians—black people—in the households of white Christians. The latter have a religious imperative at this very moment to Christianize the former and the Indians, whom Fox also refers to as "Tawny-moors," "And therefore *Christians*, you that have received it, do you preach the everlasting Covenant, Christ Jesus, to the *Ethyopians*, the *Blacks* and *Tawny-moors*, as *Philip* did" (*Gospel* 16). Ethiopia, once again, is a synecdoche for the Gentile nations, but its geographical reference has been expanded beyond patristic interpretations. Fox's Ethiopians are the slaves brought to the Americas from Africa and the dark-skinned native peoples of the Americas. They are the non-Christians who populate the Americas, who are neighbors to Christians, and who are in need of Christ. The populations of the New World provide the opportunity for the expansion of Christ's kingdom. As a man situated in the seventeenth century, Fox saw his time as messianic and demanded Ethiopia's conversion, an event prophesied in Psalm 68:31–32 and prefigured in God's providence.

The Christianization of Ethiopia is accompanied by its intercession to God on behalf of the Christians instrumental in its conversion. Fox's interpretation of Psalm 68:31 addresses the movement of Ethiopia's hands. Because Christians are under an obligation to evangelize Ethiopians and form them into Christian human beings, the Ethiopians in gratitude will offer up prayers to God on behalf of them for sharing and spreading the Gospel. Fox's understanding of Christians and Ethiopians (Africans and Native Americans) in the New World suggests interdependence. Christians cannot avoid their covenantal duties toward Ethiopians, and the former cannot avoid gratitude toward the latter: the two are inextricably bound together.

Fox's indebtedness to the figural interpretation of scripture and history is evident in his Barbadian sermon, but he was also a modern man who was compelled to address physical color. After Fox admonished the men's group to Christianize their Ethiopians, he cited Acts 17:26, that all humanity is of one blood, to proleptically counter any objections that Ethiopians, due to their race (or blood) were beyond the reach of salvation.⁶ Whereas the Spanish Inquisition made blood purity one of the paramount characteristics of Spanish nationality and therefore a differentiating substance, Fox uses blood in the opposite fashion. Christians and non-Christians share the same blood and are only separated from

Ethiopians by religion. For those men gathered at Rous's house in 1671, or for Christian readers after this date who might withhold Christianity from Ethiopians due to racial difference, Fox delegitimizes their claim. Fox sees and acknowledges phenotypical difference, but this difference does not make a spiritual difference because "*Christ dyed [sic] for all, both Turks Barbarians [Muslims], Tartarians [Asians], and Ethyopians; he dyed for the Tawnes and for the Blacks, as well as for you that are called Whites*" (*Gospel* 14).

It is within the context of the New World and the Ethiopians in it that Fox draws attention to the adverb "soon" in Psalm 68:31–32 and its importance in Ethiopia's conversion. In his interpretation of Psalm 68:31–32, Fox suggests that when Ethiopians learn about Christianity they will quickly become Christians. Fox's understanding of the rapid conversion of Ethiopians to Christianity is informed by the figure of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts. In Luke's story of the Ethiopian and Philip, Philip comes upon an Ethiopian reading Isaiah chapter 53, but with great difficulty. The Ethiopian cannot understand the passage. Philip, employing a figural interpretation, offers to explain the passage. When the Ethiopian learns that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of the "suffering servant," he immediately asks Philip to baptize him to become a Christian. By this act, the Ethiopian eunuch prefigures the conversion of all Ethiopians. Fox believed that the same rapid conversion would take place when the Ethiopians in the New World heard the Gospel. The contracted nature of messianic time accounts for Ethiopia's rapid conversion.

Fox's reliance on an English translation of the psalm allowed him to draw attention to the speed with which Ethiopia will convert to Christianity.⁷ The Latin version of the psalm that appears in patristic literature is, "Let Ethiopia extend its hands to God," and it lacks the sense of immediacy in the English translation. The conditions to fulfill David's prophecy existed in Fox's moment; his special calling by God to evangelize, his performance of miracles, and his mystical relationship with Christ were signs that Fox's time was the messianic age (Gragg 7–21, 41). Hence, the two temporal adverbs "soon" and "now" are of hermeneutical importance in Fox's sermon and his other writings. The *Jetztzeit* of Fox's moment is the time for New World Christians to evangelize and bring the Ethiopians to the New Covenant. Just as patristic exegetes refigure Ethiopia through their allegorical and figural interpretations of Psalm 68:31 and a host of passages associated with it, so too Fox further refigured Ethiopia with his

reading of the psalm within his religious, historical, and linguistic situatedness. The Christianization of the world and its Ethiopians, and the trajectory of Christian history toward its telos were the possibilities of Fox's moment.

Negroes are our Brothers and Sisters

The emergence of Psalm 68:31 in colonial American writings is linked to a constellation of documents about the spiritual fate and legal status of the Negro in New England. The first public document in North America to relate Psalm 68:31 to the Negro seems to be Samuel Sewall's *The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial* (1700), an essay that was also the first antislavery text published in New England.⁸ Sewall employed Psalm 68:31 in two ways. The verse not only announces the conversion of Africans, or in Sewall's language "Blackamores" and "Nigers," to Christianity, but it also delegitimizes the colonial justification for slavery itself. After drawing the analogy of stealing, selling, and buying Africans to the selling of Joseph by his brothers, Sewall critiqued four colonial American justifications for slavery. According to those who supported and even profited by the trade in human flesh, the primary legitimacy for African slavery was the so-called biblical "Curse of Ham," the "*Blackamores are of the Posterity of Cham, and therefore are under the Curse of Slavery*" (Sewall 12).

There are some important points to notice in Sewall's language. First, he referred to the slaves as "Blackamores" to draw attention to their phenotypic difference. It is very important to Sewall's argument against slavery that the blackness of the Negro is foregrounded. He cites Jeremiah 13:23 as a proof-text that blackness and Ethiopians have historically been synonymous with one another: "*Can the Ethiopian change his skin?* This shows that Black Men are the Posterity of *Cush*: Who time out of mind have been distinguished by their Colour" (Sewall 13–14). Physical differences are divine in origin and are intended to separate people both geographically and physically. Sewall's reading of Jeremiah in his New England context was nothing other than the central anxiety that has characterized racial difference in America: the fear of race mixing. The presence of Blackamores in New England encouraged fornication and marriage between "Negro men" and "our Daughters." Phenotypic blackness, what Sewall refers to as "their Conditions, Colour & Hair," was a divine barrier separating Negroes from the non-Negro people of New England,

so that the former “can never embody” or join with the latter (10). Following the logic of Sewall’s argument, slavery violated the divine order of creation in that it alienated Blackamores from their God-given home and their families, and encouraged “race mixing” and sin.⁹

Sewall also wanted to link the Negro to Cham and his son Cush. This accounts for his close attention to the language of the biblical text. Countering the accusations that Negroes are cursed to be slaves, Sewall argues that Noah cursed Canaan and his posterity, and “the Blackmores are not descended of *Canaan*, but of *Cham*” (13). In support of his biblical genealogy, Sewall cites and interprets Psalm 68:31, using the Hebrew transliteration of Egypt and Ethiopia, “Princes shall come out of Egypt [Mizraim] *Ethiopia* [Cush] *shall soon stretch out her hands unto God*. Under which Names, all *Africa* may be comprehended; and their Promised Conversion ought to be prayed for” (13). Sewall, reiterating a hermeneutical move by the Church Fathers, links Mizraim and Cush, two descendents of Cham, as the names of African peoples who function as a synecdoche for “all Africa.” But in Sewall’s synecdoche it is the continent of Africa—not all Gentile peoples—under the promise of salvation. The predicate of Ethiopia, “shall soon stretch out her hands unto God,” constitutes the biblical proof of this promise. Therefore, in Sewall’s interpretation of Psalm 68:31, Blackamores are under a promise of becoming Christians, not a curse of becoming slaves to Christians. The stretching of Ethiopia’s hands to God indicates conversion, not enslavement.

Lastly, Sewall wrote that the conversion of the Negro “ought to be prayed for.” Even though he did not elaborate on how this would take place, *The Selling of Joseph* did not advocate the Christianization of the Negro in America or Africa. This is an important point. Despite the fact that Sewall’s tract was the first antislavery piece published in New England, it was not written for Negroes, but about the Negro problem in New England and the spiritual and social crisis that slavery posed for white Christians. Negro slavery was a stain on the conscience of New England Christians; it was un-Christian and immoral to enslave one’s brothers and sisters. Just as the sons of Israel did not have the right to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites, white Christians did not have the moral or legal authority to buy, sell, and own Negroes as slaves. All people are children of Adam and hence coheirs of the earth without the hierarchy and injustice of slavery. The moment was right for the Negroes to convert to Christianity, not for their enslavement to Christians.

In Sewall's essay, Ethiopia is refigured as Joseph, the much-abused son of Jacob. Joseph is a figure who unjustly suffers at the hands of his brothers. Within Sewall's argument, Ethiopia as Joseph is an appeal to the Christian conscience of New Englanders to do the right thing toward their brothers and sisters; Negro concerns and freedom per se are not at stake. If Sewall had followed the logic of his refiguration of Ethiopia, his essay would have taken an interesting direction. In the biblical story, Joseph saves his brothers. During his years in Egypt, Joseph amasses great power, status, and wealth. When his brothers go to Egypt for food, it is Joseph who provides them with sustenance and a new place to dwell. The outcast and former slave becomes the deliverer and his sinful brothers become dependent on him. This is a direction Sewall could have developed, but he did not. The focus of his essay is on the humanity of the Negro and the modern value of human liberty. Yes, Negroes are black, but, as Sewall wrote, "they are the Sons and Daughters of the First *Adam*, the Brethren and Sisters of the Last ADAM, and the Offspring of GOD; They ought to be treated with a Respect agreeable" (16–17).

Converting the Negro and Uplifting His Soul

In Cotton Mather's diaries, as early as October 1693, Psalm 68:31 constituted the sermon topic that he delivered to a collection of Christian Negro slaves who wanted a place of meeting so they could worship (*Rules* 3–4). Nevertheless, in Mather's public broadside associated with the creation of places where Christian Negro slaves could worship, *Rules For the Society of Negroes* (1693), Psalm 68:31 is neither alluded to nor quoted. In Mather's 1691 hagiography of John Eliot whom Increase Mather (Cotton's father) dubbed "the Apostle of the American Indians," Negro conversion to Christianity is mentioned twice, but this event is not linked to Psalm 68:31 (*Magnalia* 576, 581). Even though Mather refers to the Negroes of New England as "Ethiopians" and "blackamores" in his biography of Eliot, his use of "Ethiopian" probably is not derived from Psalm 68:31, but from the already quoted erotema in Jeremiah. Mather's first direct public use of Psalm 68:31 in print occurred in his *The Negro Christianized* (1706), a publication that encouraged masters to Christianize their slaves and instructed slaves to obey their masters.¹⁰

Starting in 1693, with the organization of a Negro Society for religious instruction, Mather took an interest in converting the Negro (Greene

265ff). What Sewall asserted, but did not define, Mather actually formulated in an argument to convert Negro slaves to Christianity and a catechism to instruct them in correct belief and practice. To do this, Mather made an implicit interpretation of Psalm 68:31 in *The Negro Christianized*. Citing the second half of the verse on the title page of the essay, Mather never referred to the verse in his essay. The slaves are never referred to as “Ethiopians,” but as “Negroes” and “blacks.” The absence of the word “Ethiopians” from Mather’s essay signaled a shift that was beginning to take place in colonial New England concerning the blacks within their midst. “Negro” and “black” are English words that were understood as both modern and secular equivalents to “Ethiopian,” a word from scripture. The only time Mather employed “Ethiopian” in his essay was as a pun: “It may seem, unto as little purpose, to *Teach* [slaves], as to *wash an Æthiopian*”; however, this did nothing more than reiterate the classical conception of Ethiopians as a figure of physical blackness (*Negro* 25). Mather’s argument implicitly makes “Negroes,” “blacks,” and “Ethiopians” synonyms, and the Negroes who were slaves of New England masters were the people prefigured by the sign “Ethiopia” in Psalm 68:31.

Mather’s essay can be divided into two main parts. The first portion of the essay is deliberative in its form. Mather tries to convince slave owners, his fellow New Englanders, to Christianize their slaves. His argument rehashes the general theme and tone of Fox’s sermon, which centers around the obligations of Christian masters to convert the slaves in their households to Christianity and God’s judgment against those who do not do so, but Mather’s argument lacks Fox’s messianism and reliance on figural interpretation to justify the Christianization of the slaves. Instead, Mather looks at New Testament passages that obligate masters to convert their slaves and treat them as neighbors (*Negro* 4–26). According to Mather, it is the duty of Christians to be concerned for the unsaved souls of others; true believers proselytize for the faith. The benefits of a Christian slave are enormous; a Christian slave is a happy slave, more faithful, moral, obedient, and more importantly, a child and servant of God. Conversion and baptism, Mather argues, free the slave from sin and Satan, but they do not emancipate him or her from the master. Mather’s concern was not with the physical state of the slave, but with his spiritual state. This initiated in American interpretations of Psalm 68:31 what I will call “the Pygmalion syndrome” of Negroes. Changing Negroes into Christian human beings is uplifting them from one spiritual state of existence to a higher one.

Showing none of the racism that would be evident in the science of race developed during the last half of the eighteenth century and which became endemic in the nineteenth century, Mather argued that the problem with the Negro was not his body, but his soul. Like Sewall, Mather questioned the Hamitic ancestry, and therefore the curse of Ham, on Negroes. He reiterated Sewall's argument of Negro humanity—that Negroes are “*Children of Adam*” and “our *Brethren*, on the same level with us in the expectations of a blessed Immortality thro’ the *Second Adam*” (*Negro* 28). Accounting for phenotypical blackness, Mather employed Origen’s commentary on Song of Songs 1:5: “Whether they that have been Scorched and Blacken’d by the Sun of *Africa*,” but through their conversion to Christianity “their Minds” may be “Healed by the more Benign *Beams* of the *Sun of Righteousness* [Christ]” (*Negro* 2–3). Later in the essay, Mather calls skin color “a trifle” and writes, “The God who *looks on the Heart*, is not moved by the colour of the *Skin*, is not more propitious to one *Colour* than another” (*Negro* 24–25). In addressing the religious state of the slave, Mather situated the Negroes’ spiritual blackness within the patristic tradition. Unconverted Negroes were “*Vassals of Satan*” and “*Slaves to Satan* than they are to *You* [New England Christian masters],” due to their Satanic rites, magic, and worship (*Negro* 2, 15). The Negroes’ soul was black because it had not been exposed to the light and truth of Christianity. Centuries of idolatry had made Negroes barbaric. Mather had no doubt that Negroes retained the human rational capacity to learn, and believed that, with proper Christian instruction, the Negro could be transformed “from a dark State of Ignorance and Wickedness, to Knowledge of **GOD**, and belief of **CHRIST**, and the practice of our Holy and Lovely **RELIGION**” (*Negro* 1).

Bringing the “*Sun of Righteousness*” to the Negro for Mather was a matter of conversion. Fox already introduced the notion that Ethiopians should be Christianized through instruction, but he reserved the word “convert” for the Ethiopian eunuch Christianized by Philip (*Gospel* 14–15). Mather opens his essay with a quotation from the Church Father John Chrysostom on the extraordinary value of converting the non-Christian to Christ, “to Convert one Soul unto God, is more than to pour out Ten Thousand Talents into the Baskets of the Poor” (*Negro* 1). This quotation sets the trajectory of Mather’s essay: the conversion of the Negroes to Christianity through oral instruction. To convert someone is to change or transform him or her from one form or condition to another form or condition,

and within Mather's theological lexicon, conversion was the spiritual regeneration (being reborn in Christ) of an individual that was both a private and a public matter. It was private in that the individual experienced God's grace through inwardness and introspection; it was public in that the individual must articulate this faith publicly. According to Mather, the vehicle of converting the Negroes to Christianity was oral instruction, the power of speech (Kibbey 7–8). In *The Negro Christianized*, Mather uses numerous imperatives (“Tell them,” “Show them,” “Discourse with them,” “Teach them”) that instruct New England Christians to convert their slaves through talk of Christ and his current relationship with them and the possibilities of their eternal fate “till their *Hearts burn within them*” (33). Mather anticipated that this task would be difficult due to the intellectual capacity of Negroes. He calls Negroes stupid, but writes that Christian instructors should teach to the slave's capacity: “A little divine *Light and Grace* infused into them, will be of great account” (*Negro* 25). Nevertheless, the problem with Negroes was neither their color, intellectual capacity, nor diminished humanity. Mather dismissed the colonial prejudice that Negroes were less than human. Just as directly as he calls Negroes stupid, Mather writes that Negroes possess “rational souls,” evident in their speech and daily activities. The problem with Negroes, according to Mather, was the absence of Christian instruction.

Whereas Fox's sermon argued for the emancipation of Christian slaves and Sewall's essay claimed that Christians did not have the moral authority to hold Africans as slaves, Mather wrote that the Christianized slave was ineligible for emancipation.¹¹ The conversion of Negroes to Christianity did not alter the slaves' service to their earthly masters. Mather suggested that Christianity made for a more human articulation of slavery and a more obedient slave, but conversion or baptism did not emancipate him. More importantly, masters did not lose the financial investment they had in their slaves (*Negro* 25–28). Transforming the spiritual state of Negroes did not affect their physical state. Converted Negroes would no longer be spiritual subjects of Satan, but spiritual subjects of God, and they would remain physical subjects of their Christian masters. Nevertheless, Psalm 68:31 had been associated with the discourse of emancipation, and Mather's essay erased neither this association nor the impact that interpretations of the verse would have on discussions about the legitimacy of slavery in colonial and early America; however, Mather's position concerning the legal status of the Negro slave who had been Christianized

would constitute the American norm until the question of slavery was resolved with the Civil War and the Thirteenth Amendment.

The second part of Mather's essay is a Negro catechism. While still directed to slaveholders, the subject matter is the Negro as a Christian. Mather provides two different catechisms, one for Negroes of limited capacity, consisting of three questions and responses, and a longer one for Negroes of greater intellectual capacity. The latter is made up of sixteen introductory questions and responses, twenty more on the Ten Commandments, five biblical passages the Christian slave should know, a truncated Apostles' Creed, and a handful of questions and responses that accompany the rite of baptism. One of the most salient features of Mather's Negro catechism is that the slave was to receive a religious education, not a general education. The instruction of slaves is an oral education, not a literary one. This sentiment is echoed in Fox's *Gospel Family-Order*. Mather does make a passing comment on the possibility of Negro literacy, but he quickly turns from it to the five biblical verses that converted slaves should memorize: Psalm 86:9; John 3:16; Romans 14:10; Titus 2:11–12; and Ephesians 6:5–8. The fifth selection of biblical verses became most representative of slave instruction by Christian ministers throughout the duration of slavery, with the infamous "Servants, be obedient to your masters."¹² The instruction of obedience, as evidence of Christian faith, is reiterated throughout the catechism and Mather's 1693 broadside, *Rules for the Society of Negroes*. Furthermore, Mather's catechism has an etiological function: the slave learns why he is a slave. As with all of Mather's explanations of time, Providence is the reason for slavery: "Show them, That it is **GOD** who has caused them to be *Servants*" because they angered Him with their demonic rites and conjurations (*Negro* 32). Mather's *The Negro Christianized* constitutes the Negro as a figure of the "fortunate fall," or the notion that slavery, despite its horrors, was a boon to Africans and those enslaved in the New World because it introduced them to Christianity and Western civilization. Later in the eighteenth century, this idea promoted an understanding of history that would be articulated in black American literature and theology for over two hundred years.¹³

Returning to the question of the relationship between the appearance of Psalm 68:31 on the title page and the essay itself, the essay is a call and a program for Negro conversion. For Mather, his moment was the time to convert a blind and base population to Christianity. He read the adverb "soon" in the verse as a reference to the conversion of Negroes in his

moment. Mather and his fellow New Englanders were living during a time when they aided the work of Providence. Their moment, foretold in the Bible, had arrived. The enslavement of the Negro in the Christian English colonies had put both the Negro and the saved Anglo-Christian on a collision course with God's living word. Mather can only be saddled with the figural interpretation of the verse and its association with Negro conversion: the stretch of Ethiopia's hands to God was the conversion of the Negro to Christianity. For Mather, "Ethiopian" signified the descriptor of the Negro's appearance; it was a synonym of "black" and "Negro." The blackness of the Negro probably accounted for Mather's preference of "Negro" over "Ethiopian." No word appears as often as "Negro" in Mather's essay. It may not have constituted a racial or national identity for Mather, but it did signify physical difference from the white New England Christians and indicate people with a spiritual defect that could be changed.

Ethiopians and Blackness

Fox's sermon and Sewall's and Mather's respective essays represent the transition of the figure of Ethiopia at the end of the seventeenth century. For Fox, a man still thinking about Ethiopia within the framework of patristic literature, Ethiopia was a synecdoche for unconverted Gentile peoples. Both Africans in the New World and Native Americans constituted the Ethiopians prefigured in the Bible, but for Sewall and Mather, patristic Ethiopia no longer made sense. The Ethiopians in their midst were black, and their physical blackness needed to be addressed. In Sewall's essay, phenotypical blackness of the Africans in New England is foregrounded, but it does not overshadow their humanity: "These *Ethiopians*, as black as they are; seeing they are the Sons and Daughters of the First *Adam*, the Brethren and Sisters of the Last *ADAM*, and the Offspring of *GOD*" (16–17). For Sewall, the slaves in New England were literally Ethiopians in their physical appearance, and synecdochically they were Africans. Prefiguring the tautology of the racial discourse that would emerge in the eighteenth century, Sewall argued that Ethiopians were black because they were Africans. Nevertheless, Ethiopians, as children of God, were part of God's providence, made evident by Psalm 68:31's prophecy of their conversion to Christianity.

Mather's tautology of blackness echoed Sewall's, but he also employed Origen's explanation of it, while simultaneously delegitimizing the

spiritual value of skin color. Origen's allegorization of blackness allowed Mather to avoid any discussion of the material nature of slavery and of Negroes in New England for white New Englanders. Saving the Negro's soul instead of his person deferred the question of emancipation for another time or even until God decided it was time for human slavery to end. More importantly for Sewall and Mather, Negroes constituted an alien collectivity. Sewall categorically writes, "they can never embody with us," and that God gave Africa to the Africans, and Mather, in his diaries, refers to the slaves as a "miserable Nation" living among the New Englanders.¹⁴ The title of Mather's essay, *The Negro Christianized*, suggests that Negroes are a separate people who are other than the Protestant and white norm of New England. Sewall and Mather were not articulating a notion that Negroes were a nation in the modern sense of the word, but were rather suggesting that Negroes were a collectivity that was different due to their appearance and spiritual state. Both Sewall and Mather believed that their historical moment was the age when Psalm 68:31 would begin to be fulfilled, and that the people they knew as Negroes, Blackamores, and Blacks were the figures prefigured in God's prophecy. Their reading of Psalm 68:31 would contribute to the American perception of blackness as difference, the Negro as a defective human who is in need of change, and Negroes as a distinct people. If Psalm 68:31 was to be fulfilled, those figures would have to hold for America's Negroes. Sewall and Mather made the figure of Ethiopia synonymous with the Negro. The American context has reduced Ethiopia to the Negro from its more general designation as all unconverted Gentiles.

The belief that God prefigures the conversion of Negroes to Christianity provides a way into modernity. Given the Puritan understanding of conversion as an individual and introspective act, Negro converts could understand themselves as individuals, reflective beings, and self-conscious persons who were essentially the same as white people. It would only be a matter of time until Negroes would claim the same rights as whites and construct different readings of Psalm 68:31 and the Bible as a whole, grounded in the same modern arguments. Converting Ethiopia, in the hands of black exegetes, would come to mean the Christianization of the Negro, but also the emancipation of the slaves, legal and political equality, and economic stability. Negro Christians would embrace and appropriate the discourses of the Negro as a defective human and the notion of "racial uplift" initiated by Fox, Sewall, and Mather and their

interpretations of Psalm 68:31. Moreover, Negro Christians' employment of Psalm 68:31 would contribute to the figuration of Ethiopia in black letters and be one of the literary sources of black emancipation, black nationalism, black collective identity, black Christianity and theology, black protest, missionary emigrationism, black literature, Pan-Africanism, and African decolonialization; but these are the stories which the following chapters will tell.

3



Uplifting Ethiopia in America

Conversion, Self-Consciousness, and the Figure of Ethiopia

The notion of the Negro as a defective being was a given to many literate eighteenth-century Europeans and Americans. As a non-Christian, non-European, non-white living in the modern world, the disfigured Negro was described in many European and American religious and scientific writings as a being outside the flow of human history toward its telos. The Negro's phenotype and articulations of consciousness (religion, culture, creativity, and reflectivity) were signs of defect. For Johann Blumenbach, the "father" of modernity's racial categories and hierarchy, blackness was a degeneration of whiteness. Organizing the races aesthetically in the late eighteenth century, Blumenbach judged the Caucasian type to be the most beautiful of the five human races and the Negro type as the least attractive (Gould 401–12). We saw in the previous chapter that the absence of Christianity among blacks constituted a deformity, a disfigurement of great spiritual proportions. Dovetailing these assessments of the Negro, major European and American scientific studies made more inflammatory claims that the Negro was mentally disfigured.

In what reads as an intertextual game of "the dozens," western thinkers from Hume to Hegel engaged in a type of one-upmanship for who could describe the Negro as the most defective. In a footnote of his essay, "Of National Characters" (1748), Hume writes the following about the Negro: "I am apt to suspect the negroes, and in general all the other species of men . . . to be naturally inferior to the whites. . . . there are Negroe [*sic*] slaves dispersed all over Europe, of which none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity . . ." (252). Not to be outdone, Jefferson, in his *Notes on*

the State of Virginia (1787), surpassed Hume's appraisal of the Negro: "In general, their [the blacks'] existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection. . . . Comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, . . . and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous" (265–66). Hegel trumped both Hume and Jefferson in his *Philosophy of History* (1830) by labeling the Negro as an infant who is outside the movement and development of consciousness in the historical world: "From these various traits [the absence of universal ideas and principles, fetishism, sensualism as articulated by cannibalism and physical enthusiasm, slavery, and tyranny] it is manifest that want of self-control distinguishes the character of the Negroes. This condition is capable of no development or culture, and as we see them at this day, such have they always been" (98).

Bringing the Negro within the trajectory of Christian history and modern consciousness to ameliorate his disfigurement would become a major discourse in modernity. To overcome the Negro's spiritual disfigurement, Fox and Mather, working within a Crusoean worldview, promote conversion—the transformation of the figure of Ethiopia from pagan to Christian. Their understanding of Psalm 68:31 guided their figuration of Ethiopia as Christian. Closely linked to the spiritual uplift of the Negro to Christianity was its intellectual counterpart fought for by black exegetes of Psalm 68:31: the acquisition of modern Anglophone culture. Conversion narratives, the transformation of the figure of Ethiopia from paganism to Christianity and from orality to an Anglophone culture of literacy, were the first, dominant, and eventually institutional figures of Ethiopia to emerge out of the interpretations of Psalm 68:31. The discourse of "racial uplift" prominent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a "racial pygmalionism": the conversion of the other into a semblance of the modern white individual. Even though black and Native American populations could become "almost" modern human beings by converting to Christianity and acquiring literacy and Anglophone culture, their perceived racial differences made it socially, politically, and legally impossible for them to be substitutable for Western Europeans or Euro-Americans. Hence, these populations might resemble modern individuals, but they lacked the similitude of substitutability and therefore were not equal to their Western European and Euro-American counterparts. Despite this

problem, many black exegetes would interpret Psalm 68:31 in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a verse prefiguring the conversion and salvation of Ethiopia from a spiritual and intellectual morass.

Bringing the Gospel to Native Americans

The earliest appearance of the figure of Ethiopian uplift is derived from a reading of Psalm 68:31 in black letters and occurs in the autobiographical narrative of John Marrant. The figure of Ethiopia in Marrant's reading is not the slave in America, the free person of color, or the African in Africa, but rather the Native American. In the *Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black, (Now going to Preach the Gospel in Nova Scotia) Born in New York, in North America* (1785), Psalm 68:31b is cited as text signifying conversion, or the spiritual transformation of the pagan to Christianity. Written in the style of both captivity and conversion narratives common to colonial America, Marrant tells the story of his conversion, beginning with his falls into sin, his disobedience, his salvation upon hearing the Gospel as taught by the English evangelist of the first Great Awakening, George Whitefield in Charlestown, South Carolina, and concluding with his life among non-Christian family members and Native Americans and their conversion by his intervention. Born in New York in 1755, Marrant was a free man of color who received a formal education in both letters and music. It was his accomplishment in music that put him deep in the heart of rebellion against God, indolence, and hedonistic behaviors: "I was now in my thirteenth year, devoted to pleasure and drinking in iniquity like water, . . . living without God or hope in the world, fishing and hunting on the Sabbath-day" (qtd. in Gates and Andrews 66). One day, on a dare to blow his horn at a revival meeting held by Whitefield, Marrant hears the Gospel and becomes a Christian. Marrant's enthusiasm for his new faith separates him from his family. His sisters, brother, and mother are unsaved and disturbed by his piety and self-righteousness, and he is driven from home. It is Marrant's life in the wilderness of the colonies that constitutes the heart of the narrative.

Taking only a Bible and hymnbook with him, Marrant ventures into the wilderness and, like Robinson Crusoe, finds himself sleeping in trees to avoid being attacked by wild animals. Despite his caution, he comes across wolves and bears, but is unharmed. Marrant's story of his journey

into the wilderness provides testimony to his faithfulness and God's salvation. Marrant's experience in the wilderness is only a foreshadowing of his ultimate test, when a community of Cherokees holds him captive and sentences him to death. This is the climax of the narrative. At the point of his execution, Marrant averts death when he begins to pray a Christian prayer in the Cherokee language. The "king" of the Cherokees stays his execution and Marrant begins to proselytize among the people by reading the Bible to them. In a scene that echoes both the colonial American story of Pocahontas and John Smith, and the slave narrative of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, the "king's" daughter appears and kisses Marrant's Bible in an attempt to make it speak. This creates an opportunity for Marrant to pray, the effect of which is the conversion of part of the community. Then Marrant literally goes native and becomes a member of the community, staying with them for many months. As Marrant explains, "Now the Lord made all my enemies to become my great friends. . . . I had assumed the habit of the country, and was dressed much like the king, and nothing was too good for me" (qtd. in Gates and Andrews 76). He travels and lives among the Creek, Catawar (Catawba), and Housaw peoples without any further incidents.

Upon Marrant's return to a colonial settlement, his appearance is so strange that he frightens one white family out of their house. Eventually they learn, despite his appearance as a Negro in Native American garb, that Marrant is a Christian, and he stays and prays with them for a number of weeks. With allusions to *The Odyssey* and the biblical story of Joseph and his brothers in Egypt, Marrant returns home, but hides his identity from his family. As in the classical stories, Marrant withholds his identity while probing his family about himself. Finally his youngest sister recognizes him, and Marrant is welcomed back into the community. Marrant's narrative moves quickly through a couple of incidents during the Revolutionary War and ends with a prayer for the conversion of the nations to Christianity. It is in the final paragraph of Marrant's conversion narrative that he cites Psalm 68:31b, but with a slight alteration. As with Fox, the verse signifies the conversion of the non-Christian peoples to Christianity for Marrant: ". . . that strangers may hear of and run to Christ; that Indian tribes may stretch out their hands to God; that the black nations may be made white in the blood of the Lamb; that the vast multitudes of hard tongues, and of strange speech, may learn the language of Canaan,

and sing the song of Moses, and of the Lamb; and, anticipate the glorious prospect, . . . sing hallelujah; the kingdoms of the world are become the kingdoms of our God, and his Christ" (qtd. in Gates and Andrews 80).

A number of elements in Marrant's use and alteration of Psalm 68:31b are significant. First, Marrant metonymically substitutes "Indian tribes" for "Ethiopia." He displaces the subject of the sentence, but retains the figural sense of it. For Fox, "Ethiopia" signifies non-Christian peoples in the Americas, namely black slaves and Native Americans. Moreover, Fox's figural interpretation of "Ethiopia" as unconverted Gentiles is an extension of a figure created by patristic exegetes. Marrant's alteration and figuration of the verse is firmly within a Christian hermeneutic trajectory. Second, Marrant's interpretation of the verse reiterates his institutional understanding of sin and salvation articulated in patristic literature and echoed in Mather's essay *The Negro Christianized*. Ethiopians are black and all nations are Ethiopian if they are unconverted Gentiles. "Indian tribes" are part of the "black nations" in need of redemption. Blackness is not a phenotypical problem, but a metaphysical one. Furthermore, whiteness is not a sign of phenotypical superiority, but indicates spiritual salvation. The blood of Jesus washes away Ethiopia's sins, its blackness. The Indian tribes stretching out their hands to God is the movement of the non-Christian to Christ and the submission of non-Christian peoples, the kingdoms of the world, to the Gospel and God's sovereignty. Marrant's rewriting of the verse also demonstrates that he is himself an articulation between phrases. By altering the verse, Marrant accents it to signify his evangelism to Native Americans, and in so doing he marks his emergence as a historical subject between phrases.

The success of Marrant's mission to the Native Americans was intimately related to his interpretation of Psalm 68:31b. The figure of Ethiopia is one who is converted from paganism to Christianity, from spiritual morass to the light of Christ. Ethiopia as a signifier indicates one's spiritual status instead of one's nationality or race. For Marrant, the possibility existed to understand the human condition in terms other than phenotype. Although race had become an inevitable category of social definition in America, and the association of Ethiopia with the Negro would become semantically wed to the point of being homologous in the nineteenth century, in 1785 it was possible to organize the world according to religious categories instead of racial ones. Marrant directly linked the conversion of the Native Americans to the occurrence of a prefigured event. His

mission was an exigent moment in the shadow of Psalm 68:31 and God's providence.

Salvation is Both Spiritual and Physical

Whereas Marrant's broad understanding of Ethiopia reflects the tradition of the Church Fathers, Richard Allen employs the notion of Ethiopia more narrowly, in a manner that is reminiscent of the writings of Sewall and Mather. The Rev. Richard Allen is probably one of the most well-known historical figures associated with the emergence of the Negro church in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the United States. Rev. Allen, Daniel Coker, James Varrick, and Absalom Jones were the "founding fathers" of Negro Methodism and Episcopalianism in America. Born a slave in Philadelphia in 1760, Allen became a Christian while a slave. Catching the new spirit of Methodism, Allen accepted his sins as spiritual slavery and his conversion as spiritual freedom from sin (15). He remained a faithful slave and an active participant in the Methodist Society, and he eventually purchased his freedom, thereby redeeming his physical enslavement, after he introduced his master to the message of abolition preached by Freeborn Garrettson, a Methodist evangelist.¹ In words that are commonplace to colonial and early American Negro writing, Allen's eclectic narrative focuses on sin, salvation, and the church. It reiterates the message of Marrant, Gronniosaw, Phillis Wheatley, and others with its concern about the conversion of the non-Christian soul.²

Allen's concern with both salvation and emancipation, which are constant themes in his narrative, is directly linked to his employment of Psalm 68:31. In a 1793 message to Christians who heed the word of God, "A Short Address to the Friends of Him Who Hath no Helper," Allen writes, "May He [Jesus Christ], who hath arisen to plead our cause and engaged you as volunteers in the service, add to your numbers, until the princes shall come forth from Egypt, and Ethiopia stretch out her hands unto God" (76). This singular appearance of the verse in Allen's narrative is rather cryptic. Allen does not engage in a hermeneutical analysis of Psalm 68:31; he merely quotes it as a prooftext of his argument. He treats the verse as if its meaning is self-evident, thereby suggesting that its significance is already understood by the listener or reader. This indicates that by the time Allen employs Psalm 68:31, the figure of Ethiopia as a people is already a metonymy among black Methodists for the Africans in America.

In addition, the context of the verse in Allen's argument suggests that it figurally foreshadows the complete emancipation, both spiritually and physically, of Ethiopia.

In the sentences leading up to Allen's use of Psalm 68:31, he describes the physical and spiritual deeds done—presumably by Anglo-American Christians—for “the cause of the African race.” He lauds their program for the “complete redemption” of the slaves that includes condemning slavery, and providing education, religious training, and brotherhood. As biblical evidence of universal brotherhood, Allen quotes Acts 17:26 (75). He draws an analogy between these “helpers” of the African race in America and Jesus, only it is not the biblical Jesus he alludes to, but the arisen Christ. It is the work of Providence, in the guise of Jesus as Lord and not God the Father that ensures the presence of these “helpers.” Allen's association of Ethiopian salvation with emancipation unfolding under the agency of Providence is consistent with the general American Protestant belief that the founding of America and the spread of the Gospel to the New World is a sign that the end of time is near.

In a close reading of Allen's text, he cites Psalm 68:31 after the conjunction “until,” thereby linking the previous phrase to it. First, the helpers do their service for the Negro, as commissioned by Christ, and then the dual subjects of the verse, the princes and Ethiopia, will take over. These subjects seem to signify another agency that will take over the work of the current helpers. “Ethiopia” is a metonymy for Africans in America who are transformed into a new but prophesied nation, and “princes” seems to be figurally, at least in Allen's address, a designation for the slaves. This designation makes sense biblically and thematically in the text. Egypt, as the land of biblical oppression, corresponds to America as the land of slavery. As in the Old Testament story, the Israelites come out of Egypt, and their exodus affirms their liberation from Egypt. Allen makes this association in the opening paragraph of his address and elsewhere in passages in his narrative (69–70, 73, 75). Working with the parallelism of biblical poetry, Allen's interpretation of Psalm 68:31 suggests that God has begun the process of African salvation and emancipation through the aid of Anglo-American Christian helpers, but that they will be displaced by Africans themselves who will face God directly, as Allen does, without white mediators.

Even though Allen was an austere Methodist preacher, and a firm believer in the wretchedness of the body, he also believed that emancipation

was just as necessary as salvation. Appealing to the helpers to continue their “Christ-like” work, or Christian charity, Allen writes:

Our Saviour’s [*sic*] first and great work was that of the salvation of men’s souls; yet we find [through a reading of the Gospels] that of the multitudes who came or were brought to Him laboring under sickness and disorders, He never omitted one opportunity of doing good to their bodies,. . . . It [Christian charity] has no other measure than the love of God to us, who gave His only begotten Son, and the love of our Saviour [*sic*], who laid down His life for us, even whilst we were his enemies. It reaches not only to the good of the soul, but also to such assistance as may be necessary for the supply of the bodily wants of our fellow creatures. (76, 78)

Allen’s interpretation of grace is significant. The human condition is to be a slave to sin, and this for Allen includes all races. Christ’s resurrection is interpreted as the end of slavery, both spiritual and physical. The figure of Ethiopia as the African in America converted to Christianity is the universal work of Providence and part of the larger divine agenda: the salvation of the world. Furthermore, Allen’s riposte to Psalm 68:31 not only includes him in the history of universal salvation that he sees prefigured in the verse, but it situates him historically in relation to slavery. Linking phrases provides an opportunity for Allen to critique the institution of slavery via holy scripture.

Forming the Africans in America into a Nation

Maria W. Stewart’s *Productions* (1835) further establishes the message of the Negro’s salvation as prefigured in Psalm 68:31. This short document is a diverse collection of writings that include lectures, addresses, prayers, and meditations. Appearing no less than five times, Psalm 68:31 is the most often quoted biblical verse in Stewart’s writings. Born in 1803 as Maria Miller in Hartford, Connecticut, Stewart claimed that despite being introduced to Christian piety and instruction as a child and in Sabbath schools, she did not obtain true knowledge of Jesus until 1830. In 1831, she began to evangelize. Inspired by David Walker’s *Appeal*, *Productions* is a text directed toward free people of color in the North and intended to elevate them spiritually and intellectually.

In phraseology reminiscent of Walker’s *Appeal*, Stewart’s text opens

with a serious and weighty judgment for its readers: “in view of our wretched and degraded situation, and sensible of the gross ignorance that prevails among us” (*Spiritual Narratives* 3). The plural pronouns draw immediate attention. The “our” and “us” in the quote are “the sons and daughters of Africa,” both slaves and free people in the United States. Stewart refers to Negroes in America as “Africans”; however, she differentiates them from those who are in Africa. As a signifier in Stewart’s writings, “African” signifies those who were brought to the New World and have almost been made into a people due to the institution of slavery. Part of Stewart’s evangelical mission was to inscribe a sense of national unity among Africans. She engaged in a project of national formation, and her writings functioned as the catalyst.

As the title page indicates, *Productions* was presented to the First African Baptist Church and Society of Boston. Stewart’s writings were tools of evangelism for the spiritual and intellectual improvement of free people of color and the emancipation of the slaves. Like many nineteenth-century black writers, Stewart was troubled by African ignorance and sin. Her personal journey from ignorance to knowledge and from wretchedness to salvation was a model of black transformation.

Productions is a diverse literary text. In one of its sections titled “Meditations,” Stewart combines a series of spiritual thoughts followed by an accompanying prayer for the reader. Her “Meditations” are a series of biblical fragments, some in quotation marks, many without, and some slightly altered but strung together and ordered by Stewart. As a writer, Stewart stays close to the text, to the point of paraphrasing, but the purpose of “Meditations” is not to promote Stewart as an eloquent wordsmith and original hermeneut. Rather, these are spiritual and intellectual lessons on how to find God and hopefully escape his divine wrath. Stewart’s meditations are *grámmata* to be read aloud to improve the reader’s mind and Christian faith. It is in the “Meditations” that Stewart extols the virtues of literacy, especially the ability to read the Bible, the book that holds the secret of eternal life (*Spiritual Narratives* 41).

Stewart cites Psalm 68:31 numerous times in *Productions*, but she does not engage in an explicit reading of it. Instead, she presents the verse as something almost self-evident, as holy *grámmata* that do not need hermeneutical attention, but need to be juxtaposed to another phrase, a riposte. Stewart is the linking agent of these phrases. She links God’s word to her responses. For example, below is Stewart’s initial employment of

the verse in her text: “Truly, my heart’s desire and prayer is, that Ethiopia might stretch forth her hands unto God. But we have a great work to do. Never, no, never will the chains of slavery and ignorance burst, till we become united as one, and cultivate among ourselves the pure principle of piety, morality and virtue” (*Spiritual Narratives* 5–6). Stewart associates the movement of Ethiopia’s hands to God with the movement from slavery to freedom, from ignorance to knowledge, disunity to oneness, and impiety to faith, but her interpretation functions more as an assertion of a fact than a biblical prophecy. This usage suggests that by the 1830s an authoritative interpretation of Psalm 68:31b had emerged among Negro exegetes, and Stewart did not have to explain the verse. Rather, she could assert that the stretch of Ethiopia’s hands is Ethiopia’s stretch to Christ, and its intellectual and moral elevation.

This was a considerable literary event; it indicated that an institutional understanding of Psalm 68:31b was emerging in the first third of the nineteenth century among literate Negroes and free people of color. This institution was not a physical space, but an understanding shared and disseminated among these literate populations. It also suggested that not only were these writers reading the Bible and the literature of colonial America, revolutionary America, and England, but they were also reading one another. This had a dual effect; it created a tradition as well as another mediation. Stewart was not so much reading Psalm 68:31 and wrestling with its linguistic materiality as reading it through the lens of tradition, as something already read and understood. Her focus was not the verse itself, but the obstacles that were inhibiting its fulfillment. She linked the verse to her response—“But we have a great work to do”—and thereby showed herself to be the articulation between phrases and a historical subject. According to Stewart, Psalm 68:31 had not been fulfilled due to national disunity. Ethiopia had not committed herself to the grand narrative of *Bildung* [the culture of literacy], and its nation-forming and emancipatory effects.

In the closing prayer of this initial sermon, Stewart once again cites Psalm 68:31 and treats its signified as a given. In the midst of making a series of requests that Africans might lose their ignorance and become Christians, Stewart prays, “. . . grant that Ethiopia may soon stretch forth her hands unto thee” (*Spiritual Narratives* 11). This citation reintroduces the adverb “soon,” thereby asking that the fulfillment of the verse take place within her moment. She also personalizes her prayer by the use of

“thee” instead of “God” as it appears in the psalm. By addressing God in the second person and using “thee” and “thou” in a manner reminiscent of Quaker liturgical English, Stewart breaks down the distance between her and God that accompanies the use of the third person. Stewart, a convert, had overcome the spiritual distance that alienated her from God before her conversion. She is an example of Ethiopia stretching her hands to God; she has a personal relationship with God, an “I and Thou” relationship, which all of Ethiopia will have when all Negroes in America convert to Christianity.

Stewart next cited the verse at her public lecture at Franklin Hall in Boston on September 21, 1832.³ In this lecture, Stewart rails against free people of color for not taking the initiative and demonstrating the human capacity of Africans. She argues that no people who are servants can or will be respected in the world. Citing the Pilgrims as an example, Stewart writes that God will assist only those people who put forth the effort to uplift themselves. In the case of the Pilgrims, Stewart claims that God gave them George Washington, the father of the nation and the general of the revolution for freedom, and Lafayette, the French revolutionary and friend of Washington who aided America in its war against the British. Stewart argues that if free people of color imitated other free and independent peoples by improving their moral and intellectual character, white slave owners might free the slaves (*Spiritual Narratives* 52).

Stewart’s critique of the inertia of free people of color is only part of her lecture; she also criticizes white racism. The two articulations of white racism that Stewart addresses are the colonization plan to send blacks in America to Africa and the failure to extend opportunities for free people of color to advance intellectually and economically, thereby producing nihilism. As a disciple of Walker, Stewart rejects colonization and the ideological foundation for it. In one of her most original statements, Stewart writes, “for I am a true born American; your blood flows in my veins, and your spirit fires my breast.”⁴ Influenced by Walker’s *Appeal*, Stewart claims that free people of color have the same human capacity as all other peoples, however the ideology of keeping the children of Africa in their place as, “hewers of wood and drawers of water,” has inhibited their natural capacity; studying is incompatible with servitude.

It is in this context that Stewart cites Psalm 68:31b, “And were it not that the King eternal has declared that Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands unto God, I should indeed despair” (*Spiritual Narratives* 54). Again the

meaning of the verse is self-evident to Stewart, who is working out of the tradition that is emerging in the nineteenth century among Negro writers. God promises the rise of Ethiopia. Free people of color and the slave will be more than “hewers of wood and drawers of water,” no matter what obstacles American racism presents to them. The verse, which Stewart sees as a prophecy and a promise of future African success, is the biblical thread that delivers her from the despair of her people. The moral of Stewart’s lecture is that true faith allows her to live on a different plane than either the whites or the free people of color.

In Stewart’s rendition of the verse, she makes what would become a common interpretative shift by black exegetes, when she changes the verse from a written text to an oral statement. The movement from interpreting an obscure verse tucked away in the Book of Psalms to identifying the same verse as a proclamation made by God about Ethiopia’s future thousands of years ago (Stewart’s contemporary moment) is significant. “To declare” is to make something “plain” or “clear,” that is free from darkness, obstruction, and uncertainty. This shift from *grámmata* to the spoken word, *lógos*, eliminates Stewart’s role as a reader of the verse and transforms her into someone who simply parrots what God has already said. The figure of Ethiopia becomes an articulation of God’s word, much like *Lógos* in the prologue to the Gospel of John, and not an effect of Stewart’s interpretive activity. Of course, this is merely a rhetorical illusion. Stewart is responding to Psalm 68:31b by linking phrases to it, but she is hiding her articulation in the rhetoric of logocentrism. The epistemological certainty of God’s spoken word—the promise of Ethiopia’s spiritual and intellectual elevation—keeps Stewart from despair. Changing the verse from the uncertainty of *grámmata* to the certainty of *lógos* is part of Stewart’s understanding of Psalm 68:31.

Near the end of Stewart’s lecture she declares that the Lord of Hosts, a militaristic figurative name for God in the Old Testament, has heard the cries of Africans and He will “soon” end their oppression. This seems to be an allusion to the verse, its institutional meaning of the conversion of Africans in America to Christianity, and its extension to the coming emancipation of the slaves in America. Instead of citing the verse as a proof-text or interpreting it, Stewart pulls out the adverb “soon” to emphasize that these events will take place in the near future.

Stewart’s next two “Addresses” that cite Psalm 68:31 were given to Negro audiences. The first was to the “Afric-American Female Intelligence

Society, of Boston” and the second was to the “African Masonic Hall” in Boston on February 27, 1833. Approaching the verse as she had in her earlier speeches, Stewart again cited Psalm 68:31 as a self-evident *grámmata*. In her address to the “Afric-American Female Intelligence Society” Stewart chastises free people of color for not attending to the cause of abolition. She describes the selfishness of free people of color as “unfeeling” and says it is evidence of national disunity: “we shall never be a people, nor our descendants after us” (*Spiritual Narratives* 60). Employing the figure of prolepsis (anticipation), Stewart cites Psalm 68:31 as if someone from the audience had raised a question in response to her chastisement. Then she quickly responds, saying, “True, but God uses means to bring about his purposes; and unless the rising generation manifest a different temper and disposition towards each other from what we have manifested, the generation following will never be an enlightened people” (*Spiritual Narratives* 60).

Interestingly, the concept of national identity is also presumed in Stewart’s institutional interpretation of Psalm 68:31. The only thing preventing the creation of the nation prophesied by Psalm 68:31 is African disunity. This presumption of Providence combined with her analysis of national disunity positioned Stewart’s writing as a possible glue to bind Africans together as a people and as a textbook of moral and cultural formation. Stewart was in tune with her era. As all modern nationalists, she was employing *grámmata* as the vehicle for the promotion of nationalism, national spirit, and more importantly, national destiny. Her hope was for her readers to be possessed by what they read and thereby embody the text.

Stewart’s last reference to Psalm 68:31b occurs in her longest piece, an “Address to the African Masonic Lodge.” In this speech, Stewart continues her critique of the inertia of free people of color, but she augments her criticism with a history of Africa’s fall. Stewart tells what would become the common story of Africa’s past preeminence and its fall due to sin. The endurance of this Christian narrative not only shows the theocentrism of Protestant American Christianity, but the complete absence of wanting to know Africa as Africa. Africa for Stewart—and, as we will see, for Phillis Wheatley, David Walker, Alexander Crummell, and James Hood—was a Christian and modern fiction. But this does not negate the narrative’s effects on Africa because it is a story that attempted to shape it. It is in the historical narrative of Africa’s fall that Stewart cites a version of Psalm 68:31b: “Ethiopia shall again stretch forth her hands unto God”

(*Spiritual Narratives* 65). Stewart replaces the adverb “soon” with another adverb, “again,” a substitution that signifies a return. This substitution is completely within the plot of history recounted by Stewart, and it also adds a new wrinkle to the interpretation of the verse. After Stewart, many black writers would characterize the figure of Ethiopia as one that would be “restored” and “regenerated,” thereby “returning” her and her people to their former glory. This was the beginning of a mythical history, and the interpretation of Psalm 68:31b would be its engine.

The Literate Daughters of Mother Bethel, Midwives of Redemption and Salvation

In chapter 5 I will analyze what was probably the first poem written by a Negro writer that articulates a figure of Ethiopia derived from Psalm 68:31, Frances Harper’s ballad “Ethiopia” (1854). The second poem to do so was Mary Still’s “Daughters of Bethel” (1857).⁵ Echoing the poetic form of Harper’s “Ethiopia” with seven four-line ballad stanzas in iambic tetrameter (ac) and iambic trimeter (bb), Still’s “Daughters of Bethel” presents the figure of Ethiopia as a feminine force who will convert and civilize the Negro race. Still’s poem is a literary rewriting of her essay that precedes it. In “An Appeal to the Females of African Methodist Episcopal Church” Still makes a twofold argument. First, she claims that for the spiritual and intellectual enlightenment of the Negro race, the *Christian Recorder*, the newspaper of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, must continue to be published and disseminated among the race. Second, literate Negro women can be the agency that uplifts the race by writing and properly forming the young. These themes are reiterated in “Daughters of Bethel.”

Using militaristic language, the speaker calls on the daughters of Bethel to fight against the forces of “ignorance and superstition” (v. 11) until they are defeated (v. 12) (Newman, Rael, and Lapsansky 261). The speaker further links the militaristic conflict between “ignorance” and literacy, and “superstition” and Christianity, with the image of night transforming into day.⁶ Employing the traditional images of light as a representation of salvation, literacy, and consciousness, the speaker reads Psalm 68:31 within institutional Christian parameters. God guides the mission of the daughters of Bethel as He guided the Magi to Bethlehem centuries ago (v. 15). The Magi bore witness to the birth of the ultimate light (God’s word made flesh); so too, the daughters of Bethel are midwives to the birth of

the Negro's redemption and salvation from physical slavery and mental and spiritual darkness (v. 20). Ethiopia's feminine hand writes the *grám-mata* that facilitates the Negro's enlightenment. As Still writes in her essay, "females are about to step upon the glorious platform of moral enterprise, and in that elevated position and with a concentrated effort bring their influence to bear against the powers of mental darkness" (Newman, Rael, and Lapsansky 257). The Negro's redemption and salvation, the promise of Psalm 68:31, echoes the redemption and salvation of the world two millennia ago. The argument of the poem is that, just as God fulfilled His promise to the world through Christ, so too will God fulfill the promise of Ethiopia's redemption and salvation that is contained in the psalm.

Psalm 68:31 is referred to twice in the poem as "the promise" (vv. 6, 22) and is nearly quoted verbatim in the last two lines of the sixth stanza (vv. 23–24). Still's employment of the verse differentiates itself from the other biblical and religious figures that appear in the poem. Still quotes the majority of the verse in her poem, but she only makes allusions to other religious and biblical themes, structures, and images. On a cursory level, this indicates that Still was familiar with the Bible and Christian imagery, but she also subordinates these biblical and religious figures to the figure of Ethiopia and the promise of the psalm. She does this even though quoting the verse disfigures the metrical form of the ballad stanza while retaining the rhyme scheme. Still drops "unto God" so that "her hand" will rhyme with "promise stands" (vv. 22, 24). The divine promise of the Negro's redemption and salvation trumps the other figures despite their interrelatedness. It is the promise that justifies the call and the mission of the daughters of Bethel. The daughters of Bethel, who are also referred to as "daughters of Jerusalem" (v. 5), are the literate women of "Mother Bethel" in Philadelphia, the first African Methodist Episcopal Church (Newman, Rael, and Lapsansky 261). Their writings, the work of their hands, are the literary lamps that will overcome the spiritual and intellectual darkness that plagues the race. According to Still, the literate women of Mother Bethel are the figure of Ethiopia and their writings are the agency that will bring about Negro salvation and redemption.

Psalm 68:31 in Still's poem is no longer merely a verse from the Psalms. She transforms it into a literary topic that contains a promise and a prefiguration. The promise is the spiritual and intellectual uplift of the Negro; the prefiguration is the agency of Negro women, in particular the

daughters of Bethel, in the eventual redemption and salvation of the Negro. The daughters of Bethel will provide writings, or possibilities, that Negroes can read which will situate them as historical subjects and allow them to figure out the world and the future of the Negro.

The Negro as America's Light

Weeks before Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation went into effect, Thomas Morris Chester (a free man of color and former emigrant to Liberia) gave a racist speech to the Philadelphia Library Company that cited Psalm 68:31 in its last paragraph. After reviewing the mission of the Philadelphia Library Company, which was "to respond to the wants of the people who are seeking literary knowledge, and to infuse a moral purity into the community's intellectual growth," Chester suggested that this Negro organization expand its objectives to include the formation of race pride and fraternity by organizing free people of color to fight against racial oppression (Newman, Rael, and Lapsansky 306–7). Chester believed that latent racial pride and fraternity could be tapped and given form through struggle and by instilling love of the race. Echoing the critiques made by literate free people of color and ex-slaves since the eighteenth century—that American religion, politics, and literature were hypocritical because they stood for the brotherhood of Christians in Christ, democracy, and the rights of man, but they did not stand for these values when dealing with the Negro—Chester exhorted the Philadelphia Library Company to perform an *auto-de-fé* to those books that exalted American whites ("the Saxons") and degraded the Negro. The Philadelphia Library Company should "Follow only the christianity of the Bible which diffuses good will to man, rally only in support of that policy which recognizes God as our Father and as all mankind as brethren, and study only that literature which enriches and ennobles the mind" (Newman, Rael, and Lapsansky 309–10).

In Chester's concluding anaphoric paragraph, he links Psalm 68:31 to "the complete triumph of our rights and privileges," race pride, and the Negro as a light and a Christian and civilizing force in North America. Instead of Negroes being the ones who need light, they, displacing the Saxons, will be the light that saves America from spiritual and intellectual darkness. Psalm 68:31 is inserted into this statement of faith as a divine

promise of Negro uplift (“when black brows will be a passport to respectability and a certificate of intelligence”) to become a light to America (Newman, Rael, and Lapsansky 310). For Chester, this is the genuine embodiment of Christianity, brotherhood, and civilization.

Chester’s employment of Psalm 68:31 is significant due to his rewriting of the verse. Whereas the biblical verse is oriented toward a set of future actions, in Chester’s rendition the future is transferred to those present at his speech, and by extension to all Negroes, and the verse is rendered in the present, “and in the dawn of that promised period when we shall see Ethiopia stretch her hands unto God and princes come out of Egypt” (Newman, Rael, and Lapsansky 310). Ethiopia is Christian and its liberation is at hand. In a little over three weeks’ time, millions of slaves held in the Confederate States would be—at least on paper—emancipated. By changing the tense of the verse, Chester suggests that the future promise is present in his *Jetztzeit*. This event, something the Negro will see, is the fulfillment of the verse. Chester believed that his moment was messianic. The nation was embroiled in a civil war over the Negro and soon slaves held in Confederate states would be free. Ethiopia’s stretch was the beginning of a new Negro and a new North American continent.

Refiguring Ethiopian Uplift after Slavery

The figure of Ethiopia uplifted as a figure of the Negro in America converted to Christianity experienced a type of figural hibernation from the end of the Civil War to the end of the nineteenth century. Emancipation brought with it the sense that the prophecy of Psalm 68:31 was fulfilled or, at the very least, on the way to being fulfilled. No longer did the institution of slavery stand in the way of Negro conversion and the acquisition of literacy. Nevertheless, with the failure of Reconstruction and the impending legalization of segregation with the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, the figure of an uplifted Ethiopia experienced a rebirth. American Negro readers of Psalm 68:31 saw again in this verse a prophecy of Negro spiritual and intellectual elevation in the dual America created by racism.

For instance, James Holly’s essay, “The Divine Plan of Human Redemption in Its Ethnological Development” (1884), starts with the premise that Ethiopia is already elevated because its future is prefigured in Psalm 68:31. The figure of Ethiopia in Holly’s essay is a servant to God during the Parousia. According to Holly, race is a divinely ordained category for

understanding human existence, redemption, and destiny. It is as natural to human beings as having two eyes, two ears, a nose, and a mouth, and the Bible proves this. Holly explains human history and the Parousia through an ethnological interpretation of Noah's three sons: Shem, Japheth, and Ham.

In Holly's history of God's reconciliation of Himself to the world, each of Noah's sons represents a stage in God's plan. Shem, the father of the Semites, specifically the Jews, represents the Hebrew Dispensation binding God to human beings. This period begins with Abraham and lasts until the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., a length of time Holly estimates to be nineteen hundred years (134–35). The Christian Dispensation, which corresponds to Noah's second son, Japheth, replaces the period of the Hebrew Dispensation (135–36). Holly divides the period of Christian Dispensation into two phases, the Apostolic, or Evangelical, and the millennial. In the first phase, Christianity is spread and evangelized throughout the world; however, even though the sons of Japheth Christianized the world, these ministers of Christ misrepresent the Gospel. Besides global missions and translating the Bible into numerous vernaculars, the Japhetic nations are forces of violence. Instead of being apostles of peace and brotherhood, the "most enlightened Christian nations" are "the most warlike and predatory nations" (135). Nevertheless, the actions of the Apostolic phase are according to God's plan, and this phase will end when "the warlike nations" are "subdued and scattered" by God through Christ (136). After Armageddon, when Christ begins his reign on earth, the millennial phase will commence and the Hamites, particularly the Ethiopians, will have a new status: "*When He hath scattered the people that delight in war, then shall the princes come out of Egypt; the Morians' land (Ethiopia) shall soon stretch out her hands unto God*" (136).

After explaining the Hebrew behind the English names "Egypt" and "Ethiopia" and their genealogical relationship to Ham (they are his descendants), Holly claims that Mizraim (Egypt) and Cush (Ethiopia) are the nations who will rise in the millennium. Egypt, along with Assyria and Israel, will serve God at a distance based on a prophecy given in Isaiah 19:23–25, and Ethiopia will be in God's presence and serve Christ based on Psalm 68:31b. Holly, rewriting Mather's reading of the verse, retains the image of Ethiopia as a servant, but refigures Ethiopia into Christ's most trusted servant. Psalm 68:31b no longer prophesies the Christianization

of Ethiopia; it is a prophecy prefiguring Ethiopia's elevation within the divine hierarchy of races. The Christianization of Ethiopia has already taken place during the Apostolic phase, and Holly refigures Christian Ethiopia into a literal servant of Christ.

Citing numerous examples of the amalgamation of Semitic and Hamitic peoples (Abraham and Hagar, Joseph's marriage to an Egyptian, Moses's and Solomon's marriages to Ethiopian women, and the Canaanite women, Rahab and Bathsheba, who became part of the Davidic line), the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, and Simon of Cyrene, Holly argues that the elevation of Ethiopia from servants of man—or Gentiles as Holly calls them—to servants of Christ is prefigured in the Bible. The figure of Simon is particularly important to Holly and his argument. Simon uses his hands to help Jesus carry the cross to Golgotha. By bearing the cross, Simon fulfills Psalm 68:31b and prefigures the elevation of the Hamites in the Parousia: "It is a well accepted and true Christian axiom that 'he who bears the cross shall also wear the crown.' When, therefore, our Savior shall be crowned and seated upon His Throne of Glory, He will doubtless remember in a peculiar manner the race whose son carried His cross for Him, and choose from that race the crowned nobles who shall minister around His Person in His Royal Palace" (137–38). Simon is a synecdoche for all Hamites, and his action prefigures their elevation. From the Hamites, "crowned nobles," or "princes" will arise to serve Christ. Holly combines the "princes" of verse 31a with the movement of Ethiopia's hands in 31b to present a new figure of Ethiopia, ministering servants of Christ during the Parousia.

Holly's critique of Japhetic Christianity is a condemnation of European and American violence, oppression, colonialism, and imperialism. At the same time, Holly makes the phase of Japhetic Christianity merely a cause leading to a final effect: the Parousia and the elevation of the currently oppressed Hamites to ministers of Christ. The status of Ethiopia is changed, the last have become first, but the elevation of Ethiopia is outside of historical time. Ethiopia's suffering is part of God's plan and its elevation is its reward. With the "ultimate fulfillment" of God's plan, time is no longer historical. After Armageddon sin, violence, oppression, and the punctuality and possibilities of time cease to be. Christ establishes an idyllic reign and Ethiopians become his loyal and faithful servants. The figure of Ethiopia as a millennial faithful servant changes the trajectory of Christian history, but it completely neutralizes Ethiopia's orientation

to the world. Whereas in previous readings of Psalm 68:31 the figure of Ethiopia acts in history and therefore changes it, Holly's figure of Ethiopia is acted upon. This is evident not only in Holly's theo-historical framework, but in his rewriting of verse 31b. Holly changes the adverb "soon" to "directly," Ethiopia shall "*stretch out their hands directly unto God*" (137). For many exegetes of Psalm 68:31b, "soon" indicates that an event, such as the conversion of Ethiopia to Christianity, is either taking place now or will do so shortly. "Directly" can also signify something taking place "very soon," but Holly reads it as signifying a unique spatial proximity between God and Ethiopia that other ministerial nations (Egypt, Assyria, and Israel) will not enjoy: "they [Ethiopians] shall serve in His Presence and around His Person" (137). In other words, Ethiopia will be in the full presence of God during the Parousia while the other nations will not. In this capacity, the Hamitic race will perform better than the Semitic and Japhetic races. Holly's final point is that the Hamitic race will act according to God's word whereas Semitic and Japhetic races had the word, but did not follow it.

Psalm 68:31 serves as the articular linchpin in Holly's linking of phrases. It links time and eternity, biblical events and the future into a figural explanation of race, history, and Providence. According to Holly the figure of Ethiopia is not Negro, but Hamitic. This differentiation is significant in Holly's essay. The Negro is a manmade, secular, and modern figure, but the categories of Hamite and Ethiopia are biblical and within God's providence. The figure of Ethiopia as God's millennial servant is an articulation of Afro-Asiatic mythology. Instead of Ethiopia returning to its glorious past, Holly's interpretation of Psalm 68:31 prefigures a glorious future for Ethiopia. Holly is vague about when this future will occur, but he suggests that it is soon. The nineteen hundred years of Japheth are coming to a close; hence the period of Ham is near. Nevertheless, Holly's engagement with Psalm 68:31 lacks the sense of urgency that is common to many black exegetes of the verse. Time is not pregnant with possibilities in Holly's essay. God has already decided the course of history and racial organization in the millennium; Holly's figural reading of Psalm 68:31 merely reveals God's plan.

Another instance of a biblical-ethnological reading of Psalm 68:31 is Bishop James W. Hood's history of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (1895). Hood devotes an early chapter of his massive book to his own understanding of the Afro-Asiatic story of Negro origins and

its connection to Psalm 68:31. Titled "The Negro Race," Hood's chapter attempts to disprove the dominant nineteenth-century Eurocentric stereotype "that the Negro has no history to which he can point with pride" and shows to the contrary, through biblical exegesis, that the Negro has both a regal ancient history and a divinely designated destiny (Hood 27). According to Hood, the Negro race is descendent of Ham, one of the sons of Noah. Hence the scope of his history of the Negro in the Bible ranges from the ancient Canaanites to the ancient Egyptians, the ancient Babylonians and the Assyrian empires. Moreover, Ethiopians are Egyptians. He cites numerous biblical passages as evidence of the synonymous relationship between Ethiopia and Egypt. He refers to Psalm 68:31 in institutional terms as "a prophecy" (36). For Hood, Psalm 68:31 is something oriented toward the future and anchored in the past in the scriptures. Hood's interpretation linking Ethiopia and Egypt shows that he is familiar with nineteenth-century biblical criticism and the poetic technique of parallelism prevalent in the Psalms. This understanding places the future of the Negro race in the shadow of its biblical past and the prophecy of Psalm 68:31. Establishing this relationship transforms Hood's interpretation of Psalm 68:31 and the history and destiny of the Negro race into an intelligible story within the domain of providential history.

As with other writers engaged in propagating the Afro-Asiatic myth, Hood must account for the Negro's fall, and in so doing he echoes many other Negro apologists. The reason for the Negro's fall is idolatry: "This is the great sin of Ham and his sons; they were the originators and promoters of idolatry, the stench in God's nostrils, the thing of all most hateful and most hated by the sovereign God of all. . . . This is why the race has fell to divine displeasure" (54–55). Following Hood's explanation for the fall of the race, he cites Psalm 68:31 and offers an interpretation of it. Using "promise" and "prophecy" interchangeably, Hood interprets the verse to indicate the return of the race to God. The existence of the Negro Church is evidence of this return. In this way, Hood's understanding of Psalm 68:31 at the end of the nineteenth century reiterates the interpretation first put forth by Fox in 1671 and echoed by numerous Negro hermeneuts since then: the conversion of the Negro to Christianity. The figure of Ethiopia stretching to God is the return of the Negro to God via conversion. Given that Hood's book is the history of the AMEZ Church, the figure of Ethiopia is primarily the Christianization of the Negro, but Hood also applies the prophecy to Africa: "Whatever shall become of the two younger

sons of Ham (Put and Canaan), this promise [Psalm 68:31] assures us that the two elder sons [Cush-Ethiopia and Mizraim-Egypt] shall cast aside idolatry and return unto the Lord" (55). Thus the Negro race in Africa is also included within the prophecy of Ethiopia's conversion to Christianity. Hood does not develop his interpretation beyond this point, but the reference to "the Negro Church" as evidence that the prophecy is being fulfilled is general enough to refer to the AMEZ mission in America and to the mission of other competing Negro churches in Africa.

To emphasize that Psalm 68:31 is taking place in 1895, Hood draws an analogy between the rising of Ethiopia due to its conversion to Christianity and the presence of the planet Venus that is visible in the east before sunrise: "It [the prophecy of Psalm 68:31] is the streak of morning light which betokens the coming day. It is the morning star which precedes the rising sun. It is the harbinger of the rising glory of the sons of Ham. It is the first fruit of the countless millions of that race who shall be found in the army with banners in the millennial glory of the Christian Church" (55). Embedded in this anaphoric ending to "The Negro Race" is an explanation of the fulfillment of Psalm 68:31. Just as Venus in the eastern skies is a sign that sunrise, and thus daylight, is near, so too, the existence of the Negro Church is a sign that the prophecy is being fulfilled. Besides employing the dual image of rising in the conversion of the Negro from idolatry to Christianity and in the sun from darkness to light, Hood's analogy naturalizes the Christianized Negro. God's providence concerning the Negro is as dependable and natural as the daily rising of the sun. Hood's interpretation of the figure of Ethiopia erases the very moment of reading in which Hood emerges as a historical subject and as a link between phrases and discourses. By making the Ethiopian prophecy a phenomenon of nature, Hood removes the event of reading and even the significance of the text itself. Just as God intervened by bringing order to the universe, He created light amidst the void and darkness, and the light has continued to rise every day since the beginning of creation, so too, the return of the Negro race to God is the predetermined destiny of the race.

Ethiopians are God's Chosen People

Shortly after the appearance of Hood's history of the AMEZ Church, Kate Drumgoold published her autobiography, *A Slave Girl's Story: Being the Autobiography of Kate Drumgoold* (1898). Reminiscent of Allen's

narrative, Drumgoold's autobiography is actually more of a conversion narrative than a slave narrative. Her primary concern is the state of her soul. Drumgoold conveys the year of her baptism and salvation no less than five times. Sickness and death are abiding figures of Drumgoold's autobiography; their substance or shadow is in every chapter. Nevertheless, Drumgoold's overriding concern is with salvation; she wants eternal life. These are the concerns that frame and determine how Drumgoold presents her life, slavery and emancipation, race, and Psalm 68:31.

Drumgoold's worldview is fairly simple. God has providence over the world, one that is populated with races and nations, some of which are saved and some of which are not. The Bible is the word of God and is therefore both historical and truthful, and its words are eternally relevant. Drumgoold's age is one that exists in the shadow of biblical revelation. Supplementing the Bible is God's personal communication to the saved. Numerous times in the course of her autobiography, Drumgoold attributes personal health and good fortune to God and His interest in her individual life. Her worldview is representative of a typical American Protestant Christian worldview. Drumgoold's uniqueness resides, according to her autobiography, in being born a slave and a member of God's chosen race, the Ethiopians.

The figure of Ethiopia in Drumgoold's autobiography is a racial group, but her concerns are not global or Pan-African; they are purely national and concerned with the fate of Ethiopians in the United States. Negroes all over the world are Ethiopians, but greater Ethiopia is not Drumgoold's focus. She seems to employ the figure of Ethiopia merely to further her conversion narrative: an enslaved and benighted Ethiopian, who through God's grace and promise was redeemed and saved, physically and spiritually. She sees herself as a representative, like many black readers before her, of the fulfillment of God's prophecy in the world: "I was willing to go to prepare to die for my people, for I could not rest till my people were educated. Now they are in a fair way to be the people that God speaks of in the Holy Word, as He says that Ethiopia shall yet stretch forth her hand and all the nations shall bow unto her. I long to see the day that the Ethiopians shall all bow unto God as the One that we should all bow unto, for it is to Him that we all owe our homage and to be very grateful to Him for our deliverance as a race" (*Six Women's Slave Narratives* 23–24). Drumgoold prefaces her citation of Psalm 68:31b with a comment on the importance of education. Even though she does not explicitly connect the two,

the juxtaposition of her comments on education and Psalm 68:31b links them together. The intellectual formation of her “people” is fulfillment of the verse. As with earlier interpretations of the verse, the elevation of the American Negro both spiritually and intellectually is the meaning of the verse and the catalyst for uplifting the race in America.

Drumgoold’s interpretation of Psalm 68:31b also contributes interesting additions to the verse. Clearly, she is familiar with the institutional interpretation of the verse, the conversion of the Ethiopian, and the Christian Negro, but the addition she makes to Psalm 68:31b is the reversal of the racial hierarchical order. Whereas Ethiopia will bow to God, all nations will bow to her. In essence, the servant has become the master. Drumgoold’s version of “the first shall be last and the last shall be first” refigures Ethiopia. Historically “the suffering servant,” Ethiopia’s destiny is to be imperial, and all nations will submit to her. Ethiopia will become the chosen nation of God and all other nations; even the chosen of the Bible, the people of Israel, are subjected to her (*Six Women’s Slave Narratives* 23–24).

A subscriber to the narrative of the fortunate fall, Drumgoold makes reference to the privileged status of Ethiopians in the Bible, even claiming Moses to be an Ethiopian (*Six Women’s Slave Narratives* 24). In the vagaries of her narrative she suggests that, due to Ethiopian unfaithfulness, God punished Ethiopia with intellectual and spiritual darkness. Emancipation gives Drumgoold’s contemporaries a chance to submit to God once and for all. Within this narrative, Ethiopia has displaced Israel as God’s chosen people. In the tradition of Paul, Drumgoold nullifies Israel’s chosen status. The Ethiopians, Negro Americans, are now God’s people (*Six Women’s Slave Narratives* 52). The outcome of this dynamic is the implicit threat of punishment if the Ethiopian race does not convert. It has taken two hundred years, but the figure of America in Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana* has become Ethiopian in Drumgoold’s understanding of Psalm 68:31.

Drumgoold was a race woman. Race pride is the undercurrent of her narrative. Race and religion were Drumgoold’s faiths. She never misses an opportunity to frame events within these intertwined perspectives: “We, as the Negro Race, are a free people, and God be praised for it. We as the Negro Race, need to feel proud of the race” (*Six Women’s Slave Narratives* 3). The source of this pride is her interpretation of Psalm 68:31; the Negro race is destined for greatness because God promised this in the Bible and

the race is improving itself through education and conversion. Nevertheless, Drumgoold's vision of the world is so narrowed by her central concerns with sickness, death, and everlasting life that she does not provide evidence of Ethiopia's elevation outside of her own life. Drumgoold is an emblem of the race and its rise. Her autobiography racializes the figure of Ethiopia completely. Just over one hundred years after Marrant's narrative, the conversion of Ethiopia was transformed from a religious perspective to a completely racial one.

Drumgoold eliminates David's mediation from her reading of Psalm 68:31 and writes that Ethiopia's rise is a promise directly from God's mouth: "... God speaks of in the Holy Word, as He says ..." (*Six Women's Slave Narratives* 23). This makes the prophecy of the verse more creditable within a logocentric culture. Like Stewart, and others this book will analyze, Drumgoold attempts to displace the grammatological materiality of the verse, even though she is reading something that has only existed in writing, by attributing the "prophecy" to an utterance, to God's *lógos* and "Holy Word." Real salvation in Drumgoold's narrative is not a function of literacy but of grace, like the salvation she experienced in 1866 before she could read. God spoke to her soul, and she submitted to His will before she could read: "the Lord had spoken peace to my soul He led me to follow in his footsteps" (*Six Women's Slave Narratives* 22–23). Nevertheless, this move toward the oral and away from the literary defies that very syntax of the verse. If Psalm 68:31 is a transcription of God speaking, then He refers to Himself in the third person. Drumgoold is aware of this linguistic problem and cuts off the last phrase of the verse, "unto God." Substituting God as the subject of enunciation for the indirect object of the verb "shall stretch" does not trouble Drumgoold because it is clear that her interpretation of Psalm 68:31 is more an articulation of an ideology than an engagement with the *grámmata* of the verse. Drumgoold already knows what the verse signifies, but her interpretation transfers its authority away from the text and its mediation to the immediacy and presence of God's *lógos*.

Forming Children to Strengthen the Race

John Edward Bruce's speech, "To the Parents" (1900) ushers in a new century of interpretations of Psalm 68:31 as a prophecy of the spiritual and intellectual elevation of the American Negro from darkness. Bruce raises

the clarion call for Negro parents to form their children properly. According to Bruce, if parents are Christian, moral, and intellectual examples, then Negro children and the race as a whole will be uplifted. It is within this message that Bruce moves from a national message about how Negro American parents should raise their children to a racial message about the capacity of the Negro and Africa. In a couple of paragraphs, Bruce cites numerous examples of Negro leadership and intelligence, arguing that the Negro and the Jew share similar situations and destinies as determined by God. Africa is to the Negro what Jerusalem is to the Jew. The education of the Negro American, Bruce advises, must include education about Africa, its natural wealth, and its promised future. It is at this point, midway through his speech, that Bruce employs Psalm 68:31b: "In God's own time Ethiopia will suddenly stretch her hands unto him who shapes the destinies of nations and of individuals" (Gilbert 65).

The remainder of the speech is an implicit interpretation of the verse. Bruce repeatedly points to the promissory nature of the verse and the emergence of a new Negro. It is God's will for the Negro to rise and the race to be uplifted through spiritual, moral, and intellectual education. He argues that parents play the most significant role in the formation of their children and uplifting of the race. In his understanding of Psalm 68:31b, Bruce links two different interpretative trajectories: literacy, conversion, and Christian formation along with the rise of a new Africa. The link between the two interpretations is the bond of race connecting the Negro American to Africa. Learning about Africa is important to the Negro American because of the promise contained in Psalm 68:31. Bruce is not advocating emigration to Africa in his speech, but his message seems to be preparatory for an unspecified future. Negro American parents must form their children in the widest way possible in preparation for this future.

Reclaiming Ethiopian Antiquity

Continuing in the same trajectory as Drumgoold and Bruce is Winfield Forrest Cozart's *The Chosen People* (1924). Cozart's book is a full-blown narrative of the Afro-Asiatic myth that would be echoed by the Nation of Islam and other black theo-political nationalist groups in the twentieth century. He asserts that the ancient Ethiopians, and by extension the modern Negro, are God's chosen people. The evidence for this claim is historical; ancient Ethiopia is the land of civilization, and Ethiopians are

the race of epic “firsts.” Transvaluing the narrative of Negro inferiority, Cozart narrates a story of Negro superiority and divine election and lists a series of Ethiopian accomplishments that are the foundation of modern civilization and knowledge (38–40, 49–50).

Even though Cozart claims that Ethiopian civilization is greater than all others such as that of Greece, Persia, China, and Rome, he is most interested in comparing Negro civilization to white civilization: “Ethiopians and Egyptians, the ancient ancestors of the Negro, were a civilized people, builders of empires, makers of laws, teachers of religion, masters of science, dispensers of civilization a thousand years before the ancestors of the present day white man reached the stage of civilization” (38). Later in *The Chosen People* Cozart writes, “They [the Ethiopians] invented and originated many of the ideas and sciences that the modern white man claims as his own” (49). Cozart’s understanding of Ethiopia’s historical and racial significance is his attempt to write an Afrocentric history of civilization. Given the importance of race in America, and the American narrative of the Negro’s stupidity and barbarity, Cozart’s history is a transvaluation of the racial hierarchy of his period. In Cozart’s story, the Negro is neither dependent on white civilization to become civilized nor is the Negro’s education a whitening. Rather, the Negro is the fountain of civilization and knowledge that has been appropriated by white people.

Because “the white man” takes credit for the accomplishments of Ethiopian civilization, Cozart’s purpose is to reclaim Ethiopian civilization and knowledge for Ethiopians and disseminate them to the modern Negro. Race pride and solidarity are at stake for Cozart: “It is indeed a source of great consolation to the modern Negro to know the fact that his ancient ancestors were the firsts to build cities, establish and conduct governments, dig wells, canals, irrigate land, sail ships and open up commercial enterprises. . . . The Ethiopians were for over two thousand years the originators of science and the chief dispensers of civilization” (49–50).

Cozart’s citation, interpretation, and rewriting of Psalm 68:31b occurs within his racial historicism of civilization. The verse is the epigraph that opens chapter 5, which suggests that the chapter reflects the sentiment of Psalm 68:31b. At the end of chapter 5, Cozart quotes the verse again, but transforms it to fit his argument. In a vague statement he writes, “until the day of general awakening of the darker races, and then Ethiopians everywhere will stretch forth their hands” (50–51). Since Cozart links the modern Negro to the ancient Ethiopians racially, his rewriting of “Ethiopia” to

“Ethiopians” echoes Allen’s reading of the verse, in which Ethiopians are a metonymy for Negroes. Nevertheless, Cozart’s use of “everywhere” seems to imply that Ethiopians are not merely Negroes, and includes the “darker races” of the world. The wider sense of Ethiopian, which harkens back to the synecdoche in patristic literature, seems to be at work in Cozart’s use of the verse. In Cozart’s text “until the day of general awakening of the darker races” is echoed in his rendition of Psalm 68:31b, “then Ethiopians everywhere will stretch forth their hands.” *The Chosen People* presents itself as a necessary history book that the dark races, particularly the Negro, should read with the understanding that the stretching of Ethiopian hands is not toward God, but toward Afrocentric knowledge of civilization—in other words, race knowledge.

Cozart’s synonym of Ethiopians and dark races is displaced in his final paragraph with a narrow concept of Ethiopia and the education of American Negro school children. Using the language of moral obligation, Cozart writes that it is a “duty” for Negro children to learn “the glorious history of their illustrious ancestors.” Like most nationalist and racial thinkers, Cozart believed that his specific knowledge of Ethiopian history would form the Negro anew. It will “revive the crushed soul of the Negro and reestablish racial love and solidarity” (51). He cites Psalm 68:31b as the last sentence of the chapter, but edits out the last two words of it, “unto God.” The Negro of Cozart’s 1924 America is largely Christian, so the elevation they need is no longer religious, but intellectual. *The Chosen People*, with its Afrocentric history, is Cozart’s attempt to educate American Negroes and form a coherent racial group with a common history and destiny in a reestablishment of the divine racial order. Cozart’s move is to use Psalm 68:31 to write a grand narrative of Ethiopian—that is, Negro—history. This narrative has its roots in earlier interpretations of the verse that view the figure of Ethiopia uplifted as the fulfillment of Providence. However, Cozart’s historicism of Ethiopia places it alongside other modern nations and races who have made contributions to universal history. The figure of Ethiopia had been thrust into the movement and progress of modern western history. This figure would enjoy great popularity in black culture for the rest of the century, but its fate would not be tied to readings of Psalm 68:31.

The interpretations of Psalm 68:31 in this chapter are all predicated on the notion that something was wrong with the Ethiopian, be they Indians or Negroes. The Ethiopian, mainly the Negro in America, was a being

who needed to be transformed, whether in the sphere of religion or culture. This was the drumbeat that reverberated from the figure of Ethiopia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Negro could not remain Negro; he must be brought into the light of Christianity and literate western culture. The civilizing forces of Christianity and culture, particularly Anglophone culture, must neutralize the Negro's otherness. Hence, the Negro must convert and acculturate to be similar to, and simultaneously different from, modern Anglophonic human beings.

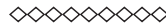
The consequent violence of this enterprise—physically, emotionally, historically, and politically—on various peoples in the United States is a document waiting to be written. The “success” of modernity and its grand narratives covers up the barbarity of conversion and Eurocentrism. Certainly, conversion, acculturation, and English literacy paved the way for black integration into American life, but in order for these events to take place, it was necessary for black people to internalize the story that there was essentially something wrong with them and that they needed to change. The figure of Ethiopia as the “civilized and Christianized Negro” bears witness to the violence of the grand narratives of modernity and the problem that occurs when one way of being in the world decides it is the broker of all other ways of being in the world.

The exegetes in this chapter addressed the exigencies of their respective moments by reading. Reading made them into historical subjects and situated them in relation to the world. Reading Psalm 68:31 and linking it to another phrase was an important literary activity of early black readers. The defective state of the Negro's soul and consciousness was paramount. Nevertheless, the figure of Ethiopia articulated by these exegetes was one waiting to take place. Readers from Allen to Cozart saw Ethiopia's uplift as a future event. As readers they could see it, Psalm 68:31 prefigured it, but Ethiopia's uplift had yet to occur. This was not the case with Marrant and Chester. These men found themselves in the midst of messianic time. Their readings of Psalm 68:31 were future oriented, but the *Jetztzeit* of the figure of Ethiopia emerged in their respective moments; the fulfillment of Psalm 68:31 for Marrant and Chester is well on its way.

Lastly, as I have shown, the eventfulness of reading Psalm 68:31 and linking phrases was erased by appeals to the self-evidence of God's word concerning Negroes, to the naturalness of Ethiopia's uplift, to discourses of national formation and racial mythology, and to the place of the Negro

in universal history. Within one hundred and fifty years, the figure of Ethiopia uplifted was transformed from a religious figure to a racial one with nationalistic dimensions. This was prefigured in Holly's essay. While not the sole contributor to the development of Negro nationalism and eventually Pan-Africanism, we will see that reading Psalm 68:31 played a significant role in these nationalist developments.

4



Missionary Emigrationism

Psalm 68:31 and Uplifting the Ethiopians in Africa

While some black American readers read Psalm 68:31 as a prophecy to bring both spiritual and intellectual light to the Ethiopians in the United States, be they Native Americans or Negroes, another group of black Americans were reading the verse as a prophecy to bring the light of Christ, literacy, and Anglophone culture to Africa and Africans. As Basil Davidson demonstrates in *Black Man's Burden* (1992), even though a parallel narrative and program of racial uplift via conversion and Anglomania existed in West Africa in the nineteenth century under the auspices of “recaptives” and Saro missionaries, black American hermeneuts, under the influence of their interpretations of Psalm 68:31, framed Africa’s redemption through the American narrative of conversion and imposed it on Africa and its populations.¹

At face value, the difference between these two readings and orientations seemed negligible. What differentiated the Ethiopian in America from the Ethiopian in Africa? Within the discourse of race that emerged in the eighteenth century, the answer was, biologically no difference.² The dissimilarity between the two types of Ethiopians was merely geographical. One group had been taken away from their motherland and the other group had remained. Moreover, because the former group had been baptized in the religion and culture of a Protestant Anglophone modernity and was possessed by the modern political spirits of democracy and the rights of the individual, this group was well suited to return to Africa and bring the message and light of the Gospel, literacy, and Anglophone culture to their brothers and sisters who lived in darkness on the

continent. This idea that the converted and literate Negroes in America—the Ethiopians of the New World—should emigrate to Africa and uplift their benighted brethren was what Gayraud Wilmore called “missionary emigrationism” (100–134). With its roots in the eighteenth century, missionary emigrationism provided an alternative interpretation of Psalm 68:31 and was at the center of one of the most hotly debated issues in nineteenth-century America: should free Negroes remain in the United States or should they emigrate to some other place, such as Africa? This debate was not only internal to Christian and literate free Negro communities largely in the North and upper southern states such as Virginia and North Carolina; it was also part of a national conversation as well.

In *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781), Thomas Jefferson advocated the colonization of free people of color from the United States due to the irreparable gulf between blacks and whites.³ Eighty years later, Lincoln echoed Jefferson’s sentiments in an address to a group of free people of color invited to the White House in August 1862. At this meeting, Lincoln told his guests, “But even when you cease to be slaves [this was referring to the four million Negroes still in bondage], you are far removed from being placed on an equality with the white race. . . . It is better for us both, therefore, to be separated” (Lincoln 353–54). Colonization proposals by Jefferson and Lincoln were concerned with America’s political and social cohesion and not the conversion and enlightenment of Negroes in America or Africans. Nevertheless, beginning in the last quarter of the eighteenth century in colonial America, Christian emigrationists’ plans were part of a public discourse about what to do with the growing population of free people of color, many of whom were literate and Christian, living among slaveholding Americans.

Wheatley, Jones, Cuffe, and Cary: The First Wave of Missionary Emigrationism

Phillis Wheatley is usually cited as the first person of African descent in America to publish a book and the second woman to publish a volume of poetry in America. Her writings also include the earliest interpretation of Psalm 68:31b by a Negro in black American letters. In a letter to Rev. Samuel Hopkins, dated February 9, 1774, the content of which concerns the sale of her book and missionary work in Africa, Wheatley writes:

Methinks, Rev. Sir, this is the beginning of that happy period foretold by the Prophets, when all shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest, and that without the assistance of human Art of Eloquence. My heart expands with sympathetic joy to see at distant time the thick cloud of ignorance dispersing from the face of my benighted country. Europe and America have long been fed with the heavenly provision, and I fear they loathe it, while Africa is perishing with a spiritual Famine. O that they could partake of the crumbs, the precious crumbs, which fall from the table of these distinguished children of the kingdom.

Their minds are unprejudiced against the truth, therefore 'tis to be hoped they would receive it with their whole heart. I hope that which the divine royal Psalmist says by inspiration is now on the point of being accomplished, namely, Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God. Of this, Abour Tanner, and I trust many others within your knowledge, are living witnesses. Please to give my love to her, and I intend to write her soon. My best respects attend every kind inquiry after your obliged Humble servant, Phillis Wheatley (175–76)

One might wonder why Wheatley wrote to Rev. Hopkins, the Newport, Rhode Island Congregational minister, about a missionary emigration plan, but the original idea of sending Anglophone Christianized Negroes from America to Africa to bring the native inhabitants the Gospel prior to the American Revolution was his.⁴ In 1773, Hopkins proposed to Rev. Ezra Stiles, a Newport minister, to educate Negroes and send them to Africa as missionaries. Two Negroes, Bristol Yamma and John Quamino, hand-picked by Hopkins, were admitted into the College of New Jersey (now known as Princeton) in 1774, to be trained as missionaries, but this plan had to be scrapped due to the Revolutionary War.⁵ Besides Hopkins's interest in the conversion of Africans to Christianity, he was also one of the leading critics of slavery in colonial America and the early Republic. In a series of writings, one addressed to the Continental Congress months before the writing and ratification of the Declaration of Independence, Hopkins pointed out the blatant contradiction of colonial freedom and African slavery and that emigration of Negroes from America to Africa was the best thing for America, "the blacks among us," and Africa. Negroes who returned to Africa, Hopkins argued, would be "most useful to

their brethren in Africa, by civilizing them, and teaching them how to cultivate their lands, and spreading the knowledge of the Christian religion among them" (610). Wheatley wrote to Hopkins because his work paralleled her thoughts about the conversion of Ethiopians in Africa.

Wheatley explicitly understood Psalm 68:31 as taking place in her moment. Her combination of the temporal deictic particle "now" and the phrase "on the point of" demonstrates her sense that the world was experiencing the fulfillment of God's word in 1773. For Wheatley, this verse came alive in her "now," and reading it provided her with an anchor to interact with the world. She was living in the midst of messianic time. She was a sign that the fulfillment of Psalm 68:31 was taking place in her moment and was unfolding rapidly to its completion. The contracted time of Wheatley's moment also provided her with a new lived experience. Through conversion, Wheatley was able to move from chronological time to messianic time, from chattel slave time to Christian saved time. In this way, she experienced time as a subject of providential history. In Christian saved time, Wheatley was not subject to her master and slavery, but to the history made by God's intervention in the lives of Ethiopians. While reading made Wheatley a subject of history, conversion transformed her soul and made her a subject of God. Furthermore, Wheatley's experience was shared by Abour Tanner and other Christianized Ethiopians and was the impetus for African missionary work.

Ethiopia's conversion to Christianity, particularly Protestant Christianity, is the figure of Ethiopia in Wheatley's reading of Psalm 68:31. David, under divine inspiration, prophesied the Christianization of Africa, which he called Ethiopia, and this Africa was emerging in Wheatley present. Through the spiritual light of Christianity, "the thick cloud of ignorance" and "spiritual Famine" Africa had previously experienced would now come to an end. Here, it is important to note that Africa's ignorance and spiritual famine were not a result of race, the rejection of Christianity, or some sin committed by either Cain or Ham, but were the result of Africa's ignorance of the Gospel. Through her interpretation of Psalm 68:31, Wheatley is able to explain Africa's otherness vis-à-vis the Christian West. In a deft move, she claims that this otherness was prophesied through the figure of Ethiopia Christianized that, in effect, neutralizes its otherness.

One of Wheatley's earliest and most famous poems, "On being brought from AFRICA to AMERICA," is an excellent poetic rendering of race and Christianity that dovetails with her letter to Rev. Hopkins.⁶ Written

in 1768, only seven years after being bought by the Wheatleys, and six years before her letter to Hopkins, "On being brought from AFRICA to AMERICA" portrays Africa as an unredeemed, non-Christian land whose people are ignorant of God and Jesus Christ, and whose souls are in darkness.⁷ Wheatley takes these descriptions even further by challenging the logic of colonial America's equation of phenomenal appearance and soul. In the sixth verse, Wheatley quotes a colonial American justification for chattel slavery: phenotypical "blackness" is an outer sign and punishment of a great sin committed by either Cain or Ham.⁸ In a move reminiscent of Origen and other patristic writers, Wheatley refutes this idea by separating skin color from the color of the unredeemed, sinful soul. The state of the Negro's soul prior to redemption is black and it is in this sense that Negroes are "black as *Cain*" (v. 7). We must take Wheatley's diction seriously. Her use of a simile instead of the verb "to be," which would function as an equal sign, suggests that neither Negroes nor the color black function as equivalents to Cain. Negroes are similar to Cain as sinners, not in skin color, and it is through the redemptive blood of Jesus that all sins are forgiven and all sinners redeemed. The phenomenal appearance of the Negro does not obstruct the spiritual salvation of a sinner's soul. In this poem, the type of blackness that is detrimental is the blackness of the "benighted soul" (v. 2).

By separating phenotypical blackness and spiritual blackness, Wheatley advances toward questioning the justification of slavery based on phenotype. Because Wheatley sheds the spiritual darkness of Africa, she is able to claim fellowship with the white, Christian, Anglo-American population and even fellowship with God. In so doing, she reiterates the question of whether or not a Christian should be enslaved. Furthermore, she reminds the Christians of colonial America that conversion changes the convert from a state of ignorance and damnation to a member of God's Kingdom. The refinement that Wheatley alludes to is the event of being reborn, but more importantly, it is the transition from spiritual blackness to salvation and redemption, from commodity to human, and from Negro to Ethiopian.⁹

Given the value Wheatley attributes to Psalm 68:31, it is obvious that "Ethiopia" is more than a mere descriptor of "the non-European African" or a sign indicating "phenotypical blackness." The figure of Ethiopia signifies a people who are, and a place that is, part of the divine scheme to spread the Gospel to all peoples and lands. Nevertheless, the connotative

devaluation of Ethiopian in English is also present in the sign. As a sign signifying blackness, Ethiopia was at the lowest rung of humanity in the hierarchy of nations and races that was developing in the eighteenth-century science of race. Through the writings of Wheatley and other black writers, Ethiopia acquires a wider and expanded range of semantic possibilities, and undergoes a transvaluation. Such readings of Psalm 68:31 place black people within universal history and the design and agency of Providence.¹⁰

Wheatley's emergence as a historical subject is a consequence of her literacy and her ability to respond to what she reads. She links phrases together and thus is historically constructed like her contemporaries George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. In her engagement with Psalm 68:31 Wheatley reconfigures Ethiopia at the end of the eighteenth century. It becomes a new figure of black Christian evangelism outside of New England and the western hemisphere. Her moment holds the possibility for the Christianization of Africa due to the Christianized and Anglophone Negroes in New England. Wheatley's riposte to Psalm 68:31 restricts Ethiopia to a synonym of Africa where Ethiopians continue to represent unconverted Gentiles in need of the Christian message, but it also generates a narrative of a return to Africa among blacks in America that would resonate for more than a century.

The interest in Christian Negroes emigrating to Africa continued to be a Christian idea after the Revolutionary War. In 1793, Rev. Hopkins delivered a speech to the Providence Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in which he reiterated his opposition to slavery and his belief that the slaves should be returned to Africa, not just for their happiness, but because it "seems to be best suited to their constitution" (607). Adding his interpretation of the situation, Hopkins continues that slavery and the emigration of slaves to Africa are part of God's design, much as the enslavement and liberation of the Israelites in the Bible. Just as Joseph's enslavement prepared the way for Israel's salvation, so too,

that those [Christianized Negroes] who have embraced the gospel while among us, with all who have been, or will be, in some good measure civilized and instructed, will, by our assistance, return to Africa, and spread the light of the gospel in that now dark part of the world, and propagate those arts, and that science, which shall recover them from that ignorance and barbarity which now prevail,

to be a civilized, Christian, and happy people. . . . Thus all this past and present evil which the Africans have suffered by the slave trade, and the slavery to which so many of them have been reduced, may be the occasion of an over-balancing good. (607)

Even though the British established Sierra Leone in 1787, the Christianization of Negroes in Africa did not really take off materially and discursively until the nineteenth century. One of the most important ministers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in America was Absalom Jones, an Episcopalian priest, a Mason, and an early critic of racism in the church. The legend of Jones's and Allen's removal from St. George's Church in Philadelphia because they would not sit in their racially designated place is the material of hagiography; but the story indicates a critique of American Protestantism and its greater concern for the phenotype of a person than for one's soul. Beyond the legend of Jones and Allen in St. George's Church, these two men started the Free African Society in Philadelphia in 1787, an organization that evolved into Mother Bethel of the African Methodist Episcopal Church under Allen's leadership. Despite their denominational differences, Jones and Allen provided people of color in Philadelphia with institutions that addressed their spiritual, physical, and financial well-being.

On January 1, 1808, Jones's "thanksgiving sermon" praised the legal end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and cited 68:31b as evidence of the role of Providence. Citing the verse in a very familiar manner, Jones withholds any reference to the verse until the closing prayer of his sermon. Reading within the trajectory of Fox, Jones links Psalm 68:31b to conversion. In a long and winding prayer Jones asks, "May the nations, which now *sit in darkness*, behold and rejoice in its *light* [the light of the Gospel]. May *Ethiopia soon stretch out her hands unto thee*, and lay hold of the gracious promise of thy everlasting covenant. Destroy, we beseech thee, all the false religions which now prevail among them, and grant, that they may soon *cast their idols, to the moles and the bats of the wilderness*" (qtd. in Porter 341). Jones prays for the Christianization of the nations in darkness. That Ethiopia is the first nation listed suggests that he might be familiar with the patristic synecdoche where Ethiopia represents the unconverted Gentile peoples. Nevertheless, even if Jones's referential scope is not as grand as the Church Fathers', the various peoples or "nations" of Africa seem to be implied in his use of Ethiopia in multiple ways. First, Africa is

the subject of the sermon. Celebrating the legal end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade by the British and the Americans, Jones is hopeful that free people of color in the United States, whom he compares to the biblical Joseph (thereby echoing the figural readings of Sewall and Hopkins), will emerge to “feed the African nations with the bread of life, and of saving them, not from earthly bondage, but from the more galling yoke of sin and Satan” (qtd. in Porter 340). Second, Jones’s diction seems to point to Africa instead of the descendants of Africa in the United States. Jones acknowledges the ethnic diversity of Africa with his use of the plurals “nations” and “religions.” Also, he characterizes African religions as “false” and idolatrous. Lastly, Jones’s use of the deictic “now” indicates the present state of unsaved African souls and suggests that the figure of Ethiopia in this thanksgiving sermon is African. In the United States, a Christian nation, the darkness and the wilderness are to the west of the nation, the mythic frontier of the American narrative, but Africa is another wilderness in need of the light of the Gospel. The abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade has provided an opportunity for Ethiopia’s salvation. Even though Jones articulates a notion of missionary work in Africa by free people of color from the United States, he does not advocate emigration to Africa. Jones is no racist or nationalist. Rather, he is a Christian and it is his allegiance to Christ and the spiritual salvation that are at the forefront of his sermon.

As readers before him, Jones emerges as a historical entity between phrases. He reads Psalm 68:31 and responds to it. He links phrases together, many of which are not his own. This is what a reader does. Jones’s emergence as a historical subject accounts for his ability to criticize American Christianity and promote the Christianization of Africa. The plasticity of the verse situates him in the world so that he can respond to it.

Paul Cuffe is famous for being an early proponent of Negro emigration to Africa. In 1815, Cuffe took a group of thirty-eight free people of color to Sierra Leone to start life anew in Africa. A few years prior to this trip, Cuffe visited the Sierra Leone colony and wrote a short report on his findings. In contemporary phraseology, Cuffe’s visit and his subsequent report would be called a “fact finding mission.” The fledgling Sierra Leone colony in 1812 was only a couple generations old at the time, but Cuffe found a modern community living under a governor and the rule of law, cultivated land with two cash crops of cotton and sugar, schools, churches, social services, and courts. Cuffe’s concern with commerce was

evident in his account of the economic viability of Sierra Leone and his desire to establish a trade relationship with the colony. In addition, he was attracted to the presence and spread of Protestantism among the native peoples of Africa.

In Cuffe's address and advice to the Sierra Leone colony, which is attached to his report, he admonishes them to be Christian and industrious, or in other words, to adhere to the Protestant Ethic. It is in the course of Cuffe's address to the colony on the proper and correct worship of God that he gives an interpretation of Psalm 68:31b: "I earnestly recommend to you the propriety of assembling yourselves together for the purpose of worshipping the Lord your God. God is a spirit, and they that worship him acceptably must worship him in spirit and in truth; in so doing you will find a living hope which will be as an anchor to the soul and a support under afflictions. In this hope, may Ethiopia stretch out her hand unto God. Come, my African brethren and fellow countrymen, let us walk together in the light of the Lord" (qtd. in Porter 260). The figure of Ethiopia here is one who has become a Christian. It echoes Mather's *The Negro Christianized*, only its location is different. Cuffe is providing the instruction that Wheatley proposed in her letter to Rev. Hopkins. Ethiopia's stretch is the movement from being "natural born" to being reborn in Christ. The interpretation of Ethiopia in this passage associates it with Africa, and it is clear that Cuffe believes a Negro fraternity exists between himself and the members of the Sierra Leone community. Nevertheless, the Ethiopianness of the community is not the primary concern of Cuffe's address. It is adherence to the faith and salvation—not phenotype or race—which are at the forefront of Cuffe's message. In Cuffe's understanding of Psalm 68:31b, the predicate is of central importance. The movement of the hand of Ethiopia to God, a movement signifying submission and faith in Him, dwarfs the subject, Ethiopia, which becomes merely incidental to the spread of Christianity globally. Ethiopia therefore signifies one people among many to become Christian. Cuffe downplays the national, racial, and continental significance of the verse and emphasizes its spiritual significance.

Another aspect of Cuffe's interpretation of the verse is that he does not call it a prophecy. As the address is written, Cuffe has hope that the Sierra Leone colony will find Christ to shepherd it through the difficulties of life. He cites the verse and his interpretation of it as a wish, not as a reading of prophecy. In Cuffe's rendition of the verse, he removes the adverb "soon"

and changes the tense from the future to the present. The shift from the auxiliary verb “shall” to the modal “may” changes the verse from one with a future orientation to a wish. Also, the absence of any reference to the speaker of the verse makes Cuffe’s literary persona the one articulating hope for Ethiopia’s conversion. Cuffe’s rewriting of the verse in this way is significant. Even though Cuffe is a confessed Christian and is concerned about the spiritual life of the Sierra Leone community, his rendition of Psalm 68:31b removes it from the realm of the divine and places it within the realm of the human. It is Cuffe’s wish, not God’s plan, that Ethiopia convert.

An altered version of Psalm 68:31b appears in a letter written by Cuffe during the last year of his life, dated January 3, 1817. Writing to James Forten, a prominent Negro leader of early nineteenth-century America, Cuffe makes two interrelated claims about the state of Africans in America. First, free people of color must colonize either Africa or a section of the United States to form a people. Second, free people of color must adhere to the proper Protestant Christian values of “industry and honesty” as an example to slaveholding America of what the freed slaves could become after slavery. At this point in the letter Cuffe writes, “May the father of all mercies and the god of peace, to influence the hearts of the Sons and daughters of the race of Africa, that they may stretch forth their arms to God, and unite in celebrating . . .” (Wiggins 509). The letter stops here, and appears to be something that Cuffe did not finish. The incompleteness of Cuffe’s utterance places Psalm 68:31b in a familiar hermeneutic situation, a free play of signifiers. Africa is a metonymy for Ethiopia, and its stretch can either signify its conversion to Christianity and Franklinesque morality (industry and honesty) or the colonization of Africa. The substitution of “arms” for “hands” supports the former use of Psalm 68:31b more than the latter. Industry is work, and arms and muscle are the means of it. The hand is a part of the arm and does the grasping and manipulation of things, but the arm provides the muscle that allows the hand to work and provides the force to move and shape things in the world. The figure of Ethiopia in one of Cuffe’s last letters before his death is the African Christian, a black representative of the Protestant Ethic.

Despite Cuffe’s transportation of thirty-eight free people of color to Sierra Leone in 1815, and his use of race as an organizing principle, Cuffe was not an ideological African nationalist. According to his writings, race for Cuffe was a phenotypical and geographical phenomenon, not a historical

or mythical identity. Thus, Cuffe's figure of Ethiopia was eighteenth century in its orientation to the world. It was a Christianized—specifically Protestant—Africa who was enmeshed in the web of world commerce not as a chattel slave but as a buyer, seller, and transporter of commodities in the triangle trade of the Atlantic. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century and the writings of Martin Delany and Alexander Crummell that nationalist Ethiopianism began to emerge as an ideology and as one of the dominant interpretations of Psalm 68:31. In Delany's and Crummell's writings, the eighteenth-century Protestant veneer of the figure of Ethiopia would remain, but it would take on mythological aspects and be thoroughly racialized according to nineteenth-century concepts of race.

Prior to the mythologizing of the figure of Ethiopia as the bearer of light to Africa in the writings of Delany and Crummell, another emigrationist in the 1820s used Psalm 68:31 to explain his mission. Lott Cary, an American born Negro, was a manumitted Virginia slave and proponent of missionary emigration to West Africa. Emigrating to Sierra Leone in 1820 as a free man of color, Cary lived out the rest of his life ministering to the native peoples and the recaptives of Sierra Leone and Liberia. It is evident from his letters to the Richmond African Missionary Society and the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions of the United States that Cary took great pride in his success building schools and a church. In a couple of letters written on June 15, 1825, Cary announced that the Baptist Sunday school in Monrovia, and biblical literacy among its students, was quickly growing: "we have now on the list forty, two of them can read in the New Testament quite encouragingly" (Hill and Kilson 84). Cary proudly wrote about the salvatory effectiveness of his Sunday school, "You must know, that it is a source of much consolation to me, to hear the word of God read by these native sons of Ham, who a few months ago were howling in the devil's bush" (Hill and Kilson 85). In addition, the regular school, which was called the Missionary School, after the Richmond Missionary Society, was instituted to educate native children, and it was flourishing. Cary requested more schoolbooks from the Board to further the acquisition of literacy among his native pupils.

It was in this context of converting the natives from their spiritual and intellectual darkness to the light of Christianity, literacy, and Anglophone culture that Cary cited Psalm 68:31b. In a letter dated almost a year after his two sent in June 1825, Cary wrote to the Richmond African Missionary

Society that the success of his work in Monrovia was evidence that the “prophecy” of Ethiopia’s conversion was being fulfilled. Since his last letter a church had been built, the Missionary School was thriving, and numerous recaptives had joined the community and were committed to its safety and mission. Again, Cary testified to the success he was having educating the natives of Liberia: “They [the native born sons of Ham] begin to learn to read and sing the praises of God” (Hill and Kilson 83). Despite this success and the role of the recaptives, Cary asked for more colored missionary emigrationists from Virginia because the work in Liberia “is a wide and extensive missionary field” (Hill and Kilson 83). Even though the subjects of Psalm 68:31b are the natives and recaptives of Liberia, the figures of Ethiopia stretching forth their hands to God, the agents of change were the literate Christian free people of color from Virginia supported by the funds and institutional clout of missionary and colonization societies in the United States.

Garnet, Delany, and Crummell: The Second Wave of Missionary Emigrationism

The first wave of missionary emigrationism was not very effective in moving free people of color from the United States to Africa. The grand plans of Hopkins, Wheatley, Cuffe, Cary, Daniel Coker, and others of bringing light to benighted Africa did establish missions in West Africa, but few free people of color emigrated. The most successful instrument of emigration, the American Colonization Society, only brought twelve thousand Negroes from America to Africa. According to historian John Hope Franklin, the total number of emigrants did not reach fifteen thousand during the life of the organization (237–41). Despite the low number of free people of color who actually emigrated to Africa, the emigrationist scheme was significant for the creation and elaboration of Africa as the mythical homeland of all “Ethiopians,” be they on the continent or in the diaspora. It was the second wave of missionary emigrationism that emerged in the 1850s, headed by critics of the American Colonization Society, Henry Highland Garnet, Martin Delany, and Alexander Crummell, which would provide the imaginative refiguring of Ethiopia in literary works and lead to the Garvey movement in the 1920s.

In 1858, Henry Highland Garnet founded the African Civilization Society, an organization that shared the same initials with the American

Colonization Society, but differentiated itself from the latter in that Garnet's organization did not promote general emigration of the Negro to Africa, but "the civilization and christianization" of Africa (Brotz 191). In the preamble to the African Civilization Society's constitution, Garnet directly links missionary emigrationism to his understanding of Psalm 68:31b:

It has pleased Almighty God to permit the interior of Africa to be made known to us during the last few years. . . . The facts which have become public concerning the climate, soil, productions, minerals, and vast capabilities for improvements, are such, that we can no longer mistake the intention of the Divine Mind towards Africa.

It is evident that the prophecy that "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God," is on the point of fulfillment, and that the work, when commenced, shall be "soon" accomplished. (Qtd. in Brotz 191)

Garnet's Africa is not a continent containing numerous and differentiated ethnic communities. His Africa is a non-Christian and uncivilized place filled with a race of people on the verge of great change. Out of many will come one. Instead of Africans retaining their ethnic worldviews and self-definitions, they should become a new entity: the African race with an African nationality (Brotz 194).

Previous interpretations of Psalm 68:31b have suggested the ability to know God's mind, but Garnet explicitly lays claim to this ability. It seems like an extraordinary leap from reading a psalm verse as prophecy to reading God's mind, but it is not. Because Garnet believes with an absolute faith that the *grámmata* of Psalm 68:31b refers to the Christianization and civilization (read the modernization and Americanization) of Africa, he makes what is irreducibly "Other" (the materiality of the scriptures) into something he can understand and believe in completely. It is merely a short step of faith to claim knowledge of God's mind if one understands His *grámmata*. In Garnet's interpretation of Psalm 68:31b, a reading of the adverb "soon," is linked to the events of the nineteenth century in Africa: its penetration by civilized and Christian non-Africans and the success of the missionaries in bringing modernity to the benighted Africans. These events indicate to Garnet that Psalm 68:31 is almost fulfilled.

The Origin of Races and Color (1879) is Martin Delany's ethnographic narrative presenting a version of the Afro-Asiatic mythical articulation of

a figure of Ethiopia.¹¹ Stating that the human race is one and that all men are descendent from Adam and Noah and his children, Delany argues that it is divinely separated into three sub-races derived from Noah's sons and their wives. Shem is the father of the "yellow" race, and he and his descendents settled in Asia; Ham is the father of the "black" race, and he settled Africa (Ethiopia and Egypt), although one of his children settled in Canaan and one of his grandchildren in Assyria and Babylon; Japheth is the father of the "white" race, and he settled in Europe. Nevertheless, determining the Adamic origin of humanity is not the thrust of Delany's essay. As a romantic racialist, Delany contends that Africa, home to the black race, is the origin and source of morality, science, and civilization. Delany argues that Africans are the oldest race of men, and Ethiopia, or Negro Africa, is the *origin* of all Egyptian science, religion, and culture, and that Egyptian religion was first to articulate a formulation of the trinity (*Origin* 38, 48, 56).

The Africa of Delany's essay is an idyllic place, a land of ancient greatness, but one behind and underneath "the noble Caucasian and Anglo-Saxon" race which is "now at the top rung of the ladder of moral and intellectual grandeur in the progress of civilization" (94). *Origin of the Races and Color* is not just an articulation of an Afro-Asiatic myth of ancient African superiority; it is a racial manifesto. In language that echoes the race theories of the era, Delany writes that the three races are substances and as such are "indestructible," "pure," and fixed types by God. Racial identity and separation are substances and feelings innate to the human species, and are part of God's plan. Both race and geography are not only phenomenal, natural, and essential, but they are also divine. For Delany, difference is substantial; it is not a figure of thought.

According to Delany, the so-called mixed or impure races of humanity such as the Malays, the Aborigines of Tasmania, the Maori of New Zealand, and the people of New Guinea are abnormal and destined to become extinct (*Origin* 93). In Delany's race logic, because there are only three divinely designated races, mixed-race people are consumed by the indestructible purity of the races. For example, a person who is one-quarter black and three-quarters white will return to the indestructible purity of the white race. Generations later, that person's offspring, if they continue to marry white, will be white. Delany's focus on the mixed races should be read within the American context; he actually uses the word "*miscegenation*." The fear of race mixing is a central component of the history of

race, black rights, and citizenship in America (Sollors 2000). By using this buzzword of the white South as a synonym for “mixed race,” Delany is employing a language that both agrees with the majority of Americans and cuts at his ideological nemesis, Frederick Douglass.¹² Taking one more jab at Douglass, and all those opposing emigration to Africa by the American Negro, Delany’s essay places mixed-race people outside of history, for they will become extinct as a result of their rebellion against God’s plan. Without using specific phrases such as “Africa for Africans,” Delany is putting forth a divine geography that claims to be essential, even though it merely echoes racist and nationalist nineteenth-century theories.

Within this context of Africa’s once-storied history and the indestructibility of race, Delany quotes Psalm 68:31 and gives an interpretation of it at the end of his essay:

“Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God.” Ps. lxxviii. 31.

With faith in this blessed promise, thank God, in this our grand advent into Africa, . . . with an abiding trust in God, our Heavenly King, we shall boldly advance, singing the sweet songs of redemption, in the regeneration of our race and restoration of our fatherland from the gloom and darkness of superstition and ignorance, to the glorious light of a more than pristine brightness—the light of the highest godly civilization. (*Origin* 95)

Delany’s citation and exegesis of Psalm 68:31 reiterates and expands the interpretive tradition of the verse. He produces an institutional interpretation of the verse. First, he cites the verse in its entirety. Second, he identifies Psalm 68:31 as a “promise” God made in the Bible to Africa. Third, Africa has displaced Ethiopia as the signifier, and it is the destination for emigration. Fourth, in the last sentence he binds together “redemption,” “regeneration,” and “restoration” into one definitive statement. What Africa once was, it will be again. Only in its renaissance will it be physically and spiritually free, healthy, and in its original state. Lastly, the action of the predicate of Psalm 68:31b is the transformation of darkness to light, savagery to civilization, superstition to Christianity, and ignorance to knowledge.

Delany’s essay merges two literary traditions into an apparently seamless story. The promise of Psalm 68:31 is a return to Africa’s idyllic past when it was the light of the world. Delany implies that Africa will rise

again and displace the current ruling race, the Caucasian and Anglo-Saxon race.¹³ In the sentence before he cites Psalm 68:31—almost as if he is warning white people—Delany writes that it is time for white people to recognize God's promise and its inevitability. Black people are coming back and reclaiming civilization from its current rulers. All of human history can be understood as the conflict between the three races—especially between the black and the white races. His emphasis on the phenotypical blackness of the figure of Ethiopia reiterates colonial American fascination with skin color. Ethiopia as a synonym for Africa has figural support early in the tradition, but Delany makes phenotype and the biology of race the dominant characteristic of Ethiopia. The figure is reduced to a mere racial entity: its history is racialized, its intelligence is racialized, and its civilization is racialized. Delany's idyllic and epic Ethiopia and her physical blackness, associated with a reading of Psalm 68:31, would have been foreign to early interpreters of the verse such as Wheatley, Marrant, and Allen. His essay presents race and geography as divine givens that have been forgotten or ignored due to the modern relationship between the white race and the black race, but Delany puts himself in the position of exposing and explaining God's plan for humanity and Africa's role in this plan. This is a bold undertaking, but, like all of the racial and national theories of the nineteenth century that try to essentialize these figures, Delany's essay is more fiction than science, attempting to articulate his hopes and expectations for black people.

Prior to citing Psalm 68:31, Delany explains that only black people can regenerate Africa. Written and published in the United States, *Origin of the Races and Color* was Delany's last written attempt to encourage missionary emigrationism. The African race being addressed is literate and Christian Negro Americans. Even if they are racially impure in the United States, they can go to Africa and facilitate its regeneration. The verse is a promise, but its fulfillment is set in the future. Redemption, regeneration, and restoration are unfulfilled actions; the prophecy of Psalm 68:31 in Delany's last written work was a dream deferred, and one that he would not see fulfilled during his lifetime.

For an ideologue like Delany, race determined the meaning of Psalm 68:31. The idea of race defined his identity and formation. His commitment to the idea of race precluded his formation as a historical subject through the performance of reading. Delany was responding to American racism, white supremacy, and a world organized along categories and

hierarchies of race. The mythical Afro-Asiatic figure of the redeemed, regenerated, and restored Ethiopia, derived in part from his interpretation of Psalm 68:31, reiterated the romantic racial historicism of whiteness that accompanied the scientific study of race in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By suppressing his heterological historical subjectivity as the reader and linker of phrases, Delany became a racial essentialist, and he prefigured much of the racial essentialism that attended Black Nationalism and Afrocentrism in the twentieth century.

Of all the figures associated with missionary emigrationism and the interpretation of Psalm 68:31 in the nineteenth century, Alexander Crummell was probably the most significant.¹⁴ A major intellectual and political figure in both the United States and Liberia, he represented the height of the “Ethiopian” interpretative tradition in the nineteenth century. Like other missionary emigrationists such as Lott Cary, Crummell actually emigrated to Liberia; however, he did not remain there. Besides giving numerous sermons and addresses to the people of Liberia in the 1850s and 1860s, Crummell taught at the Liberian College from 1863 to 1866 and engaged in an intense effort to convert the native peoples of Liberia to Christianity in the early 1870s. For almost twenty years, Crummell brought light to benighted Liberia as a teacher and Episcopalian priest; he lived Psalm 68:31 as he understood it. African uplift was an actual vocation of Crummell’s life work and writings. He was one of the earliest to work out an Afrocentric hermeneutics of the Bible and a complimentary grand narrative of Ethiopia based on the interpretation of Psalm 68:31. Crummell’s importance for the subsequent institutionalization of this hermeneutic and narrative as the basis for ideas of Negro and African racial identities and nationalisms cannot be overemphasized.

One year before Crummell emigrated to Liberia, he gave a sermon, “Hope for Africa” (1852), to the Ladies’ Negro Educational Society in London. This sermon—an early one in his public career as a priest, lecturer, and writer—articulated Crummell’s definitive and most extensive interpretation of Psalm 68:31b. The verse not only served as the text of his sermon, but he either quoted or alluded to it over half a dozen times throughout the piece. Crummell set up his notion of history and God’s providence, and their relationship to Psalm 68:31b.

According to Crummell, the African continent suffers from three thousand years of mental and spiritual darkness. Cut off from Christianity’s beachhead in North Africa by the Sahara Desert, sub-Saharan Africa, the

home of the Negro race according to Crummell, is sick with intellectual and religious disease. Drawing an analogy between Africa and the man with the withered arm in the synoptic Gospels, Africa is lame, medically unable to worship God properly or form a civilization in the darkness. Nevertheless, God does not allow sheep to wander indefinitely in the dark. As a great shepherd, God guides the sheep into the light. For Africa, these are signs that her night is coming to an end: her enslavement by Christians, the existence of Negro men of culture and religion, the presences of Christian churches and missions in West Africa, and the return of Negroes from the New World to Africa. While the Christian world had access to Africa's history and its eventual salvation in the words of the Bible, it is Crummell's interpretation of Psalm 68:31b—what he expressly identifies as a “prophecy”—that unlocks the meaning of the verse.

In Crummell's first allusion to Psalm 68:31b, he pairs it with another allusion, the healing of the man with the withered hand (Matt. 12:9–14, Mark 3:1–6, Luke 6:6–11). In the synoptic report of the miracle, Jesus says to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” The man does as Jesus commands and his arm is restored. For Crummell, this is evidence of the power of God's word. An important aspect of the healing of the man's withered hand is that it is accomplished orally; Jesus never touches it. Jesus speaks, and the man is healed. Crummell sees a relationship between this story, African mental and spiritual benightedness, and the prophecy. Jesus's command to the man is reminiscent of the movement ascribed to Ethiopia in Psalm 68:31b. Just as Jesus heals the man's hand because he obeys his command, so too, when Ethiopia obeys God and rejects idolatry and paganism, He will regenerate her. For Crummell, the human species is a whole body and Ethiopia is its withered arm in need of healing. The human body cannot be whole and healthy as long as Ethiopia lives in darkness. The light of civilization and Protestant Christianity will restore the arm of man, Ethiopia.

The story of the healing of the man's withered hand also serves another purpose: it provides a linguistic style in which Crummell presents the figure of Ethiopia. Just as the man's hand is restored, Crummell claims, Ethiopia will be regenerated. Regeneration has two senses here that are applicable to Crummell's Africa. First, disease is the degeneration of a body, the breakdown and destruction of the body's materiality. The disease of Africa is her mental and spiritual darkness. Health is regeneration, the replacement of diseased tissue with healthy tissue. Second, regeneration

is also a spiritual rebirth. Africa's conversion is its regeneration, its second birth. He believes Africa's rebirth has already begun and its fulfillment is just around the corner, "the day of the regeneration of Africa and her children is fast drawing nigh" (*Future of Africa* 289). This interpretation of the figure of Ethiopia regenerated would become an institutional characteristic associated with Psalm 68:31 in the second half of the nineteenth century. With these two allusions to Psalm 68:31b, Crummell engages in a detailed interpretation of the verse and relates it to other passages in the Bible that are also read with the same hermeneutical approach. Crummell reads the Bible to see modern Africa and what has been prefigured for it (*Future of Africa* 307).

While these developments in the figure of Ethiopia are significant by themselves, Crummell adds more to the history of interpreting Psalm 68:31b in black American letters. Previously, other interpreters of the verse have argued that God is fulfilling its words in their moment. Crummell takes this approach to a new level. In his sermon to the Ladies' Negro Educational Society, he emphasizes the swiftness of fulfillment without drawing specific attention to the use of "soon" in the verse: "the Negro race—is gradually, nay rapidly, resuming life and vitality," "the Negro race is fast approaching, the day of complete evangelization," "the day of regeneration of Africa and her children is fast drawing nigh," and "rapidity of God's work during the brief period" (*Future of Africa* 286, 289, 308). Without explicitly referring to "soon" in Psalm 68:31b, Crummell is engaged in an interpretation of the word and his moment. Contracted time is speeding up Ethiopia's regeneration. Crummell's message about the agency of messianic time mimics Paul's letter to the Corinthians. The Christianization of the Negro and its effects in the United States, West Indies, and West Africa from 1800 to 1850 are erasing three thousand years of night in Africa, and in 1852, the year of Crummell's sermon, the "day is at hand!" for Ethiopia's regeneration (*Future of Africa* 310).

In his speech to Barbadian emigrants to Liberia in 1863, Crummell emphasizes the adverb "soon" as a way of connecting his audience to the verse. The Barbadian emigrants, and by extension all Negroes from the New World who return to Africa, are signs that God's word is fulfilling itself. Crummell's present is the return and arrival of teachers and priests who will soon arise and bring Africa redemption in the form of Christianization and regeneration in the form of Anglophonic civilization, which will "soon" be disseminated to all ignorant and unsaved Africans

on the continent (*Africa and America* 429). He seems excited about the “nowness” of the prophetic “soon” in the verse. Like his predecessors and contemporaries, Crummell’s interpretation of Psalm 68:31 is rife with an explicit faith in the veracity of the verse, as he states in one address before he cites the Psalm, “the words I now utter are the words of inspiration, they come from God Himself” (*Future of Africa* 129).

Crummell’s interpretation of Psalm 68:31b contains a notion of history and destiny, in short, Divine Providence. Even though previous interpreters have placed the figure of Ethiopia in the hands of Providence, Crummell actually understands the history and destiny of Ethiopia as the workings in a divine plot: “And if I read the signs of the times alright. . . . What a grand reversal of a dark destiny will it not be for poor bleeding Africa!” (*Future of Africa* 310). A reversal, as students of drama know, is when action takes an unexpected turn. In the plot of Ethiopia, Europeans bring Africans to the New World to work, but this action also brings them to Christ. God allows the terror of slavery to take place so that Negroes can be exposed to Christianity and reborn as a Christian race. Another poetic concept associated with reversal is recognition. This is when a character learns something that, throughout the play, has been unknown to him or her. Becoming Christian is spiritual recognition. The conversion of Negroes is their intellectual transformation from ignorance to knowledge. As Crummell writes, “There is an uprising of her [Africa’s] sons from intellectual sloth and spiritual inertness; a seeking and a stretching forth of her hands, for light, instruction, and spirituality.”¹⁵ The unknotting of Ethiopia’s plot is when Psalm 68:31b is completely fulfilled, when Ethiopia is in all respects enlightened and Christian; when Ethiopia is commensurate with God’s design (*Future of Africa* 320).

Crummell further develops his understanding of providence in his 1863 sermon, “Emigration, an Aid to the Evangelization of Africa.” As if he is making a statement of knowledge instead of a statement of faith, Crummell opens with an interpretation of Deuteronomy 26:1–11, Moses’s instructions to the Israelites prior to entering and conquering the land of Canaan, and asserts that “there is no such thing as chance” (*Africa and America* 412). God has predetermined time, a complete and homogeneous plane, with a divinely designated beginning and end. All events within this homogeneous time of God are meaningful, and are signs of His providence. Even the absence of history in West Africa is an articulation of God’s design to bring Africa from sublime darkness to sublime

light.¹⁶ Although the workings of Providence are mysterious, students of history can look backward and read the text of time that God has written. In this worldview, the will of God merely unfolds through time until the end of time, the Eschaton. The unfolding of events, the text God already wrote, provides “distinct evidences of divine intent and purpose” (*Africa and America* 413).

Reiterating the patristic criticism of pagan religion, Crummell states that the story of sub-Saharan Africa is one of sin, punishment, and salvation. The forefathers of the nineteenth-century Negroes are pagans who “heap[ed] abominations upon abominations,” thereby incurring God’s anger (*Africa and America* 418–19). This constitutes Africa’s sin. The enslavement of Africans in the New World, an event in which, Crummell writes, “mercy was mingled with . . . wrath,” constitutes Africa’s punishment, and Africa’s conversion to Christianity is its salvation (*Africa and America* 419). The “return” of the Barbadian group to West Africa is a sign of God’s faithfulness to his promise and a sign that Psalm 68:31 will be fulfilled shortly. To aid in the fulfillment of God’s prophecy, these emigrants to Liberia must become “civilizers and evangelizers of these our heathen kinsmen [non-Christianized Africans] around us” (*Africa and America* 426). The story will be commensurate with God’s Providence once all of Africa, the whole continent, is Christianized.

It is within this context that Crummell interprets the predicate of Psalm 68:31b as the Anglo-Saxonization of Africa and Africans. For Crummell, the verse encompasses the whole continent of Africa, not merely sub-Saharan Africa. An Anglophile, Crummell saw the Anglo-Saxons as the pinnacle of manly force, civilization, and Christianity. They were greater than the French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Danes, the other European nations with colonial interests in Africa or the western hemisphere. The greatness of Anglo-Saxon culture, civilization, religion, and most importantly, language, was evidence of this. Crummell was a man of his age, and like many nationalists, he celebrated language as the premier articulation of the national spirit. He praised English as a language of manly force, freedom, liberty, and Christianity. This was vital to black people because it was the vehicle to enlightenment and salvation.¹⁷ Liberia was a prime example of the redemptive and regenerative powers of English. The contact of black Anglophones and Africans elevated the African from barbarism to civilization. English was the language of the racial Bildungsroman that God

had written for Africa. The resulting texts were Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Christianization of Negroland, or West Africa. Psalm 68:31 foretold the present and for centuries the will of God was hidden, but slavery and the exposure to English (especially the Bible in English) and Anglo-Saxon culture and civilization were the revealed workings of Providence.¹⁸

In Crummell's sermon to the Ladies' Negro Educational Society, the climax occurs when he cites his own rendition of Psalm 68:31b. Previously, we have seen that black writers take liberties with the wording of Psalm 68:31 to make it resonate a certain way within the context of their argument. Sometimes rewriting the verse is associated with the multiple translations of the verse, but sometimes the verse is rewritten to fit the context of the reading. One of Crummell's alterations to the verse is to make it continental instead of just national or racial. Usually appearing in the last paragraph of his addresses or sermons, Crummell's rendition of Psalm 68:31b is: "Ethiopia, from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean—from the Mediterranean to the Cape, 'shall soon stretch out her hands unto God!'"¹⁹ Echoing patristic literature, but also racializing it, the figure of Ethiopia for Crummell is continental; the synecdochic sense of Ethiopia has expanded from sub-Saharan Africa to the whole continent. All of Africa will become Christian and Anglo-Saxon African. The Sahara, which Crummell claims once impeded the movement of Christianity southward into sub-Saharan Africa, has been overcome by Providence. God has chosen the modern era to fulfill the promise contained in Psalm 68:31, and the civilized and Christianized Negro will be the agent of change.

This reworking of Psalm 68:31 occurs twice in Crummell's writings. In "Along the West Coast of Africa," an address given six times in the United States in 1861, it is clear from Crummell's interpretative rendition that he sees Psalm 68:31 as a prophecy for Africa alone. Citing the verse with his alterations, the North American, West Indian, and South American Negroes are not covered by the prophecy. Africa and its spiritual and intellectual needs have displaced the elevation of the diasporic communities. This was a new interpretative development of the verse. Since Wheatley's initial interpretation of Psalm 68:31, the Negro in the Western Hemisphere—especially the American Negro—had been the representative Ethiopian in the Christian and modern world. Crummell's interpretation pulled the rug out from under almost ninety years of interpreting the subject of the verse. His alteration of Ethiopia as a continental designation is

one that we can identify as “Pan-African.” There are hints of “Pan-Africanist” sentiments in early interpretations of Psalm 68:31, but Crummell’s rendition of the verse is explicitly Pan-African.

The majority of Crummell’s citations and interpretations of Psalm 68:31 appear in texts during the 1850s and before the end of the Civil War. After the Civil War and his return to the United States in 1872, Psalm 68:31 rarely appears in Crummell’s writings. The one occurrence of the verse in Crummell’s repatriated work is a poem included in his sermon commemorating fifty years as an Episcopal priest, *Jubilate: 1844–1894, The Shades and the Lights of a Fifty Years’ Ministry*. In the course of giving a skeletal representation of his life and his meeting with Rev. William Croswell, Crummell quotes “Joy to thy savage realms, O Africa!” Croswell’s sonnet inspired by Psalm 68:31.²⁰ Crummell characterizes Croswell as “one of the sweetest poets of our [the Anglican] church” and judges Croswell’s poem “Joy to thy savage realms, O Africa!” as one that is “fully equal to the glowing verse of Montgomery, on Africa, or the fine Sonnet of Wordsworth to the Negro Lady fleeing from France.”²¹ The importance of Croswell’s poem to Crummell cannot be overstated; it seems to confirm his pastoral mission and preaching, it corroborates his understanding of Psalm 68:31, and it appears on the flyleaf of Crummell’s 1862 book *The Future of Africa*.²² Despite the importance of Croswell’s poem and Psalm 68:31 to Crummell’s antebellum writings, Crummell does not provide a reading of either one in *Jubilate*. He appears to have merely cited the poem to present Croswell and to praise him as an early mentor and friend. This poem appears to be the last occurrence of Psalm 68:31 in Crummell’s writings, and the beginning of the retreat of Ethiopia as a figure in need of Christianity and culture.

Du Bois wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk* that Alexander Crummell “began to struggle with life that he might know the world and know himself” (169). Even though Du Bois’s short literary biography attributed Crummell’s knowledge of the world and himself to his personal experience, Crummell was more a product of reading. He became who he was through literacy; his engagement with the world was literary. Crummell’s life was one of linking phrases together. That was how he came to know the world and himself. Psalm 68:31 was one of many phrases that Crummell wrote ripostes to, but it probably constituted the single most important biblical verse in his writings. He was anchored in time and space by being an articulation between phrases. His grand narrative of Christian

and racial redemption might have erased his emergence as a historical subject, but his writings bear witness to a life of reading and responding to the written word in order to think about and live in the world.

The End of the World; or The End of White Supremacy

The Christian desire to evangelize the world is as old as Paul's mission to the Gentiles in the first century of the Common Era. According to Paul, the conversion of Gentiles is ultimately connected to the conversion of the Jews. The conversion of both the Gentiles and the Jews is a sign of the end of the world. In Paul's writing, an eschatological discourse is intimately associated with Christ; there is little time left in Paul's world; the age of last things is near. Paul writes, "What I mean, my friends, is this: The time we live in will not last long. . . . For the whole frame of this world is passing away" (1 Corinthians 7:29, 31). The persistence of these themes in Christianity bears witness to their imaginative, material, and spiritual importance for Christian thinkers and exegetes.

In 1888, Theophilus Gould Steward published *The End of the World; or Clearing the Way for the Fullness of the Gentiles*. Steward, an African Methodist Episcopal minister, ex-Army chaplain, former Buffalo soldier, and a professor at Wilberforce College in Ohio, saw his moment as the one prefigured by Paul's eschatological discourse. Steward writes that the Christian idea has been racialized by the white races, under the leadership of the Anglo-Saxon, to the point where "it has become a white man's religion" instead of a universal one (120). There is more "clan" than "Christ" in Christianity (Steward 121). Pointing to white supremacy and the violence and oppression of colonialism and imperialism, Steward argues that those promoting white Christianity and civilization, because they believe it is the pinnacle of the divine idea and the most apt to survive among the races, are attempting to eliminate the dark-skinned people from the face of the earth (68–76).

The foil of Steward's argument was Josiah Strong and his book, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (1885). A Congregational minister and the general secretary of the Evangelical Alliance for the United States, Strong advocated notions of white supremacy and the white man's burden. To counter Strong's assertions about the divine nature of white supremacy—particularly Anglo-Saxon supremacy—and social Darwinism, Steward employs Psalm 68:30–31 as a biblical prooftext

against Strong and the white Christian idea: "After God shall have scattered the fierce nations who delight in war, and who have carried the destructive science to a height never before conceived of, then 'Princes shall come out of Egypt, and Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands unto God'" (123–24). The scattering of the nations who delight in war is a rendition of the verse that precedes 68:31. Reading the signs of the world through the vector of scripture, Steward predicts a cataclysmic war among white Christian nations that will open up the possibility for the reemergence of true Christianity, the evangelization of the darker races of the world that will foreground "brotherly love" and empathy, and the subsequent conversion of these peoples (123–24). African Christians and the Abyssinian Church will replace Strong's Anglo-Saxon civilized missionaries to the darker races of the world, specifically Africa. This righteous remnant will bring unconverted Africans to Christ, and in doing so, will participate in the divine plan of the conversion, or fullness, of the Gentiles (Steward 125–26). Linking the Pauline figure of the universality of God's promise to Abraham with St. John's image of the universal redemption of all nations through Christ's blood (Revelation), the conversion of African nations through the agency of the Abyssinian Church resonates in Psalm 68:31b for Steward.

According to Steward's interpretation of Psalm 68:31b, the hands of Ethiopia bring "Africa's millions" to Christ. Instead of Ethiopia's hands stretching to God in submission, her hands embrace non-Christians and bring them within Christ's salvation. Ethiopia's hands also replace Strong's Anglo-Saxon missionaries who, under the guise of Providence, are attempting to change the darker races of the world into dark skinned Anglo-Saxons (Strong 159–80). Steward's response to Strong is a nineteenth-century critique of whiteness as the universal norm. He articulates a figure of difference based not on the science of race and its inherent hierarchy, but on the biblical notion of diverse "nations." To explain this, Steward produces an argument about the relationship of the one and the many. Christ's redemption is universal; the Christian idea is one, and other than the idea of race, and therefore should not be submitted to it. Steward cites Galatians' famous third chapter as proof that God's promise of human redemption is beyond national or racial distinctions (115–16, 128–29). Even though the Christian idea is singular, humanity is diverse and each race is different. Steward's articulation of human diversity echoes Herder, but without the latter's attention to folk culture and orality.

Steward attempts to maintain the dialectic between the one and the many, and his reading of Psalm 68:31 does so. Abyssinian missionaries teach the Christian idea, and Africans evangelize other Africans. African difference is maintained at the same time Africa is Christianized. According to Steward, the fulfillment of Psalm 68:31 is a sign that the age of Anglo-Saxon oppression and violence is coming to an end. In the next age, a pure, non-racial Christianity will replace Anglo-Saxon Christianity, and both Gentiles and Jews will live in the light of Christ's salvation.

Psalm 68:31 provides Steward with a riposte to Strong's idea of white supremacy. The verse prefigures the Christianization of Africa, but Africa will take care of herself; she does not need Anglo-Saxons and their misunderstanding of the Gospel. More than one hundred years separate Wheatley's and Steward's respective readings of Psalm 68:31, but a greater distance separates their responses to the verse. Wheatley wanted Christianized Negroes from New England to go to Africa and be missionaries. The kind of Christianity they would bring would be English derived and hence similar to Strong's Christianity. Steward's reading of Psalm 68:31 promotes the Christianization of Africa, but it rejects the involvement of non-Africans, both Strong's Anglo-Saxon missionaries and Negro Americans. In Steward's vision, African Christians should Christianize Africa. Furthermore, Psalm 68:31 is one verse that anchors Steward's critique of Strong and white supremacy. He negates Strong's narrative of the Anglo-Saxons colonizing, civilizing, and Christianizing the darker peoples of the world, thereby hastening the Kingdom of God through his interpretation of Psalm 68:31. Ethiopia Christianizes Africa, and this event signals the end of Anglo-Saxon dominance and the beginning of Christ's global reign.

Included in Steward's book is James A. Handy's short essay, "An Exposition of Psalm 68:31." Handy, an African Methodist Episcopal minister and later a bishop, repeats many of the major themes of Steward's text, but unlike Steward's work, his essay is completely governed by Psalm 68:31 and its relevance to Africa and African history. As is common to many Afro-Asiatic myths, Africa is presented as a land of historical preeminence that was eclipsed by the rise of Christianity and darkened by the spread of Islam throughout the continent. Outside of Christianity's incursion into North Africa in late antiquity, Christianity has failed in Africa. Handy uses biblically derived designations for Africa and its people, such as "the land of Ham" and "Hamites," to write a story of continuity between ancient

Egypt and nineteenth-century Africa. For Handy, the land of Ham in the Bible is the Ethiopia of today. In one of Handy's renditions of Psalm 68:31, he substitutes "the land of Ham" for "Ethiopia" as if they are synonymous. The object of continuity is race.

In grand literary style, Handy refers to the verse as "this passage," presents it, and explicates its meaning, "That this land [Africa] and its inhabitants, notwithstanding the lowest depths of sin and idolatry that it has touched and its present state of Pagan, Heathen, and Mohammedan superstition shall learn the narrative and history of the Manger, the Cross and Calvary, and bow and worship, and serve and love the Lord Jesus Christ, our common Saviour [*sic*]. A clear rendering of this passage is 'Princes shall come out of Mizraim. Cush shall soon stretch out her hand unto God'" (145–46). Handy's citation and interpretation of Psalm 68:31 echoes previous Christian readings of the verse as the conversion of the Gentiles. He reads Egypt and Ethiopia as a synecdoche for all of Africa and its unconverted masses; he understands the verse as a prophecy concerning the Christianization of non-Christians in Africa; and he believes his moment will witness the fulfillment of the prophecy. Handy also reiterates Sewall's use of the transliterated names Mizraim and Cush for Egypt and Ethiopia, respectively, to buttress the biblical Africanness of these places and to legitimate his exposition of the verse.

In addition, Handy echoes Steward's argument. Lamenting the failure of various white Christian denominations to stretch Africa's hands to God, Handy does not see the Abyssinian Church as the agent to evangelize Africa (142–43). He looks to tribal leaders to evangelize their own peoples, and he cites Psalm 68:31 in association with other biblical verses as his proof. Much dispute has gathered around the meaning of the Hebrew word *ḥašmannim*. Psalm 68:31 is the only place in the Tanakh where the word, in either the singular or plural form, occurs. The standard English translation, "Princes," is a philological guess. Nevertheless, in Handy's interpretation of the verse it is not vague or shadowy, but clear as a pane of glass. For him "Princes" signify the nineteenth-century African chiefs and kings. Accordingly, the "Princes" will embrace Christianity and their people will follow. Handy also claims that the "Princes" will be "ministers at the altar of God" (149). Even though Handy diverges from Steward's interpretation of the verse concerning the evangelic agents of Africa's conversion, he reiterates Steward's rejection of Anglo-Saxon Christianity's

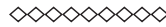
missionary authority and legitimacy, and he looks to Africans to convert other Africans.

Handy concludes his essay with an enigma. He claims that “the moment is on the wing,” that is, the Christianization of Africa is at hand. His proof is a series of unreadable events such as the scramble for Africa and the rise of the Abyssinian King John, who was known as the Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, King of Zion, King of Kings of Ethiopia, and the Elect of God. Handy sees these events as evidence of God’s providence for Africa as revealed in Psalm 68:31 (149–50). In other words, the events that take place in Africa or that concern it “make up an unexplained enigma”; they are visible signs of God’s invisible will. Handy’s reading of Psalm 68:31 grounds his faith and provides a response to the events he reads about in his newspaper. His essay attempts to make sense of the signs of the times. To do this, Handy links phrases from the newspaper and the Bible to figure out the world and its telos.

In the previous chapter, readings of Psalm 68:31 grounded the mission to uplift the Negro American. The acquisition of modern culture and conversion to Christianity were the ways to negate and overcome the defectiveness of the Negro American. In this chapter, readings of Psalm 68:31 were exported from America to Africa. Christian Negroes, educated in America and animated first by the spirit of evangelism and then by ideas of race and racial fraternity, saw Africa as a land smothered by metaphysical blackness that endangered African intelligence and spiritual health. Attending the figures of Africa’s conversion to Christianity and its regeneration was a pernicious belief that Africa could not escape its metaphysical benightedness on its own; salvation must come from outside of Africa. Steward and Handy were two hermeneuts of Psalm 68:31 who conceived of Africans as the agents of their own salvation, but the majority of Negro American exegetes of Psalm 68:31, armed with Christianity, literacy, and Anglophone culture, saw themselves as either the messengers or the agents of Africa’s redemption.

Echoing the European assessment of Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a place of “the grossest darkness and ignorance,” Christian Negroes, from Wheatley to Crummell, created a discourse about Africa that did not emerge out of Africa, but was applied to it (Gates and Andrews 33). Just as the Negro American was a figment in the minds of white Americans, the African became a figment in the minds of many

black American Christians. Africans must be transformed into Anglo-phone Protestants, people who would resemble the Christianized Negro American, but would be Negro African. Although a sense of Africa's spiritual benightedness sparked the idea of missionary emigrationism, by the 1850s it had become something else. Readings of Psalm 68:31 grounded the reconfiguration of Africa as a racial, romantic, and mythological figure. Africa became the center of the world, and Ethiopia was its origin. The figure of Ethiopia became the main character in the racial Bildungsromans of Delany, Crummell, and Handy. These developments dovetailed with the refiguration of Ethiopia in the political and literary arenas in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century.



Psalm 68:31 and the Fight for Freedom and Equality in Antebellum America

One of the grand narratives of race in America painted a picture of white dominance and black capitulation from the eighteenth century to the latter decades of the twentieth century. The intertwined images of white supremacy and black vacuity attempted to present the discussion of race in America as a white monologue in which black people were defined legally, scientifically, politically, and culturally by the dominant population. Whites had the final word about race, and it became the official and solely legitimate discourse on the subject. Moreover, this discourse attempted to foreclose further discussion about race as a figure, issue, or topic. However, this narrative of the white monologue is one-sided and does not take into account the subtle and constant dialogue on race in America that has occurred since the eighteenth century. Despite the marginalization of blacks in America since the birth of the country, black readers and writers have been engaged in a dialogue about the question of race. Instead of allowing themselves to be defined as objects, black readers have inserted themselves into the discussion by reading, and thereby attaining historical subjectivity, and they have contributed to the discussion by sending ripostes to the discourses of white supremacy and black vacuity that oppose them as the final arbiters of race. One of the dominant ripostes of black writers in America is the assertion of their humanity in terms recognizable to white people.

In the last two chapters, Negro hermeneuts offered their own versions of the final word against the Negro's essential human deficiencies through interpretations of Psalm 68:31. The conversion and acculturation

of the figure of Ethiopia, the Afro-Asiatic myth, and emigration were all ripostes to the narratives of white innate supremacy and the Negro's essential vacuousness. Biblical prophecy, a recognized and sacred discourse, attested to the essential humanity of the Negro, and constituted the final word by God on this matter. Nevertheless, the conversion of the figure of Ethiopia neither constituted the only interpretation of Psalm 68:31 nor the final word on the question of race in America. Many black hermeneuts understood the verse as a prefiguration that slavery would end and the former slaves and free people of color would be included into the social and political fabric of the United States. For these readers, such as Rev. Allen, David Walker, Maria Stewart, and Frederick Douglass, migration was out of the question. Emigration to Africa represented capitulation to the narrative that America was solely a white country, but more importantly, it was to acquiesce to the story of the essential otherness of the Negro. Those opposed to emigration—and this constituted the overwhelming majority of black hermeneuts and black people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—employed the modern discourses of emancipation and the rights of man to agitate for inclusion within the American social contract.¹ The current chapter will discuss writers who fall into this category.

Freedom, Fraternity, and Revolution: Prince Hall's Reading of Psalm 68:31

It was within the struggle to become legal Americans that novel readings of Psalm 68:31 refigured Ethiopia anew. Instead of reading for the verse to change the nature of the Negro, these readers read Psalm 68:31 to change the social and political status of the Negro. These interpretations proclaimed the end of slavery and the emancipation of the Negro. Shortly after the end of the Revolutionary War and the ratification of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights until a few years before the secession of the South from the Union, Psalm 68:31 provided the hermeneutic basis for the hope for Negro emancipation and even inclusion within the United States as citizens, as well as criticism of American hypocrisy.

The first interpretation of Psalm 68:31 in relation to Negro liberation was made by Prince Hall. The founder of Negro Masonry, Hall was a manumitted slave, a soldier in the Revolutionary War, and a Methodist

minister. He cited Psalm 68:31 in two sermons at the African Masonic Lodge in Boston just prior to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Like the African Methodist Episcopal Church and numerous other black institutions, the African Masonic Lodge was created because white Masons in Boston and other major American cities refused to integrate their institutions. Many white institutions held the belief that, like the country, their institutions were for whites only. Hall used the platform of the African Masonic Lodge to organize free people of color to agitate against slavery. His interpretation of Psalm 68:31b was instrumental to his critique of slavery and freedom in the new American nation.

Recall that, in Wheatley's reading of Psalm 68:31b, the figure of Ethiopia is a new Christian, a figure redeemed from spiritual slavery and sin. In Hall's interpretation of the verse, the spiritual salvation of the Negro in America is downplayed, and the physical liberation of the figure of Ethiopia is foregrounded. In 1792, Hall's message to his fellow lodge members is, "But be not discouraged, have patience, and look forward to a better day; Hear what the great Architect of the universal world saith, *Aethiopia* [*sic*] *shall stretch her hands unto me*" (qtd. in Porter 67). Five years later, Hall reiterates this message but heightens his rhetoric with a reference to the Haitian Revolution: "Thus doth Ethiopia begin to stretch forth her hand, from a sink of slavery to freedom and equality" (qtd. in Porter 74).

In the first address, Hall takes liberties with the wording of the psalm. Using a Masonic metonymy for God, "the great Architect," who has written plans for the world and its destiny, Hall needs to change the verse from third person to the first person in his rewriting of the psalm. Attributing the psalm to God as something He spoke thousands of years ago instead of to David, the traditional author of the psalms, Hall needs to replace "unto god" with "unto me." Instead of Ethiopia stretching forth her hands to God—a rather distant and impersonal description of a future action—Hall replaces "God" with "me," thereby making the relationship between Ethiopia and God more personal. According to Hall's rendition of the verse, God is speaking directly to Ethiopia without the mediation of David. Psalm 68:31b becomes the word of God and not the psalmist. This gives Hall's rendering of the verse a covenantal legitimacy suggesting that God has promised Ethiopia "a better day." This time is not necessarily the Eschaton, but a new age in race relations in the United States. Hence, within the divine plans of God, the future of Ethiopia is already written. In Hall's interpretation, the stretching forth of Ethiopia's hands is

the liberation of those held in bondage, and the sign of neither submission nor supplication.

In the first sermon of Hall's interpretation of Psalm 68:31b, a message to "Brethren of the African Lodge," he lists a number of biblical and early Christians (Tertullian, Augustine, and Fulgentius) who were "Ethiopians," and therefore serve as models for his listeners to imitate (qtd. in Porter 65). As a writer with more historical references at hand than Wheatley or Marrant, Hall's downplaying of Ethiopia's conversion might indicate that for him the church is an African, not a European, institution. If his audience at the lodge meeting was free, Negro, and Christian, an interpretation of Psalm 68:31b as a reference to Negro conversion to Christianity would not make any sense. They were already Christians. What they needed were moral models for imitation. For Hall, who better than early African Christian saints could serve as moral guides for "the humble and poor servants of Christ" in his Boston audience (qtd. in Porter 67)?

Moreover, the significance of Hall's reference to Tertullian, Augustine, and Fulgentius is that he makes North Africa "Ethiopian." In American English prior to Hall's writings, Ethiopia denoted people from sub-Saharan Africa, but Hall makes Ethiopia include Africa above the Sahara. By extending the geographical location of Ethiopia, Hall extends history. Whereas Wheatley, following in the tradition of Cotton Mather, interpreted Psalm 68:31 as a prophecy of Negro conversion, Hall's Ethiopianization of North Africa serves as a counternarrative; Ethiopia was already Christian before slavery. In short, Hall jettisons the figure of Ethiopia's fortunate fall and offers up a new history of the Negro that includes Christian North Africa.

In Hall's second address, he extends the figure of Ethiopia to Haiti and the event of the Haitian Revolution. The verse from Psalm 68:31 is written in the future tense, "shall stretch forth," but in Hall's rewriting of the verse, he changes the future tense into the present tense: "Thus doth Ethiopia begin to stretch forth." Hall reminds his audience that: "My brethren, let us not be cast down under these and many other abuses we at present labour under: for the darkest is before the break of day. My brethren, let us remember what a dark day it was with our African brethren six years ago, in the French West Indies" (qtd. in Porter 74). In 1797, this was a bold sermon to publish for the public to read in slaveholding Boston. Hall's example of Santo Domingo in relation to his revision of Psalm 68:31b constitutes a threat of civil unrest to the young republic. Ethiopia is a

revolutionary figure fighting for its emancipation. The Haitian Revolution is the present of Hall's alter verse that American Negroes and slaves are waiting to fulfill.²

The figure of Ethiopia is cast over the Haitians; they are Ethiopian, racial "brethren" to Hall's Boston audience. "Brethren" is a figure common to Christian sermons, but Hall extends the signifying range of this sermonic figure to refer to West Indians and Africans as brothers of the same mother: Africa. In Hall's sermon he does not refer to the slaves of Haiti as "Haitians" or "West Indians," but rather as "Africans." This is not merely a descriptor; it is a political and racial assertion about the Negro in the New World and his relationship to Africa. Hall was articulating in his figure of Ethiopia an early notion of an Ethiopian or African diaspora that would become a central feature in emigrationist ideology of the nineteenth century, Pan-Africanism of the twentieth century, and blackness as defined in the sixties and seventies in the United States.

In Hall's employment of Psalm 68:31 in the context of the Haitian Revolution, Ethiopia does not stretch her hands to God, but "from a sink of slavery to freedom and equality." The replacement of "God" with "freedom and equality" is a significant tropological shift. Freedom and equality were key words associated with the French Revolution (Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity) and with the revolutionary spirit that animated the Haitian Revolution. If Hall's alterations of Psalm 68:31 are combined with his use of "brethren" to refer to the people in the lodge and the Haitian revolutionaries, then we have a call for revolution. The motto of freedom, equality, and brotherhood is echoed in Hall's sermon through his interpretation of Ethiopia's movement. Haiti is the beginning of Ethiopia's "now," the unfolding of its freedom in the present age. This was a revolutionary interpretation for a revolutionary time.

At the time of his address, Hall did not know the outcome of the Haitian Revolution; he probably had faith that it would be successful, based on his interpretation of the verse. He recognized his historical moment as one within messianic time and its possibilities. The figure of Ethiopia was living the promise God made thousands of years ago. Under its own power, Ethiopia was liberating itself from the shackles of slavery. Filled with the agency of contracted time, the figure of Ethiopia was the agent of change, its auto-emancipation sanctioned by God. Having lived through two major societal upheavals—the American and French Revolutions—that altered the political and social landscape of modernity forever, and

having participated in the success of the former revolution, Hall understood Psalm 68:31 as an index of his age. The time for Ethiopia's emancipation was Hall's moment, and the Haitian Revolution was a sign that Ethiopians (Negroes in the New World) were in the process of obtaining the better day promised by the verse.

The Eventfulness of January 1, 1808

Ten years prior to Hall's second address to the African Masonic Lodge in Boston, the government of the United States put in motion a constitutional event that would both undermine slavery and fuel the debate over it until the Civil War. Employing euphemistic language, Article 1, Section 9, set a date in the future for ending America's importation of slaves from Africa: "The Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the Year one thousand eight hundred and eight" (U.S. Constitution 8). When January 1, 1808, arrived and the trans-Atlantic slave trade legally ended, free people of color in the North saw it as a hopeful harbinger of the end of the institution of slavery itself. Numerous sermons and orations were given in celebration of what many saw as the beginning of the end of slavery in the United States. In hindsight they were right, but the years between 1808 and 1865 were some of the most brutal in American slavery. The internal slave trade rapidly expanded and slavery was pushed west. Great cotton plantations of Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas grew as a result of an internal slave workforce that was moved further south and west from Virginia and the Carolinas. Nevertheless, January 1, 1808, was a day to celebrate. Absalom Jones, in a sermon given on this day, called for an annual "day of publick [*sic*] thanksgiving" in celebrating the legal end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade (qtd. in Porter 340). Despite the joyfulness and optimism of January 1, 1808, the day stood in the shadow of horrors still to come.

Two other orations given in response to the law that took effect January 1, 1808, were Peter Williams's speech, given in New York City at the African Church the same day as Jones's sermon in Philadelphia, and Henry Sipkins's speech given at the same location one year later. Williams and Sipkins were free men of color in the North who were abolitionists and influential advocates for Negro rights in the first third of the nineteenth century. Both men were prominent participants in the National Negro

Conventions in the 1830s. In their New Year's Day speeches, Williams and Sipkins present idyllic images of Africa prior to the introduction of slavery by Europeans. Williams's speech echoes the sentiments of Absalom Jones who, in Philadelphia on the same day, claimed that Providence was responsible for outlawing the trans-Atlantic slave trade. For Williams, the new law was a watershed event and the beginning of complete liberation. Ending his speech with a prayer, Williams writes, "May the time speedily commence, when Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands; when the sun of liberty shall beam resplendent on the whole African race; and its genial influences, promote the luxuriant growth of knowledge and virtue" (qtd. in Porter 353). The truncated citation of Psalm 68:31b, with the editing of "unto God," follows the interpretative tradition initiated by Prince Hall in the late eighteenth century: the movement of Ethiopia's hands is toward physical and political freedom, not to God. This point is reiterated in the clause following the citation of the verse. Ethiopia's stretch is the liberation of the race globally. The movement of Ethiopia's hands is echoed in the famous eighteenth-century image of a kneeling African in chains and its adjoining motto printed over the enslaved figure, "Am I not a man and a brother." This image of the supplicating and submissive slave, made by abolitionists in 1787 to critique slavery and lobby for Negro liberation, is utilized by Williams to refer to a Negro figure beyond supplication and submission. Ethiopia's stretch can only be accomplished once the chains of slavery are removed.

Williams draws attention to the emergence of Ethiopia's emancipation in his opening clause, but he suppresses it when he cites the verse. He knows about the standard English translation of Psalm 68:31b, because he cites it on the title page of the published oration. His call for the speedy commencement of Ethiopia's emancipation suggests that his moment is within the time of the verse's fulfillment. Williams sees the antislavery work of Americans John Woolman and Anthony Benezet, and Englishmen William Wilberforce and the Rev. Thomas Clarkson, along with the new law prohibiting the trans-Atlantic slave trade, as evidence of preparatory steps before Ethiopia's complete emancipation.

The last clause of Williams's oration is set after Ethiopia's emancipation. As many after him, Williams promises gifts by Ethiopia to the world, the gifts of knowledge and virtue.³ This last clause brings the reader back to the opening paragraphs of the speech. Prior to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, idyllic Africa is without social ills and Africans do not suffer from

character defects. But the clause is also forward looking. Literate free people of color, such as Williams and the members of the African Church in New York City, have emerged in the midst of slavery and contributed to the expansion and dissemination of knowledge. An emancipated Ethiopia will be a positive addition to America and, according to Williams's speech, is not in need of intellectual and moral cultivation.

Henry Sipkins's oration of 1809 reiterates many of Williams's sentiments. Unique to Sipkins's speech is his allusion to Psalm 68:31: "But may the long wished for time soon arrive when slavery of every species shall be destroyed—when despotism and oppression shall forever cease—when Africa shall be reinstated in their former joys—when the exulting shouts of Princes, embracing their long lost oppressed subjects, shall reverberate on our ears—when the bursting acclamations of approbation shall resound from the tombs of our worthy departed ancestors; and all find protection under the fostering wing of Liberty" (qtd. in Porter 373). Allusions to Psalm 68:31 are woven throughout this prayer closing Sipkins's oration. In the opening clause, Sipkins alludes to the fulfillment anxiety that accompanies Psalm 68:31 and its interpretation in black American letters: if the age of Ethiopia is not at hand, the interpretative promise of the verse is not in play. Hence, the current moment is not in the shadow of the prophecy. As we have seen, readers for hundreds of years viewed their age as the age prefigured in the psalm. According to Sipkins's interpretation of the verse, "the long wished for time" hopefully "soon [to] arrive" is the end of slavery, in all of its articulations, and also the end of its handmaiden, oppression.

The second and third clauses refer to the restoration of Africa prior to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This sentiment is an outgrowth of Sipkins's idyllic history. With the end of the slave trade, Africa can return to the way life was before the European trade. It is a gross misstatement to characterize human existence in such a flat manner. The slave trade was legally ended, but Africa had been permanently transformed by its interaction with Europe; there could not be a return to the past as if the slave trade did not exist. Sipkins's naïve prayer is informed by his interpretation of Psalm 68:31. The restoration of Africa's pre-European past is accompanied by the emergence of "Princes" who will restore their rule over their people. The reference to and capitalization of "Princes" is derived from Psalm 68:31. Sipkins's addition to the verse is to give the "Princes" more animation than they have in the psalm. In the biblical verse, princes come

out of Egypt, but in Sipkins's interpretation, they shout and embrace their people. Ethiopians in America, presumably in celebration of Ethiopia's liberation, will hear the power of the princes' shouts.

In the last two clauses of Sipkins's prayer he rhetorically heightens the effect of freedom by including those Ethiopians in America who died without obtaining it. They too will make a noise of approval from their grave in celebration of Ethiopia's emancipation. Liberty is an event that binds Sipkins's prayer together and determines his interpretation of the verse. Like Williams, Sipkins understood Psalm 68:31 to prefigure the end of slavery everywhere, but his subtle use of the verse in his speech is indicative of the interpretative elasticity of this verse to black readers even in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

America in the Hands of an Angry God

Sipkins's figurative extension of Psalm 68:31 presented a case for Negro liberation. Reading the verse situated his response to it and to slavery in nineteenth-century America. Despite the hermeneutical force of Williams's and Sipkins's New Year's Day addresses, greater rhetorical fire against slavery was needed. David Walker's *Appeal* (1829) has the deserved reputation for being one of the most fiery pieces written by a person of color in the nineteenth century. His anger against slavery matched and even superseded Jonathan Edwards's famous jeremiad, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (1741). If sin is the lead in the human soul that pulls it toward the fiery pit, then slavery is the lead in the American soul sending it to eternal damnation; if sinners are hanging over the jaws of hell ready to be consumed, but then saved by God's grace, then America and the institution of slavery are at the precipice of God's judgment. By 1829, Walker, the son of a slave and a free woman of color, was completely incensed by American Christian hypocrisy concerning people of color. In the *Appeal*, Walker cites and gives an implicit interpretation of Psalm 68:31.

Following in the style of Mather's *The Negro Christianized*, Walker does not cite Psalm 68:31 in the body of his *Appeal*; rather he places it, with his own variations, in the Preface:

It is expected that all coloured men, women and children, of every nation, language and tongue under heaven, will try to procure a

copy of this Appeal and read it, or get some one to read it to them, for it is designed more particularly for them. Let them remember, that though our cruel oppressors and murderers, may (if possible) treat us more cruel, as Pharaoh did the children of Israel, yet the God of the Ethiopians [*sic*], has been pleased to hear our moans in consequence of oppression; and the day of our redemption from abject wretchedness draweth near, when we shall be enabled, in the most extended sense of the word, to stretch forth our hands to the Lord our God, but there must be a willingness on our part, for God to do these things for us, for we may be assured that he will not take us by the hairs of our head against our will and desire, and drag us from our very, mean, low and abject condition.

There are a few aspects of Walker's citation of Psalm 68:31 that immediately draw attention. First, Walker personalizes the figure of Ethiopia by changing the possessive pronoun from "her" to "our," and in so doing includes himself in the agency that the figure will make. This rendition of the verse functions in a self-referential manner. The *Appeal* itself is an articulation of Ethiopia's stretching: writing is a hand-dominant technology. In writing the *Appeal*, Walker is stretching forth his "Ethiopian" hand for the benefit of Ethiopians oppressed in America. Second, Walker rewrites the ending of the verse from "to God" to "to the Lord our God." As with the substitution of pronouns in the earlier section of the verse, Walker's rewriting signifies a change in the figure of Ethiopia: Ethiopia does not need to be Christianized because it already is. The presumption of the existence of Ethiopian Christians is a verbal effect of the phrase "our God"; they do not have to be created, they already exist.⁴ The trajectory of Walker's diction suggests that Psalm 68:31 is being rewritten and modeled after the Israelite enslavement in Egypt. A common phrase of the Deuteronomic school is "the Lord our God." Walker explicitly copies this language and draws an analogy between the Israelites and the Ethiopians. Ethiopian slavery is a modern echo of the oppression of Israel. Put within the framework of this book, Walker interprets Negro slavery and the Bible figurally. His moment is opening up, as an event in time and space, in the shadow of biblical events that took place, but were oriented toward the future when they would be fulfilled. As in the biblical stories of the Exodus, God's agency will free Ethiopians from American slavery.⁵ Lastly—and this dovetails with the previous point—the day of liberation,

the fulfillment of Psalm 68:31, is near. The shadow of the past is becoming substantial in Walker's "now."

It is common in jeremiads for the prophet to insist that the coming destruction will take place soon, while at the same time being vague as to the specific time when it will occur. This is the prophetic dynamic of Walker's *Appeal*. He insists that "the day is fast approaching" when white American Christians will be destroyed for slavery and the "ignorance and degradation" that the institution perpetuated in the minds and souls of slaves. This judgment against white American Christians also has another effect: the emancipation of the slaves from bondage. The certainty of the "whatness" of America's future is as great as the illusionary "whenness" of its occurrence. Nevertheless, in preparation for the end, Walker, in Pauline tones, instructs people of color on how to ready themselves for the end of slavery.

Walker's *Appeal* is actually a lesson plan designed to prepare colored people for God's liberation. He wants to liberate the minds and souls of colored people from the shackles of slavery. Using an argument that foreshadows Ngugi wa Thiong'o's "decolonizing the mind," Walker argues that slavery has made slaves less than men because they are apathetic to their condition. This is the primary reason Walker vigorously attacks Jefferson's racial theory, pro-slavery Christian preachers, and the American colonization plan; he wants to demonstrate that the institutional position on the Negro's inhumanity is not merely false, but demonic. White American Christians have done what no other oppressive force has done in world history: they have reduced the oppressed to the status of brutes. This is not only a crime against people of color, but also an affront to God Himself. The *Appeal* is designed to bring light to the darkness of slavery and awaken the human spirit for freedom that slavery has put to sleep in the slave.

After awakening the spirit of resistance in colored people, Walker's *Appeal* instructs them to be faithfully vigilant: "Remember, also to lay humble at the feet of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, with prayers and fastings. . . . Never make an attempt to gain our freedom or *natural right*, from under our cruel oppressors and murderers, until you see your way clear—when that hour arrives and you move, be not afraid or dismayed; for be you assured that Jesus Christ the King of heaven and of earth who is the God of justice and of armies, will surely go before you" (11–12). This is tantamount to a call for a slave rebellion. The references are vague, but

the instructions are clear: through prayer and fasting the slaves will learn of the hour of the war for their emancipation.

Later in the *Appeal*, Walker writes that a messianic warrior, in the mode of Hannibal the Carthaginian (whom Walker alludes to as an African), the general who fought the Roman Empire, will be sent to the colored people of America as an agent of their emancipation: "God will indeed, deliver you through him from your deplorable and wretched condition under the Christians of America" (20). Walker employs the figure of Hannibal two ways in this text. First, he argues that if the Carthaginians had unified behind Hannibal, he would have defeated the Romans. Carthaginian disunity is mirrored in the colored population. The figure of Hannibal teaches the lesson that unified resistance is needed against an oppressive force. Much like a minister preaching to a congregation, Walker refers to his intended audience as "my brethren" numerous times in the *Appeal* to encourage a sense of unity, of collective identity and purpose. No phrase is more common in Walker's text than this one. Second, the figure of Hannibal allows Walker an opportunity to refer to the Haitian Revolution. Haiti serves as a historical instance that illustrates Walker's message, a successful slave rebellion. (Walker's only problem with Haiti is that it is a Catholic, and not a Protestant, nation.) Whereas Hall refers to the Haitian Revolution while it is unfolding, Walker knows the results of the rebellion and the fear associated with it in the United States thirty years later.

Comparing the instruction contained in the articles of the *Appeal* to the preface and Walker's rendition of Psalm 68:31, the figure of Ethiopia takes on a militaristic sense. Walker retains the notion that Ethiopians are Christians or will become Christians once they are exposed to the Gospel. He even follows in the footsteps of Mather when explaining African slavery as divine punishment due to sin (21). Moreover, his story of Africa is a retelling of the typical romantic nationalist tale: the narrative of the fortunate fall, of an idyllic national past, a national fall due to sin, and a future national redemption through Christ. Despite Walker's Matherian understanding of chattel slavery, he counters Jefferson's disparaging remarks about the intellectual capacity of the Negro, and in so doing, makes a nineteenth-century argument for "Black Athena." Walker identifies Africa as the birthplace of knowledge that disseminated to Europe via Greece and Rome. Nevertheless, we must remember the orientation of Walker's *Appeal*. As the subtitle indicates, it is directed "to the Coloured Citizens Of The World, but in particular, and very expressly, to

those of The United States of America,” especially those who can read. He was working from the assumption—one that was probably not wrong in 1829—that literate colored people were also more than likely to be Christian. The evidence from the numerous documents written by antebellum Anglophone Negro writers is that they were Christian, and that the Bible or the Book of Common Prayer was their first textbook. Walker is counting on this population to read his *Appeal*, and to read it to illiterate colored people. It will be the means of producing a revolutionary colored population: “Men of colour, . . . for you particularly is my APPEAL designed. Our more ignorant brethren are not able to penetrate its value. I call upon you therefore to cast your eyes upon the wretchedness of your brethren, and to do your utmost to enlighten them—*go to work and enlighten your brethren!*—Let the Lord see you doing what you can to rescue them and yourselves from degradation” (28).

The figure of Ethiopia in Walker’s interpretation of Psalm 68:31 is in the midst of an enlightening, an intellectual and spiritual awakening which will trigger its redemption by Providence. The stretch of Ethiopia is the “move” to revolution that Walker instructs his readers to faithfully and vigilantly await. “Move” is a veiled metonymy for revolutionary action (praying, fasting, fighting). His understanding of Psalm 68:31 gives more definition to the predicate than to the subject. He sees the stretch of Ethiopia’s hands as a prophecy of the emancipation of colored Americans and the destruction of white Christian America.⁶ The Haitian Revolution is an instance of the present moment not merely living in the shadows of the past, but making the shadow substantial by living it, and thereby fulfilling it.

One might conclude from the above discussion that Walker was an early Pan-Africanist or a subscriber to missionary emigrationism, but that was not the case. The figure of Ethiopia in Walker’s interpretation of Psalm 68:31 neither returns to, nor Christianizes, Africa. Following the lead of Rev. Richard Allen, Walker rejects the notion that Africa is the national homeland of Negroes in America. In a bold move, and one that lacked any legal or constitutional standing, Walker claims to be a citizen of the United States. Colored Americans are Americans because they are historically and physically rooted in America. The colonization scheme, Walker argues, is another way that whites are trying to dispossess colored people of their labor. Furthermore, Walker states that slave labor and suffering actually give colored people more rights to the country (65). The

colonization plan is a gauntlet thrown at the colored people in America—one that Walker hopes will break their apathy and transform them into faithful and vigilant revolutionaries.

Returning to Walker's version of Psalm 68:31 in the preface and its relationship to the *Appeal*, we can see that they fit together: the latter is an extended interpretation of the former. The figure of Ethiopia is Ethiopia in chains at the precipice of redemption. Providence is the agency of Ethiopia's emancipation, but God will not bring about Ethiopia's promised redemption unless Ethiopia initiates its own liberation. Ethiopia's action is reading the *Appeal* (or hearing it read), "hearing" its message, rejecting America's racist narrative about Negro inhumanity, and rising out of the wretchedness of slavery and its spiritual and mental effects. This is Walker's understanding of the predicate of the subject of Psalm 68:31. The figure of Ethiopia is explicitly a figure of literacy, and the resistance to slavery is an outcome of reading, or at least hearing the words written by Walker's hand. Orality cannot do what Walker wants the written word to do. It cannot extend itself over time and space; it cannot reach and unite a multitude of people, "coloured [people] of every nation, language and tongue under heaven," against racial oppression, but the prosthesis of writing can do these things (Preface). Walker's *Appeal* is evidence that Negro writers knew the importance of writing and literacy for forming a collective identity and story.

Ethiopia's Cry; or the Figure of Ethiopia as a Literary Topic

This book has shown that black American writers—those born in Africa and brought to America (such as Wheatley), those born in America as slaves, but who were manumitted (such as Allen), and those born free (such as Walker)—engaged in interpretations of Psalm 68:31 that resulted in different understandings of the figure of Ethiopia. Each of these writers, and the other writers previously analyzed, saw people of color in the United States or the people from the sub-Saharan part of the continent as a people prophesied to be uplifted spiritually or materially. These writers mined Psalm 68:31 for the workings of Providence in relationship to Ethiopia. Despite the close attention they paid to the verse, the gender of Ethiopia did not draw exegetical attention.

In 1851, Frances E. W. Harper's poem, "Ethiopia" feminized the figure of Ethiopia in accordance with the feminine pronoun in the biblical verse.

This was a first for a few reasons. The appearance of the figure of Ethiopia in black American literature had thus far been limited to citations and interpretations within narratives, letters, addresses, and sermons. With Harper's "Ethiopia," Psalm 68:31 becomes the subject of a poem in ballad form. Furthermore, "Ethiopia," as a poem, is a riposte to Psalm 68:31 solely.⁷

"Ethiopia," a seven-stanza poem, shows evidence that Harper was familiar with the English literary ballad form. For the most part Harper's quatrains, the ballad stanza, follow the "abcb" of the ballad form with the odd verses in iambic tetrameter and the even verses in iambic trimeter. In addition, Harper adds a compositional order to tell a chronological story of the figure of Ethiopia in her poem. The first stanza introduces the dramatic personas of the poem, stanzas two through six constitute the body of the poem and the actions to be done by Ethiopia and God, and stanza seven is a variation on the first stanza that functions as a conclusion. The poem takes the reader from the current state of Ethiopia enslaved to a possible utopian state of Ethiopia liberated.

The figuration of Ethiopia as a woman is a disfigured synecdoche. She has hands, a neck, a dark brow, a smile, and a fruitful uterus; however, she does not suckle her sons (vv. 2, 5, 10, 13, 14, 18, 26). Ethiopia bleeds, cries, and is racked with sorrows (vv. 2, 3, 16, 26, 27). These are not emotional states per se. Rather, they are the physical condition inscribed on her body by slavery. The figuration of Ethiopia in the ballad rests on the interaction of her disparate body parts, and the inscription on them by first slavery and then freedom. Her hands are bleeding due to the work of slavery. Her metaphorical neck holds the yoke of slavery on it. She is not simply chattel; she is domesticated. Ethiopia's face is indeterminate because it is the face of the nation and not of an individual. She has a brow, eyes, and a mouth. Her brow signifies an indeterminate phenotype; it is merely dark. Nevertheless, the agency of Providence erases the sorrow written on the face of Ethiopia by slavery, and replaces her sorrow with a smile, the happiness that accompanies freedom.

Presented together with the synecdochic figure of Ethiopia are the actions associated with it. A dominant figure of American ethnic, post-colonial, and feminist literary studies is giving voice to the oppressed. A contemporary reader of Harper's poetry might expect that a nineteenth-century female Negro writer would be obsessed with publishing her voice or giving voice to her female personas in her work. This is not the case in

"Ethiopia." The figure of Ethiopia is not silent in Harper's poem; it is just that neither she nor her sons speak. The only sound attributed to Ethiopia is a cry (vv. 3, 27). The verb "to cry" signifies the flow of tears from the crier's eyes, but this sense of the verb is not its only meaning. To cry is also to make a loud wordless sound conveying grief, pain, or joy. The two meanings can occur simultaneously, but what stands out and resonates in Harper's poem is the sense of Ethiopia's cry as unarticulated sound. Her prayer is not in English; it is not in the language of the Bible or the Christian Book of Common Prayer. It is a loud sound devoid of content: it is pure form. In other words, Ethiopia's cry does not have a conceptual emotion that can articulate or convey its pain. Ethiopia's cry merely and irreducibly *is*. As a wordless pain, Ethiopia's cry cannot be appropriated, domesticated, or ignored; it demands a response from God.

Harper's development of the figure of Ethiopia as a woman has many different dimensions, but there is one initial problem: where is Ethiopia? Does Ethiopia refer to sub-Saharan peoples of the continent or to the slaves in the New World? Among the various populations of slaves in the New World, which Ethiopia is the subject of the poem? This problem is one of deixis, the linguistic location of something or someone in time and space. Without a deictically clear anchor for Ethiopia in Harper's poem, we do not know from where Ethiopia is stretching. One might point to the adverb "abroad" as an indication of Ethiopia's location in time and space. Even though "abroad" can signify something away from one's own country, what is the country abroad from Ethiopia? Lacking definite deictical signs in "Ethiopia," we are left to read the images associated with Ethiopia in the poem as possible clues to her location. The figure of Ethiopia in Harper's poem is one enslaved. This slavery is twofold, spiritual and physical, but the primary concern of the speaker is with the tyranny of physical slavery, which is described as a "tyrant's yoke," an image that combines the injustice of New World slavery and the status of the slave as chattel (v. 5). Ethiopia seems to refer to slavery in the United States.

Harper's figure of Ethiopia stretching abroad is not a movement toward the African continent or Ethiopia, but a movement to God. This in itself is not unique in the interpretations of Psalm 68:31 that we have seen thus far. The novelty of Harper's usage is that Ethiopia's stretch is a cry and a prayer for God's deliverance from slavery. The image of God in the poem is also important; He is sitting in judgment. The "throne of fire" is an image directly from Revelation 4:4 (v. 4). The "bleeding hands" (hands bleeding

due to their oppression), a dramatic addition to the biblical verse, together with the “cry of agony” (crying due to the pain of slavery) are directed to God who is abroad; He is not of this world. A peculiarity of Harper’s figure of Ethiopia beseeching God’s deliverance is that the figure, at the time of its request, is not necessarily Christian. For Wheatley and Allen, the figure of Ethiopia stretching forth her hands to God is one that indicates the conversion of Ethiopians to Christianity. In their writings, spiritual salvation is the prophecy of Psalm 68:31 for Ethiopians. In Harper’s poem, Ethiopia cannot be Christian due to the oppression of her slave master. Harper’s critique of slavery is twofold: it makes human beings into chattel and it enslaves the slave’s soul (v. 6). It is only after the yoke of physical slavery is broken that the figure of Ethiopia becomes Christian (vv. 7–10).

The most frequent word in Harper’s poem is “shall.” Eleven times the speaker implores the auxiliary verb to indicate future events in addition to a reciprocal sense of obligation between God and Ethiopia. The first two “shalls” constitute Ethiopia’s prayer to God for liberation (vv. 1, 3). In response, God frees the slaves (v. 7), and in return the liberated sons of Ethiopia praise God for their deliverance (vv. 10, 12). Employing idyllic images of life after freedom, much of it inspired by Isaiah, the speaker continues her future orientation and predicts happiness and security for Ethiopia due to Providence. By echoing the future orientation of Psalm 68:31, the speaker of “Ethiopia” implicitly makes the poem into a prophetic ballad reiterating the prophecy first given in the Old Testament. Harper shifts from an interpreter of Psalm 68:31 to a writer of prophecy.

Despite Harper’s rewriting of Psalm 68:31, the last stanza of the poem presents a problem. After the speaker has listed a number of changes that will occur in the future for Ethiopia and her children, she starts verse 25 with “then” and nearly repeats the opening stanza of the poem. Again we are faced with a problem of deixis. If the “cry of agony” is an appeal to God’s judgment and to a series of events taking place that secure the freedom of Ethiopia from chains, the use of “then” and the repetition of the first stanza does not follow. The speaker has Ethiopia stretching and crying to God twice, but the second time is unnecessary. The repetition of the actions of Ethiopia might be explainable if the seventh stanza is merely a refrain for the ballad, but the use of “then” still creates a problem with time.

Instead of “then” referring to a time after the creation of an idyllic place following slavery, maybe “then” is relating to stanzas two through six as

if they are prefixed by “if.” The poem suggests that Ethiopian redemption is predicated on her stretch and cry: if Ethiopia does not take the initiative, her redemption will not take place. Returning to the first stanza, its opening “yes!” is a confirmation of the prophetic value of Psalm 68:31 in the sense of signifying “it is so.” The psalm has prophesied an action in the future, the present of which is the time of Harper’s poem, and “yes!” is an affirmation of the obligation that was prophesied for Ethiopia. Stanzas two through six develop the verse past the extension of Ethiopia’s hand to God, to imagining life for the freedmen, Ethiopia’s children, after slavery in an idyllic setting. In this reading of the poem, the “then” opening verse 25 suggests a command for Ethiopia to do what it was prophesied to do so that Providence can take over.

In addition to Harper’s use of feminine pronouns, the image of Ethiopia as a mother is another figuration of Ethiopia’s femininity. There are two references to Ethiopia’s children in the poem. The first, reminiscent of biblical language, refers to Ethiopia’s “sons,” who will acknowledge God’s redemption after slavery (v. 10). The second is a more general reference to Ethiopia’s “children” frolicking in an idyllic garden after their redemption from slavery (vv. 17–24). In both instances, Ethiopia is seen as a fruitful mother giving birth to future generations who will reap the benefits of God. Harper’s Ethiopian mother gives birth, but she neither shelters nor sustains her children; she is breastless. In the poem, Ethiopia gives birth and God takes care of her children in the idyllic world He creates for them. Furthermore, she is asensual. Men do not court or desire her. She reproduces asexually. Outside of giving birth, there is nothing traditionally feminine about Harper’s figure of Ethiopia.

Harper’s rewriting of Psalm 68:31 not only presents America’s slaves as people foreshadowed in the biblical verse, but also reads the verse closely and disfigures it. Harper’s figure of Ethiopia is faithful to the diction of the verse. The biblical text makes Ethiopia feminine, and so does Harper, but she adds flesh, blood, and sound to Ethiopia and sets her in an idyllic time and place. Harper’s rewriting of the verse was the beginning of the invention of the myth of Ethiopia that would reach its height in the prose romances of Pauline Hopkins and Sutton Griggs. Also, by reshaping the figure of Ethiopia from a vague reference in a biblical verse to a figure in a work of modern lyrical poetry, Harper brought the figure of Ethiopia into the realm of literature proper.

Instead of being a proof-text in an argument against slavery, or against

the denigration of Africans, or an interpretative gloss on a biblical verse, Harper makes the figure of Ethiopia a topic of literature, and in doing so, transforms it into something other than a divinely prefigured entity. Introducing the figure of Ethiopia into the sphere of literature indicates that, despite the tenuous nature of free people of color in antebellum America, a class of people were emerging who had the leisure time to read and write lyrical poetry. More importantly, Harper's poem indicates that she understood the signifying power of literature and its political possibilities. Published in the wake of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), a novel that sold over three hundred thousand copies in the first year of its publication, Harper's "Ethiopia" liberates the figure of Ethiopia from the domain of the black preachers and political activists (who for decades had claimed the verse as their own and made it the subject of numerous sermons, addresses, and essays) and brings it into the wider discursive realm of literature. Even though it had taken nearly four score years for Ethiopia to be refigured as a secular topic, Harper's poem initiated a new movement in black letters, the disfiguring and displacing of a sacred prophecy with secular literature.

Moral and Intellectual Development of Ethiopia and Emancipation

Douglass continued Harper's secular and literary interpretation of Psalm 68:31 in his second slave narrative, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855). By 1855, Douglass was one of the most recognized antislavery figures in America, and probably the most famous ex-slave living in America. His first slave narrative, a powerful literary text, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (1845), reads like a well-written popular novel with villains aptly named "Mr. Gore" and "Mr. Severe."⁸ This is the gripping tale of Douglass's life as a slave in Maryland, his reduction to a brute at the hands of Covey, his resurrection as a man in his epic struggle with Covey, and his escape North and subsequent freedom, marriage, and self-naming. These are the elements of good storytelling, and a rewriting of the uniquely American literary genre, the captivity narrative. Despite the power of Douglass's first autobiography, no work of nineteenth-century black literature matches the style, erudition, and irony of *My Bondage and My Freedom*. It is in this text that Douglass employs the figure of Ethiopia. At the penultimate page of this narrative appears, "and that 'Ethiopia shall yet reach forth her hand unto God,'" and

Douglass engages in his own reading of the verse to counter the emigrationist interpretation (405).

As readers of Douglass's writings know, he was a modern man committed to the principles of human brotherhood and equality before the rule of law as laid out in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights of the United States. A modern man, Douglass believed in the grand narratives of progress and culture, what his German contemporaries called *Bildung* or the process of moral and intellectual formation. For Douglass, the elevation of free people of color was not a regeneration, a rebirth, a restoration of a prior lost state of Ethiopian being, or a return of the past in the present. With his American sense of newness, Douglass saw the formation of free people of color, and the future emancipation of the slaves, as a new event in human history, the emergence of the modern Negro in the present for the future. Looking at contemporary 1850s "condition and circumstances of the free colored people" Douglass saw a need for the improvement and elevation of their character (405). He argued that the future emancipation of the southern slaves rested with the character development of the northern free people of color via the acquisition of *Bildung*. It was in this context that Douglass quoted Psalm 68:31b. Instead of missionary emigrationism as promoted by Crummell, Garnet, and Delany, Douglass proposed a local missionary elevation of free people of color.⁹

Douglass places his work inside the purview of Providence, and discusses his publishing career in religious terms, as a mission. It is as an agent of Providence that Douglass quotes Psalm 68:31b and gives it his reading. Ethiopia's reach to God is the elevation of free people of color and the eventual emancipation of the slaves. Douglass and others like him are themselves signs that Ethiopia is acquiring *Bildung* and emancipation. He and his contemporaries are in the midst of the fulfillment of the verse, and the prophecy has not yet been fulfilled. The continuation of these dual but interrelated processes, despite many obstacles, will bring about "the universal and unconditional emancipation of my entire race."¹⁰

The image that Douglass employs to convey the difficulty of the dual processes of elevation and emancipation is that of light after the storm:

I have felt it to be a part of my mission—under a gracious Providence—to impress my sable brothers in this country with the conviction that, notwithstanding the ten thousand discouragements and the powerful hinderances [*sic*], which beset their existence in

this country—notwithstanding the blood-written history of Africa, and her children, from whom we have descended, or the clouds and darkness, (whose stillness and gloom are made only more awful by wrathful thunder and lightning,) now overshadowing them—progress is yet possible, and bright skies shall yet shine upon their pathway. (405)

Douglass's imagery parallels his reading of Psalm 68:31b. Despite slavery and the legal and social apparatuses that inhibit the Negro's growth and freedom as a human being, the possibility of progress exists. This possibility is the promise of an end to slavery, fugitive slave legislation, and the indeterminate legal status of free people of color. No storm is continuous or stable. There are always breaks in the storm, moments of possibility to be seized by the vigilant. When bright skies break up the clouds and darkness of the storm, the Negro must be ready to seize the moment. Douglass was a living testimony to this, and his narratives, written with his own hand, were signs of the possibilities afforded in the storm in preparation for the new day. He was the text of both slavery and the human capability to transcend the institution while simultaneously living in the midst of it.

In addition, Douglass repeats the phrase "shall yet" in both his rendition of Psalm 68:31 and his figurative story of darkness and light. "Yet," like "soon," is an indicator of when something is to take place. It signifies "at this time" or "now." Both instances—Ethiopia's elevation and the shining of the sun—are deictically anchored in Douglass's moment and oriented toward the future. As in earlier interpretations of Psalm 68:31, Douglass reads the verse as taking place in his "now." His present moment and the eventfulness of obtaining literacy are prefigured in the verse. These do not fulfill the prophecy; they are merely evidence of it being in the process of fulfillment. Douglass's moment is filled with *Jetztzeit* and he recognizes it. Contracted time and its possibilities have engaged Douglass against the forces of oppression that enslave and brutalize the Negro. The events of the fifteen years following the publication of *My Bondage and My Freedom*—the Civil War and the ratification of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments—bear witness to Douglass's reading of his times. He can see the end of the institution of slavery and the beginning of the Negro's inclusion in the American social and political fabric as a citizen. As a deictically anchored reader, Douglass's immersion in the debate over the Negro is the figure of Ethiopia's elevation, the light in the midst

of the darkness. *My Bondage and My Freedom* is the dialogic riposte to the narrative of the Negro's essential deficiencies and marginal humanity, and a sign of progress toward Ethiopia's eventual elevation and emancipation.

From Douglass's understanding of the verse, it is clear that history unfolds under the guidance of Providence, but in Ethiopia's relationship to God she must take the initiative. The movement is not God to man, but man to God. Ethiopia's reach is not merely a faith statement, but an action: Ethiopia must acquire *Bildung*. Douglass's reading of Psalm 68:31b is a project for the Bildungsroman of the race. His slave narratives, as literature, display indebtedness to the nineteenth-century Bildungsroman. Douglass's life bespoke a maturity achieved through literary formation. He projected similar developments for free people of color, the effect of which would be the end of slavery.

In many respects, Douglass's interpretative move recalled the early colonial figural interpretations of the Old Testament. The new American context required a new interpretation of the Bible. The New World became Canaan, the native peoples became Canaanites, the settlers were the Chosen People (the New Israel), and the land became a wilderness that needed to be domesticated by European culture to release its milk and honey. Having been twenty years a slave and nearly twenty years free in 1855, Douglass saw that Negroes in America, "like the Pilgrim fathers," also required a reading of the Bible commensurate with their "condition and circumstances."¹¹ His interpretation of Psalm 68:31b—that the self-elevation of free people of color via *Bildung* would be "one of the best means of emancipating the slaves of the south"—was Douglass's attempt to make a reading adequate to its moment.

Weaving America: Including the Negro within America's Social and Political Fabric

In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Ethiopia has a wide signifying range reminiscent of other understandings of the verse. Douglass interprets the verse to be nationally specific; it is a signifier of a stateless, but geographically specific, people. In Douglass's text, Ethiopia does not include Africa and its struggles with imperialism. His employment of the figure of Ethiopia is completely national. The figure of Ethiopia for Douglass is not legally, but historically and figurally, American. This is a first in the interpretation of Psalm 68:31. Douglass transforms religious and racial identities into

a national identity. It is his way of redefining the Negro American. In a speech given three years before the publication of *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass links his reading of Psalm 68:31 to the inclusion of the Negro within the constitutional fabric of the United States.

At the end of his famous speech in Rochester, New York on July 5, 1852, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?," Douglass quotes Psalm 68:31: "Africa must rise and put on her yet unwoven garment. 'Ethiopia shall stretch out her hand unto God'" (qtd. in Blassingame 387). Instead of quoting the first clause of the biblical verse, "Princes shall come forth out of Egypt," Douglass gives an alternative that seems to be a gloss of the second half of the verse that he quotes verbatim. Both are clauses of roughly the same syllabic length. In Douglass's gloss, he changes the future tense of the verb to the imperative. Instead of a prophecy, Africa is obliged and commanded to do something; its action is almost inevitable. The stretch of Ethiopia's hand is not a movement to become Christian (which Douglass did not oppose) but a movement to become an American citizen.

Reading Douglass's wording closely, he states that it is inevitable that citizenship will be extended to Ethiopia. Africa rising suggests a movement from submission or prostration to upright freedom. The use of the word "rise" is interesting in itself for it signifies many actions that would not only change the Africans, but would alter the relationship of power between whites and people of color. Rise has a sense of "ascent," which suggests a vertical movement from a lower position to a higher one. The act of rising is also associated with wakefulness. In addition to the change from unconsciousness (sleep) to consciousness (awake), the change from lying to standing suggests a physical as well as a mental change. When combined with another connotation of "rise," that of rebellion and insurrection, ascent and wakefulness make "rise" a very dense sign that is significant for reading Douglass's narratives. Everyone familiar with *My Bondage and My Freedom* knows that Douglass's elevation takes many forms. He ascends from slavery to freedom, reading awakens his consciousness about himself and the world, and he confronts and overcomes Covey the "nigger-breaker."

The garment of Africa, the Negro in America, is unwoven because the Negro is both enslaved and a noncitizen in the land of his birth. The metaphor of the garment that represents the social fabric goes back to the ancient Greeks. The weaving together or interlacing of the phallic warp, the vertical stiff thread called the *stēmōn* and *mitos* held in place by

stones, *laiai*, with the horizontal feminine woof called *krokē* and *rhodanē* are associated not only with the sexual intercourse between a man and a woman, but with the active and passive components of society. Materially, the interlacing of the warp and the woof represents the union of courage and moderation (those necessary for action, *andreioi*, and those necessary for reflection, *sōphrosunē*), thereby producing *stasis* (civil strife). As Jesper Svenbro explains in the *Craft of Zeus* (1996), the metaphor of weaving in ancient Greece signified the union of “opposing forces of the city before they destroy everything. It [weaving] transforms ‘conflict’ into ‘marriage,’ contradiction into cohesion. Rituals [such as the weaving of Hera’s *peplos* (robe) by the sixteen women every four years in Elis] can represent this social peace as well as the comic poet [Aristophanes] or the philosopher [Plato], using the same elementary myth of dissimilar and opposing threads” (Scheid and Svenbro 32). The Negro was not woven into the American fabric. On the one hand, the Negro as an “unwoven garment” lived life in America outside the social, and more importantly, the political bonds of America. The Negro was neither blanketed by nor written into the protection of the Constitution or the Bill of Rights. Both as a free person of color and as a slave, the Negro was a stateless person. On the other hand, due to the Negro’s stateless status, nearly four million people and the very survival of the American social fabric was at stake. With the Negro outside the fabric of American society, the Negro’s energy could not be submitted to and domesticated by the fabric. The possibility of civil unrest existed between the state and the stateless. Nearly seventy-five years earlier, Thomas Jefferson recognized this problem in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, writing, “Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever” (289). As the other, the Negro needed to be woven into the American fabric to stabilize both the nation and his social and political status.

Within the context of Douglass’s quotation, “Africa” signifies Negroes in America and not Negroes in Africa. Douglass opens his famous speech with a significant piece of irony that he repeats throughout the speech: “Fellow-Citizens” (qtd. in Blassingame 359, 361, 363, 364, 365, 367, 368, 374, 383, 385). This is ironic because, as a Negro, Douglass was not a citizen of the United States. Like all people of color in America, free and enslaved, his legal status was stateless. People of color were not woven into the fabric of civil society. They were not even marginal; they were not part of the woof or the warp that constituted American civil society. During his

Fourth of July speech, Douglass hammers this point home with his incessant references to the holiday as “your” day of independence and not that of the slave or free person of color. The garment of citizenship has not been woven for Africa’s children in America. Attaining citizenship is being woven into the society fabric of America. Douglass’s speech is a petition for Negro citizenship, but it situates Douglass as a historical subject. As a weaver of phrases, Douglass weaves himself into the national literary fabric of America. In 1852, this move would have signaled the death knell of slavery in America. Of course, Douglass, and all people of color who remained in America and did not emigrate to Liberia, would have to wait sixteen years before America made them citizens through the Fourteenth Amendment and another two years after 1868 until they were completely woven into the civil fabric of America with the right to vote via the Fifteenth Amendment.

In the previous chapters, the elevation of the figure of Ethiopia was a common interpretation of Psalm 68:31, whether it signified the conversion and education of people of color in colonial America and the United States or in Africa. Readers of Psalm 68:31 agreed on the action of the predicate; the stretching of Ethiopia’s hands to God was the Christianizing and civilizing of Ethiopia. They also seemed to agree on what was wrong with Ethiopia: spiritual and intellectual darkness. What they disagreed about was the nature of the subject. Who was Ethiopia? What constituted Ethiopia? John Marrant identified Native Americans as Ethiopia; Maria Stewart saw Negroes in America as Ethiopia; Kate Drumgoold acknowledged Stewart’s reading, but added that Negroes in America were God’s chosen people. Phillis Wheatley, Paul Cuffe, and Lott Cary read Ethiopia as referring to sub-Saharan West Africans. Martin Delany understood Ethiopia as racial blackness and mythic-idyllic Egypt and Ethiopia, and Alexander Crummell, a racist like Delany, interpreted Ethiopia as a continental reference “from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian—from the Mediterranean to the Cape.” These readings fractured God’s providence and made His divine orientation flit from one people to another and from one geographical region to another. The sheer diversity of interpretations suggests that while each hermeneut was confident as to the orientation of Providence, God as a figure of their collective interpretations was caught in an indeterminate situation: who should He help, and where were they?

While God was put in an indeterminate situation concerning Ethiopia, some black hermeneuts in the United States were not concerned with

this problem. Interpretations of Psalm 68:31 extended beyond readings of what the Negro lacked and began to draw attention to the inherent contradiction of American democracy: the existence of slavery and disenfranchised free people of color in the midst of a country founded on the principles of “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.” Prior to black hermeneuts citing Psalm 68:31 as a text supporting the humanity of the Negro, thousands of free people of color fought for the liberation of the colonies from the British during the Revolutionary War. Wheatley, using the modern language of the era, dedicated a poem to George Washington praising him as the guardian of American freedom.¹² Legendary freedom fighters such as Crispus Attucks and Peter Salem distinguished themselves in the Boston Massacre and the Battle of Bunker Hill, respectively. These people, like their white counterparts, were filled with the spirit of the times—freedom, democracy, and the rights of man.

In the years leading to the Civil War, readers such as Hall, Harper, and Douglass refigured the figure of Ethiopia into an emancipated human being. Spiritual redemption or conversion could not, and did not, stifle the quest for physical emancipation. To this end, Psalm 68:31 was employed, and through the figural interpretation of this verse, Negro readers claimed their “just and inalienable rights” as full human beings (Douglass, *My Bondage* 269). Even if this claim was legally denied, Negro exegetes and writers emerged as historical subjects through linking phrases they read and responding to them.

The interpretation of Psalm 68:31 as a prophecy of Negro emancipation was a story of hope, a narrative adequate to its moment. Given the discourses of democracy, emancipation, the modern individual, and the legal and political wrangling to dismantle slavery after 1787, the narrative of Negro emancipation was not only timely, but it also made sense. The possibility of seeing the end of slavery, while simultaneously being in the midst of it, was the work of imagination. The poetry of Harper and the grand and powerful rhetoric of Douglass were literary instances of anchored imagination that could see beyond the yoke of slavery and the exclusion of free people of color from the rights and protection extended to white American males. In chapter 7 the figural interpretation of Psalm 68:31 will be refigured in a new literary and imaginative form, the novel. The possibility of a Negro novel was nonexistent before the Revolutionary War, but by 1860 it was a reality.

6



Reading for Independence

The Figure of Ethiopia and the New Africa

The passing of the Fugitive Slave Act, one-fifth of the 1850 Compromise, was seen as a serious setback for many abolitionists in America. Once again, American law had defined the Negro, in this cause the fugitive slave, as someone outside the protections and rights of the Constitution and modern law. The slave was merely chattel, and as such was the property of his master. In the first meeting of the National Negro Convention after 1850, Frederick Douglass wrote an address to the people of the United States asking them to live up to their foundational principles and include Negroes within them. He added, “the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, that legislative monster of modern times, by atrocious provisions the writ of ‘*habeas corpus*,’ the ‘right of trial by jury,’ have been virtually abolished, shall be repealed” (Bell 10).

While Douglass and others agitated for the reweaving of the American political, social, and legal fabrics in the midst of compromises to save the Union and keep the status quo vis-à-vis slavery, Martin Delany turned his back on America and began to entertain emigrationist, and eventually nationalist, ideas. Before 1850, Delany was an opponent of emigrationist schemes; he was especially opposed to the American Colonization Society. In Delany’s *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852), he criticized the ACS as “one of the most arrant enemies of the colored man, ever seeking to discomfit him, and envying him of everything that he may enjoy.” Delany characterized it as “anti-Christian in its character, and misanthropic in its pretended sympathies” (31–32). Nevertheless, after the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act,

Delany became convinced that colored people in America constituted “a nation within a nation” and he articulated plans to emigrate to other locations in the Western Hemisphere.¹ Delany rejected emigration to Africa in his 1852 essay, “Upon the American continent we are determined to stay,” but in its appendix, he proposed an expedition to eastern Africa that implicitly suggested that it might serve as a national homeland for Negroes in America and Canada (*Condition* 209–15). In 1854, Delany attended the National Emigration Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, for which Negro emigration was the catalyst. According to the official call that went out about the convention a year prior to its taking place, the purpose of the Emigration Convention was to obtain equality and freedom outside of the United States, but not in the Eastern Hemisphere (Delany and Campbell 27–28). At this convention, in terms much harsher than the National Colored Convention, the Fugitive Slave Act was condemned (Ullman 155–56). In 1856, Delany and his family left Pittsburgh and emigrated to Chatham, Canada West (contemporary Ontario).²

During Delany’s time in Canada, two more events directed his orientation toward Africa, and a nascent African nationalism: the Dred Scott opinion and the decision of the National Board of Commissioners of the Emigration Convention to make a scientific expedition to the Niger River Valley in the following year. The 1857 Supreme Court decision of *Scott v. Sanford* clarified the legal status of the Negro, free or slave, in the United States. As Chief Justice Taney wrote in his majority decision, Negroes are people who have been regarded as “. . . beings of an inferior order and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect” (Fehrenbacher 347).³ Although Delany was living in Canada during this time, Chief Justice Taney’s opinion merely confirmed Delany’s assessment that the United States was not the place for the Negro. Weeks after the Third Emigration Convention met in August 1858, Delany was named the “Chief-Commissioner” of the expedition to the Niger River Valley in West Africa. Delany went to Africa in order to establish a modern Negro nation that would be an African equivalent to England.

Even though Delany wanted a self-sufficient and self-liberating black nation, the part of Africa that attracted his attention was on the periphery of the interests of the British Empire. The British had numerous colonial interests on the coast of West Africa, but by the middle part of the

nineteenth century they had become more trouble than they were worth, and serious consideration was given to leaving the region and allowing traditional African institutions to return to power. As Basil Davidson wrote in *The Black Man's Burden*, a Select Committee of the House of Commons, liberal in its political orientation, recommended in 1865, "the ultimate future in West Africa must always lie in a restored African sovereignty" (32). Delany's expedition to the Niger River Valley in 1859 was not only a response to the dreadful 1850s in America, but it was nearly synchronized with British political concerns about Africa. During Delany's African expedition, he purchased three hundred and thirty square feet of Yoruba land for himself from King Docemo of Lagos. This deal was overseen by the British Consulate and registered as a legal sale (Delany and Campbell 68). Delany and his co-commissioner, Robert Campbell, also signed a treaty with the king and a number of chiefs in Abbeokuta that provided for selective Negro emigration from America to unoccupied Egba-Yoruba territory. In this treaty, Delany and Campbell agree to send civilized colored people with technical knowledge who would submit to the local laws of the region (Delany and Campbell 77–78). In Abbeokuta, Delany saw the possibility of establishing a modern Negro nation with a thriving local and international economy that featured cotton as its staple (Delany and Campbell 116ff). After Delany's expedition, he made business alliances in England and Scotland for the purpose of introducing West African staples, along with other African raised products, into the global marketplace. His hope was that African cotton, grown and manufactured by free black labor, would outsell American cotton, grown by enslaved black labor, and break the back of slavery in the United States.

Despite the fact that British policy toward Africa changed in the 1870s with the establishment of the Gold Coast colony in 1874 and its participation in the scramble for Africa over the remaining decades of the century, Delany's 1859–1860 expedition, mission, and legal contracts with local authorities overseen by the British were exceedingly timely. In Delany's report, he articulated what would be the sentiment of African nationalists for generations to follow: African regeneration was predicated on Africa having a "national character," a first principle of all modern people (Delany and Campbell 111). "Civilized"—in other words, Christianized and modernized—Africans needed to establish the national character of Africa to be respected in the modern world (Delany and Campbell 110–11, 120). His message that Africa needed a nation-state, made in the image of

modern European nation-states, prefigured the work of second-generation recaptive James Africanus Horton (Davidson 36–51).

With Delany's expedition to the Niger River Valley, Psalm 68:31 underwent another refiguration. The figure of Ethiopia became an independent and modern Africa. For Delany, Psalm 68:31 was the foundation for all things having to do with the organization and modernization of the Negro race. In Delany's *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party* (1860), he formally linked African independence to an engagement of Psalm 68:31, and in so doing, initiated another figuration of Ethiopia. At the end of his report on Africa, Delany writes, "Our policy must be—and I hazard nothing in promulging [*sic*] it; nay, without this design and feeling, there would be a great deficiency of self-respect, pride of race, and love of country, and we might never expect to challenge the respect of nations—*Africa for the African race, and black men to rule them*. By black men I mean, men of African descent who claim an identity with the race" (qtd. in Delany and Campbell 121).

Delany's racial nationalism was a product of his comprehension of Psalm 68:31. A few paragraphs after announcing his racial policy, Delany cites the verse and gives an extended interpretation of it:

"Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.—Ps. Lxviii. 31." With the fullest reliance upon this blessed promise, I humbly go forward in—I may repeat—the grandest prospect for the regeneration of a people that ever was presented in the history of the world. The disease has long since been known; we have found and shall apply the remedy. I am indebted to Rev. H. H. [Henry Highland] Garnet, an eminent black clergyman and scholar, for the construction, that "soon," in the Scriptural passage quoted, "has reference to the period ensuing *from the time of beginning*." With faith in the promise, and hope from this version, surely there is nothing to doubt or fear. (Qtd. in Delany and Campbell 122)

Delany's interpretation of Psalm 68:31 in this context is interesting because, although he is among the Yoruba people in the Niger River Valley, he erases their ethnic specificity with the category of race. The conversion of the ethnic Africans to Christianity, their acquisition of literacy, and their nationalization creates "the African Christian" and the vehicle for seeing the African Christian as a race. This is evident in Delany's medical metaphor of regeneration. Negro Africa suffers from the disease of

paganism, the absence of literate culture, and the want of a national capacity; the remedy is its conversion—religiously, culturally, and most importantly nationally—to modernity. Africa’s conversion effaces its ethnic difference and brings a new people, the Negro race, into existence. This, in effect, becomes a policy of denigrating all traditional African peoples and political organizations and replacing them with non-African ones. As Davidson so eloquently characterizes the regeneration of Africa in the writings of Delany, Crummell, and James Africanus Horton, Africa must be changed by outside Negro forces, which are culturally and religiously western European, but racially black. This notion that the salvation of Africa “come[s] from outside” of it also means the self-alienation of Africa, because it is predicated on the belief that Africa is incapable of saving itself (Davidson 38). The beginning of Africa’s regeneration is its “fortunate fall” into modernity through slavery. The Christianization of the Negro activated the temporal element of Psalm 68:31 that for over two thousand years had been waiting to emerge into history. Delany places his mission to Africa and his policy of “*Africa for the African race, and black men to rule them*” as part of the fulfillment of Psalm 68:31 and its promises.

The figure of Ethiopia in Delany’s report represents unequivocal racial nationalism. This was Delany’s response to Psalm 68:31 on the eve of the Civil War. Delany redefined himself and his relationship to Africa through his new interpretation of the Psalm and its meaning in 1860. The conversion of Ethiopia, a metonymy for the sub-Saharan peoples of the continent, paves the way for racial self-consciousness. Delany’s Ethiopia is a modern entity. In a world separated into races and nation-states, Delany’s figure of Ethiopia claims its racial and national place within the modern organization of collectivities. The premodern organization that characterized much of sub-Saharan Africa’s social organization—the ethnic nation, popularly known as the tribe—no longer adheres for Delany. Delany interprets Psalm 68:31 within this ideological parameter. Ethiopia becomes a sign that signifies a modern social and political entity that Delany calls the “African race.” One might be tempted to read “Ethiopia” as a synecdoche of Africa in Delany’s report, but the East African land called “Ethiopia” is not the place that represents all of sub-Saharan or Negro Africa. The figure of Ethiopia is a pure signifier without referential constraints, and as such, it is free to signify anything Delany wants it to signify. In his report on the Niger Valley, “Ethiopia” is a figure of the African race, the African nation, and African autonomy. More importantly, Delany’s figure

of Ethiopia prefigures twentieth-century Pan-Africanism, African decolonization, and the Garvey movement.⁴

Du Bois's Secular Ethiopia, a Figure of History

Delany and Crummell were two of the leading hermeneuts of Psalm 68:31 during the nineteenth century. Their ability to interpret the verse in creative ways was instrumental in the development of nascent concepts of "a Negro consciousness" and "Negro history and destiny." They were two of the leading Negro intellectuals of their time. What they were to the nineteenth century, W.E.B. Du Bois was to the twentieth century and beyond. In the nineteenth century, the Negro was the object of scientific study. The Negro stood at the precipice of human and nonhuman. Writers such as Delany and Crummell, men who bragged of being pure Africans, undiluted by European blood, demonstrated that black people were human beings. The problem with the Negro was not nature, but nurture. Delany and Crummell argued for the Negro's humanity, but Du Bois proved it scientifically. In the twentieth century, Du Bois developed a science of the Negro. This work, spanning numerous academic fields and literary genres, influenced the conceptualization of the Negro in America and Africa, both in popular culture and academia. Besides reconfiguring the Negro as an object of knowledge within the academy, Du Bois was actively engaged in reshaping the world through the NAACP and the Pan-African movement so that people of color could live complete and whole lives without the yoke of racial and economic oppression. That was one of the arenas where Du Bois contributed to the reconfiguration of the figure of Ethiopia.

The earliest usage of Psalm 68:31 in Du Bois's numerous writings appears in his 1890 Harvard University commencement address, "Jefferson Davis as a Representative of Civilization." In this short piece, Du Bois argues that Jefferson Davis is a representative of a powerful but perverse type of civilization, "the idea of the Strong Man—Individualism coupled with the rule of might," that needs to be balanced by the civilization of the "Submissive Man," represented by the Negro, for the benefit of all people around the world (*Reader* 17). At the end of the address, Du Bois writes, "No matter how great and striking the Teutonic type of impetuous manhood may be, it must receive the cool purposeful 'Ich Dien' (I serve) of the African for its round and full development. In the rise of the Negro

people and development of this idea, you whose nation was founded on the loftiest ideals, and who many times forgot those ideals with a strange forgetfulness, have more than a sentimental interest, more than a sentimental duty. You owe a debt to humanity for this Ethiopia of the Outstretched Arm, who has made her beauty, patience, and her grandeur, law" (*Reader* 19).

In contrast to the religious interpretation of Psalm 68:31b that dominates the nineteenth century, the figure of Ethiopia here is completely secular. Du Bois displaces the figure of Ethiopia submitting itself to God via conversion with one who is submitting to earthly material powers. Previously, the institutional understanding of Ethiopia placed it within the realm of prophecy and Providence. Ethiopia's role in the divine drama of world history overshadowed its material history. Du Bois's rewriting of the figure of Ethiopia reinvigorates it and provides a new "why" for understanding the modern relationship between Africa and Europe. Race displaces religion as a category for understanding this relationship and the unequal and oppressive nature of it. Covered in the figuration of Ethiopia, Africa is a modern servant, a slave, as Du Bois's employment of the German phrase, "Ich Dien," suggests. The "arm" of Ethiopia is not outstretched in praise or in worship of the Teutonic race; it is not engaged in a modern form of idolatry, the worship of the conquering race. Its arm is outstretched in service to the Teutonic race. Modern slavery built the modern world and its racial hierarchy and the dominance of Teutonic civilization. The enforced labor of Africa accounts for the wealth and power of the West.

This address was an early indication of how central the concept of race, as a category for understanding the organization of power, would be in Du Bois's analysis. One of Du Bois's most famous assertions is that "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line,—the relation of the darker to the light races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (*Souls*, 45). In 1890, he already had a historical, sociological, and philosophical analysis of the American race problem and the problem of colonialism and imperialism in Africa and other regions inhabited by dark-skinned people. Within his scientific study of the color line, religion is a topic to be studied, but the religious-racial mysticism of the Christianized Negro is not perpetuated. Du Bois's figure of Ethiopia does not emerge in modernity due to a fortunate fall; it emerges out of the force of Western ideas: "individualism" made perverse by "the

rule of might” without the tempering spirit of justice.⁵ In Du Bois’s use of Psalm 68:31b, Ethiopia is a figure of history; it is not a figure living in the shadow of a destiny designed for it by God and prophesied in the Old Testament.

This figuration of Ethiopia, as an oppressed servant of the West whose service accounts for the West’s ascendancy, is repeated in Du Bois’s *The Negro* (1915) and his first autobiography, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (1920). *The Negro* is a short book that tells a history of Africa, its ancient and modern inhabitation, and its diaspora. It is a scholarly narrative that not only takes Africa as its subject, but contributes to the growing literature that undergirds the Afro-Asiatic myth that is intimately related to Pan-Africanism in the Western Hemisphere. In the chapter on modern slavery, “The Trade in Men,” Du Bois cites Psalm 68:31b: “Such is the story of the Rape of Ethiopia—a sordid, pitiful, cruel tale. Raphael painted, Luther preached, Corneille wrote, and Milton sung; and through it all, for four hundred years, the dark captives wound to the sea amid the bleaching bones of the dead; for four hundred years the sharks followed the scurrying ships; for four hundred years America was strewn with the living and dying millions of a transplanted race; for four hundred years Ethiopia stretched forth her hands unto God” (159). The anaphoric use of “for four hundred years” emphasizes the length of Ethiopia’s suffering. Furthermore, Du Bois alters the verse by changing its tense. Ethiopia has already stretched to God. This stretch has been four hundred years of service to Western Europe and the Western Hemisphere. In her service under slavery, Ethiopia has suffered. Du Bois does not develop the image of Ethiopia as a messianic “suffering servant,” but rather tries to draw attention to the violation of Ethiopia. The importance of the feminine pronoun of Psalm 68:31b is crucial to Du Bois’s figuration of Ethiopia as a violated woman—a victim. Du Bois displaces the image of the servant with the image of rape; Ethiopia is forcibly penetrated and made to submit to the will of external powers. In an age of autonomy and emancipation, Ethiopia is heteronomous and oppressed. Psalm 68:31 prefigures the Negro’s modern history, not a glorious past or future.

Du Bois’s next move is to turn the institutional interpretation of Psalm 68:31 against itself. Ethiopia stretches her hands to God for help. She turns to God not for spiritual salvation, but in a theodictic plea for justice and freedom. The figure of Ethiopia is again secular and displays a general human response to oppression. God is no longer a divine being or the

designer of the past and the future; “God” signifies “freedom” in Du Bois’s secular elaboration of Psalm 68:31b. For four hundred years, Ethiopia has stretched for freedom from oppression, while simultaneously doing the work that has built modern Western civilization. In the chapter, “The Trade in Men,” Ethiopia is acted upon—as if she is being raped—and never acts. Although Du Bois is familiar with many stories of Africa during the slave trade in which Africa resists its figurative rape, within the logic of “The Trade in Men,” Ethiopia violated by the perverse “Strong Man” is a more effective story.

In *Darkwater*, Du Bois continues to refigure Ethiopia and gives another secular interpretation of Psalm 68:31b: “The hands which Ethiopia shall soon stretch out unto God are not mere hands of helplessness and supplication, but rather they are hands of pain and promise; hard, gnarled, and muscled for the world’s real work; they are hands of fellowship for the half-submerged masses of a distempered world; they are hands of helpfulness for an agonized God!” (74). In a form reminiscent of the anaphors used at the end of “The Trade in Men,” Du Bois repeats the clauses “they are hands of” to emphasize the active role Africa is playing in the world and will play in its future. Ethiopia’s previous stretching of her hands in submission and prayers for freedom is over; the time has passed in which Africa exists in a submissive relationship with Europe. Ethiopia’s hands—working out of her experience of subjugation, labor, and political weakness—will reshape the political landscape of the twentieth century. Ethiopia will lead the dark-skinned peoples of the world from behind the color line. This transformation of the figure of Ethiopia, from subjugation to the liberation of those who have been oppressed for four hundred years by Western European nations, is new. It cannot be emphasized enough that the new figure of Ethiopia is neither an agent of the Protestant God nor the fulfillment of biblical prophecy; the figure of Ethiopia is a product of history. Four hundred years of submission and labor have brought out of Africa people who, inspired by the modern grand narratives of culture and emancipation, are ready to remove the yoke of domination and take their rightful place in the human family. History—not God—has shaped the hands of Ethiopia and its unknown destiny.

For the first time in its interpretative history in black American letters, the signifying range of Psalm 68:31 is extended outside of the black-white, Africa-Western Europe, pagan-Christian dichotomies and placed within a global dichotomy of the color line. As Du Bois argues, Africa is one of

many “Southern” geographical spaces, such as “Southern North America, South America, [and] Australia” (Du Bois would later add Asia to this list) populated with the darker races of men who in modernity are prostrated at the feet of the lighter races of men who reside in “Northern” geographical spaces like North America and Western Europe (*Reader* 18; *Du Bois Souls*, 45). The particular narrative of Africa is the general story of dark-skinned people globally. The figure of Ethiopia in Du Bois’s poetry has become a cipher for the universal struggle for human rights and democracy. In other words, the figure of Ethiopia is decolonized and intimately embedded in the decolonization of the dark world. It is no longer defined within the narrow context of race and continent; it is global. Du Bois rewrites Psalm 68:31b to make it resonate for the twentieth century and its political organization. For Du Bois, the figure of Ethiopia is global, a new figure for a new understanding of the configuration of power. Furthermore, linking Psalm 68:31b to a global figure of Ethiopia allows Du Bois to conceive of the American situation within a global context. Du Bois’s interpretation of the verse is a vehicle that elevates him from the parochialism of America into the cosmopolitanism of the new world that was emerging in the twentieth century.

The hands of Ethiopia work with and assist the colonized dark-skinned peoples of the global South. They are not hands trying to remake the world in Ethiopia’s image, nor are they hands attempting to bring culture and God to the oppressed. Ethiopia’s hands are extended in “fellowship” to the colonized dark-skinned peoples of the world; they are extended to help. The image of Ethiopia linking hands with the other dark-skinned peoples of the world presents a new political and historical force. For the first time in human history, the oppressed people of the world—those behind the color line—will unite against the color line and those on the other side of it.

The Latin phrase, *Semper novi quid ex Africa!* [Always something new from Africa!] appears in a number of Du Bois’s writings. This phrase closes *The Negro* and it frames “The Hands of Ethiopia” chapter in *Darkwater*.⁶ Giving both an interpretation of Psalm 68:31b and prefiguring the “Conclusion” of Franz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), Du Bois writes, “Twenty centuries after Christ, Black Africa,—prostrated, raped, and shamed, lies at the feet of the conquering Philistines of Europe. Beyond the awful sea a black woman is weeping and waiting, with her sons on her breast. What shall the end be? The world-old and fearful things,—war

and wealth, murder and luxury? Or shall it be a new thing,—a new peace and a new democracy of all races,—a great humanity of equal men? ‘*Semper novi quid ex Africa!*’”⁷ Du Bois maintains the image of Ethiopia as a woman, but it is not her past (a history of violation) that concerns him. Rather, it is the open-endedness of her future. Like the biblical Rachel, Ethiopia cries in the present, but unlike Rachel, Ethiopia and her children are oriented toward the future. Their present lives exist in the shadow of the future. Nevertheless, unlike the prefiguration associated with the figural interpretation of Psalm 68:31, the future of Ethiopia and her children is unknown; there is no biblical event or verse to which their future owes a debt. They live in the shadow of a choice and the grand narratives of modernity. The figure of Ethiopia has a choice: continue the destructive behavior of the West or build a new world by adhering to the lofty ideals of modernity. If it chooses the former, the world will continue on a path of destruction to the point of annihilation, and the terror of a Jefferson Davis civilization. If it chooses the latter, a secular messianic age will take place. This would be the newness of Ethiopia, and the making of a new social and political order.

According to Du Bois’s use of the figure of Ethiopia as a figure of history, now is the time for Africa to emerge out of the shadow of European oppression and history. The figural relationship of “the what-has-been,” Africa’s four hundred year history or “the then,” and “the now” is the flash that opens the contracted time of the moment from which a modern, decolonized, independent, and democratic Africa will emerge. The biblical figure of Ethiopia is a cover for Du Bois’s secular, figural, and historical Africa. Even though the previous figure of Ethiopia derived from the interpretation of Psalm 68:31b has been a way of writing Africans into the history of the West and the design of Providence, Du Bois’s figure of Ethiopia emerges from his reading of history, the dialectic constellation between “then” and “now.” As a figure of history, Ethiopia is at the “point of explosion,” and this accounts for Du Bois’s use of the adverb “soon.” Ethiopia is at the brink of something new, hence the phrase “Always something new from Africa.” The time is now for Ethiopia to be what Europe and America could not be—an agent for the messianic age. In addition, Du Bois emerges as a historical subject in the taking place of the figural relationship between “then” and “now.” He is not a transcendental subject of Western modernity, but a subject produced out of the emergent “legibility” of the dialectic of “then” and “now.” The historical subject, Du

Bois, emerges simultaneously with Ethiopia as a global and non-Western figure of change.

The Romance of Race: Garvey's Pan-Africanism

Materiality is a dominant topic in this book. The materiality of *grámmata*, the figure, and the historical inscription of readers and their emergence as subjects have been my primary concerns, even though the figural interpretations of Psalm 68:31 have drifted into metaphysical, romantic, and idealistic notions of religion, culture, history, race, language, nation, and the individual. Despite the power of Du Bois's materialist reading of Psalm 68:31, his figure of Ethiopia did not appeal to the new urban Negro masses. In the 1920s and 1930s, Marcus Garvey (the only non-American given significant attention in this study) and his idealization of the figure of Ethiopia captured the imaginations of many Negro Americans. With his organization, ceremony, and racist and hyperbolic talk of Negro chauvinism, the colonization of Africa, and the establishment of a black empire, Garvey articulated a message that resonated with black people tired of the indignities of racism and oppression and who dreamed of the Negro taking his rightful and elevated place in history among the families of humanity. Reiterating the message of Delany that a people without a national capacity are a people without respect, Garvey called for "Africa for the Africans," and large numbers of the urban Negro masses heard him. Psalm 68:31 was central to Garvey's articulation of Negro history, Negro destiny, and to solving the so-called Negro problem in the United States, Africa, and around the world.

According to Garvey, Psalm 68:31 was a prophecy prefiguring Africa's independence and redemption, the in-gathering of Africans in the diaspora, the colonization of Africa by New World Negroes, God's election of the Negro as His people, and the end of time. Many of Garvey's interpretations of and allusions to Psalm 68:31 reiterated some of the figures of Ethiopia previously analyzed in this study, but his Pan-African racial ideology and imagination refigured Ethiopia anew. As I will demonstrate, Garvey's reading of Psalm 68:31 brought the figuration of Ethiopia to new heights, but it also constituted the figure's last major flash in black American letters. The figure of Ethiopia was Garvey's movement. Although it burned brightly in the American Negro imagination during the Harlem Renaissance, its light was an ideological illusion. Garvey and Garveyite

ideologues would be the last major contributors to the figuration of Ethiopia in America before it expired and disappeared politically in the 1950s and poetically in the 1980s.

The eight appearances of Psalm 68:31 in *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey* can be divided into two types: complete quotes and allusions. Garvey was a man of his time. He inherited a tradition of Negro nationalism earlier articulated by Delany, Blyden, and Crummell, and he was also a man with nineteenth-century sensibilities. He was at once a racist and a nationalist, positions that he used interchangeably as if they were synonymous with one another. For Garvey, the normative form of collective human life was to belong to a biological race and to an autonomous geopolitical nation. In a speech given in 1921, shortly after the Russian Revolution, World War I, and the creation of the League of Nations, Garvey stated, "There is a mad rush among races everywhere towards national independence. Everywhere we hear the cry of liberty, of freedom, and a demand for democracy. In our corner of the world we are raising the cry for liberty, freedom, and democracy" (*Philosophy* 1:71–72). In a letter written from prison in 1923, after his conviction for mail fraud, Garvey articulates his theory of history and race which insists that the time of the Negro is on the brink of becoming a reality: "Our consolation should be, however, that each and every race will have its day; and there is no doubt that the Negro's day is drawing near" (*Philosophy* 2:13). The agency of divine providence that produced all other racial-national political entities is about to do the same for the Negro. Armed with a Crummell-like philosophy, that history and destiny are not a matter of chance, but of intelligent divine and human design, Garvey employs Psalm 68:31 as proof that "a free and redeemed Africa" and the emergence of the Negro race as a nation would soon take place in Africa.

The figure of Ethiopia takes a variety of configurations in Garvey's writings. One of these is that Ethiopia is the righteous servant of God. This is a reiteration of Holly's and Handy's figures of Ethiopia and it is concurrent with Cozart's reading of Psalm 68:31. Couching his speech within chronological and homogeneous time, the emancipation of slaves in the nineteenth century by the British and the United States, and the Afro-Asiatic myth of origin, Garvey argues that Ethiopia's reemergence in history will be a light to the nations. Comparing the future African nation with the Anglo-Saxon and Japanese nations who are world superpowers, Garvey accuses the latter nations of disobeying God's will by oppressing weaker

people. When Africa emerges as a unified race and a modern nation, as “prophesied” in Psalm 68:31, Garvey writes that Africa will be a model of Godly virtues and a righteous force in the world, something the Anglo-Saxons and the Japanese have not been (*Philosophy* 1:60–61). Psalm 68:31 is not only the “great hope” of the Negro, but also an object of Negro faith. Working within the Protestant tradition, Garvey ends his 1922 New Year’s Day speech by linking faith to fulfillment: “And so tonight we celebrate . . . with an abiding confidence, a hope and faith in ourselves and in our God. And that faith that we have is a faith that will ultimately take us back to that ancient place, that ancient position that we once occupied, when Ethiopia was in her glory” (*Philosophy* 1:61). Garvey does not provide an interpretation of the verse, but emigration to Africa is the fulfillment of Psalm 68:31. For the Negro to go forward, he must go “back” to Africa, geographically and spiritually. As an action within the design of Providence, emigration is a given. Garvey romanticizes Africa and in doing so, he idealizes the Negro’s future. Psalm 68:31 no longer requires nuanced interpretations to signify the in-gathering of diasporic Negroes to Africa. Negro faith in the prophecy of Psalm 68:31 will destroy the gulfs of time and space that separate the Negroes in the Western Hemisphere and those in Africa. Diasporic Negroes will soon return to their ancestral, idyllic, and romantic home. Requesting that his followers embody the movement of Ethiopia in the verse by praying (that is stretching forth their hands to God) at noon and midnight for thirty seconds, Garvey links prayer to the fulfillment of the prophecy. Enacting the prophecy will make it take place.

As the next chapter will demonstrate, the action of Ethiopia stretching forth her hands is a literary image that owes a debt to Delany’s *Blake*, Sutton Griggs’s *The Hindered Hand*, and Du Bois’s *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*. Garvey employs this image in his interpretations of Psalm 68:31, but he is not alone in this literalization of the verse. The 1920 lyric “O Africa, My Native Land!” by Arnold Ford, the music director of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and a member of Harlem’s Negro Jewish community, portrays Africa stretching forth her hands to her children in the diaspora as a gigantic mother. In the refrain of Ford’s verse, the poet, speaking as a prodigal son of mother Africa, implores her twice to extend her “hands” to him (vv. 10–11, 21–22).⁸ The predicate of Psalm 68:31 is refigured into a literary motif. Ford alters the tense of the verse from the future to the present. In addition, he changes the mood by making “stretch” an imperative. The speaker orders Africa to “stretch

forth" her hands to her children (vv. 10–11, 21–22). The calls of race and homeland displace God in Ford's poem, but he presents this displacement as if Ethiopia's stretch to God is commensurate with Africa's stretch to her children. Just as the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son is a figure standing in for God, so, too, is parental Africa in Ford's poem. The hands of Africa are stretched toward Negroes in the diaspora to reclaim and embrace the return of her lost sheep to the fold. Before the second refrain that alludes to Psalm 68:31b, the poet articulates the underlying chauvinism and essentialism associated with Garvey and the UNIA when he writes that Africa gave birth to the most notable and remarkable people in human history (v. 20).

This sense of Psalm 68:31 appears in a number of Garvey's writings and speeches. For example, in an eulogy for president Warren Harding, Garvey asserts that Ethiopia's hand is the "hand of justice, freedom and liberty" which "shall be extended to all mankind" when Africa emerges on the world's stage as a political and civilizing presence, thereby fulfilling the prophecy made in Psalm 68:31.⁹ Garvey also associates Ethiopia's hand with instruction. The figure of Ethiopia has something to teach the world: the lesson of justice. Moving from the abstract "Africa" to the collective personal "we," Garvey writes, "We will teach man the way to life and peace, not by ignoring the rights of our brothers, but by giving to everyone his due. We glory in Africa's new responsibility" (*Philosophy* 2:54).

In Garvey's first speech after his release from prison, he addresses the faithful at Liberty Hall, the central meeting place of the UNIA. In a clear and succinct message, Garvey ties the goals of the UNIA together with Psalm 68:31, which serves as a prooftext. Using one of his favorite expressions to signify a decolonized Africa, "a free and redeemed Africa," Garvey calls for an African nation with its own government and racial harmony through racial purity and segregation. In words that harken back to Sewall's view about the proximity of the races to one another, only a world in which races are pure and geographically separated from one another can experience peace:

We Negroes want a government of our own in Africa, so that we can be nationally, if not industrially and commercially, removed from competition in race. . . . We who believe in race purity are going to fight the issue out for the salvation of both races, and this can only be satisfactorily done when we have established for the Negro

a nation of his own. We believe that the white race should protect itself against racial contamination [amalgamation], and the Negro should do the same. Nature intended us morally (and may I not say socially?) apart. (*Philosophy* 2:234)

Garvey cites the verse as a prophecy of this worldview without providing an interpretation. Moreover, he reorders the verse by placing Ethiopia's stretch before the Princes' rise; Africa's independence should be prior to the creation of its government.

In a short speech situated after John Powell's message to the UNIA at Liberty Hall, Garvey alludes to Psalm 68:31 twice by quoting parts of the verse: Africa "stretches forth his hand to achieve through the impulse of his God" and later in the passage, "Princes will rise to bless and glorify the true and ever living God."¹⁰ The masculinization of Africa is to be noted in Garvey's rendition of the verse. Masculine nations are the norm, therefore Africa too must be male, but what is more significant is Garvey's ordering of the allusions. Again, Garvey places Ethiopia's movement to God prior to the emergence of its princes. Both allusions are predicated on the belief that the Negro contains a latent power that has been asleep for many millennia and which is at the point of awakening and becoming manifest, thus constituting a rebirth and resurrection. When the Negro awakens, humanity will be blessed with the benefits of African civilization. The fulfillment of Psalm 68:31, which Garvey claims "is near at hand," is Ethiopia's return to an idyllic past, when Africa once again determines the nature of civilization and culture (*Philosophy* 2:350).

Tony Martin, a Garvey scholar, has demonstrated that Garvey and other leaders in his movement understood the centrality of literature to national formation.¹¹ One of the main proponents of literary Garveyism and a major contributor to the *Negro World* was John Edward Bruce. In his essay, "The Negro in Poetry" (1923), Bruce writes:

The Negro race is one of the oldest races and had a civilization thousands of years before Europe emerged from barbarism or America had a place in the social progression. Her scholars, philosophers and poets have already written their names on the pages of history and in the next twenty or thirty years there will be an awakening among Negroes throughout the world; a revival of letters such as distinguished the black race in another period when it was the acknowledged school-master of Greece and Rome.

This is not quite the Negro's day in literature. He is dead now but he is soon to arise with healing in his wings. Rejuvenated, disenthralled, redeemed, he will stand forth in the full stature of a man and will ably fulfill the promise that Ethiopia shall suddenly stretch forth her hands unto God and then princes shall come out of Egypt. For out of Egypt have I called my son. We are coming and the Father of us all will bless and prosper the race that gave hospitality and protection to the Son of Righteousness, if it will only believe in itself and be itself. (Qtd. in Martin, *African Fundamentalism* 63–64)

This extensive quote from Bruce is Garveyism and its relationship to Psalm 68:31 in summary fashion. The Afro-Asiatic myth of the grandeur of ancient Africa, its fall, and its resurrection, as prophesied in Psalm 68:31, are the foundations of Garveyism. The metaphor of racial and national awakening is at the heart of Garvey's and Bruce's interpretations of the verse. The promise of Psalm 68:31 is the restoration of Ethiopia's cultural and political supremacy.

Furthermore, like Garvey, Bruce links other biblical references to Egypt and Ethiopia to enhance his interpretations of Psalm 68:31. In particular, the story of Joseph and Mary's escape to Egypt with the baby Jesus to avoid the terror of Herod is associated with the verse: God will save Africa because Africa provided sanctuary for His son.¹² In Bruce's citation of Psalm 68:31, he emphasizes the nearness of a resurrected Africa in his use of "soon" and the suddenness of Ethiopia's stretch. The metonymy of Ethiopia's wings for its hands, signifying both its flight and speed to God, and therefore to resurrection and redemption, is the unfolding of God's promise in the twentieth century. The figure of Ethiopia, this awakened and resurrected body, is Christ-like, and hence the savior of the world. In a shift of figures, Ethiopia is transformed in Garveyism from the prophetic object of God's word to the voice of God Himself. Just as Christ is the *lógos* of the Father, Ethiopia is the voice of God (*Philosophy* 2:51).

Garvey also associates the end of days with Psalm 68:31: "a free and redeemed Africa" might be an effect of the Parousia. In numerous passages, Garvey explicitly links Ethiopia's stretch to God and its movement toward freedom and liberty with Christ's militaristic return:

We need the freedom of Africa now. . . . Our cause is based upon righteousness. And anything that is not righteous we have no respect for, because God Almighty is our leader and Jesus Christ our

standard bearer. . . . For it is the same God who inspired the Psalmist to write “Princes shall come out of Egypt and Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands unto God.” At this moment methinks I see Ethiopia stretching forth her hands unto to God and methinks I see the Angel of God [Jesus Christ] taking up the standard of the Red, the Black and the Green and saying “Men of the Negro Race, Men of Ethiopia follow me.” (*Philosophy* 1:73–74)

Recalling the biblical figure of prophetic ecstatic vision, Garvey aligns the Parousia with “a free and redeemed Africa,” a nation with its own flag that Christ is bearing. He hears a new command from Christ that is specifically for the Negro. The shift from the *grámmata* of prophecy to the *lógos* of a new command neatly posits the Negro as a major player in the divine drama of history and its summation. Garvey’s millennialism moves the Negro from the margins of history to its center. The call to “the men” is decidedly militaristic. The messianic army will be made up of Negroes. His refiguration of the figure of Ethiopia constitutes all of time and its meaning. The figure of Ethiopia is the chosen one of God, and He is re-configured into the God of Ethiopia. Writing from prison two years after creating the figure of a millennial Ethiopia, Garvey reiterates the figure in his essay, “The Crime of Injustice” (August 1923). Citing a litany of injustices, Garvey ends his essay emphasizing the prophesied rebirth of Africa in Psalm 68:31: “Such will be Africa’s day, when a new light will encircle the earth, and black men lift their hands to their God and Princes come out of our country. For this we will not give up hope, but fight and struggle on, until the Angel of Peace and Love [Jesus Christ] appears” (*Philosophy* 2:14).

Faith in the prophecy of Psalm 68:31 will not only bring it about, but God will correct those people who oppose Ethiopia’s attempt to become fully human. Through innuendo, Garvey critiques Negro leaders such as Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson who oppose racial separatism and are working for the full inclusion of the Negro within the political and social fabric of America. Accordingly, for Garvey the task of the Negro is not to convince white people to change, but for the Negro to change and embrace his divinely ordained collective racial identity and destiny: “He [God] promised that Ethiopia’s day would come, not by the world changing towards us, but by our stretching out our hands unto Him” (*Philosophy* 2:16). Within Garvey’s racial ideology, to be fully human, a person must

belong to a racial collective that is true to itself and its divinely designated purpose. The stretch of Ethiopia is its allegiance and adherence to its racial aims, its racial destiny, its racial unity, and to God. Psalm 68:31 and his use of it merely backs up Garvey's assertion that it is divine evidence. It is an interpretation without any hermeneutical analysis. For Garvey, all notions having to do with "a free and redeemed Africa" are foreshadowed in Psalm 68:31.

In the last entry of Garvey's *Philosophy and Opinions*, he warns whites to stay out of Africa because they are racial foreigners. White people should stay in their own geographical areas; it is their proper, God-given place. Directing his anger toward the Firestone Company and its rubber interests in Liberia, Garvey threatens the tire giant with an eschatological race war with a heavenly army at the lead of an African army: "one day God and His hosts shall bring **'Princes out of Egypt and Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands'**" (*Philosophy* 2:412). These are the last words of the book. Again, Garvey employs Psalm 68:31 as a prooftext for his interpretation of world events and the future, Africa's renaissance, and independence through the aid of Christ.

The appearance of Psalm 68:31 in Garvey's poetry occurs in his long racial-historicist lyric, "The Tragedy of White Injustice" (1927).¹³ Written in seventy stanzas, each with eight verses and four couplets, "The Tragedy of White Injustice" chronicles the history of white oppression of the dark-skinned peoples of the world. The opening line of "The Tragedy of White Injustice" accuses white people of duplicity and acquiring wealth dishonestly and repeats this accusation at the end of the poem. Garvey's lyric contains a litany of charges that condemn four hundred years of colonialism, imperialism, and racism.¹⁴ As poetry, "The Tragedy of White Injustice" suffers more from being a condemnation of white people than from displaying any commitment Garvey has to the genre as a literary form. It is sing-songy and has numerous forced rhymes. Its content is equally shaky. Some of the poet's observations have merit, but for the most part, the poem is undone by the underlying ideologies of nationalism and race, an almost obsessive desire "to tell the white man off," and the need to defend Garvey and the UNIA. For instance, stanza 44 praises the Ku Klux Klan for their doctrine of racial purity and support of the recently passed national policies that greatly reduced and redefined the racial and ethnic nature of immigration to the United States. Between 1900 and 1920, millions of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe

came to the United States. In 1924, Congress enacted immigration laws that attempted to fix the racial and ethnic composition of America according to the 1890 United States census. The new immigration quotes favored the so-called “Anglo-Saxons” and people from northern European countries, discouraged immigration from eastern and southern European countries, and virtually eliminated immigration from Africa, China, and Japan (Takaki 273, 307, and Zinn 382). The Klan is “goodly” due to its fight to keep America white and the other nations and races in their divinely ordained geographical locations (Garvey, *Poetical Works* 15).

In stanza 67, Garvey alters Psalm 68:31a and merely alludes to the often-read second half of the verse. The tradition of Psalm 68:31 as prophecy is taken as a given in Garvey’s poem. The speaker’s perspective is Christian; the rise of the black man—and this reference is decidedly patriarchal—is an articulation of grace that the trinity affirms. Furthermore, the speaker interprets the prophecy as an oral promise that is “clear,” and not as *grámmata* that is obscure (*Poetical Works* 22). Garvey’s confidence in the prophecy of Psalm 68:31 owes a greater debt to his faith in the ideologies of race and nationalism (and their underlining logocentrism) than to the clarity of the biblical verse. As we have seen, the Hebrew of the verse is obscure and resists translation, and the interpretations of Psalm 68:31 are anything but consistent.

In addition, Garvey retains the sense that Psalm 68:31 is a divine prophecy in stanza 67, and he places his reading of the verse within this context. For Garvey, it is the figure of black majesty in the signifier “Princes” that is more important than Ethiopia’s movement in Psalm 68:31. The signifier “Princes” appeals to Garvey’s racial romanticism (*Poetical Works* 22). A prince belongs to a premodern and predemocratic political organization. Instead of being elected by the people, the prince’s authority is grounded in blood and tradition. Such a position suited Garvey, who proclaimed himself “the Provisional President of Africa” and organized parades in which he dressed in military regalia. The prophesied “nobility” of the black man displaces the spiritual and intellectual uplift of the race. Egypt is no longer a figure of the land of slavery as it appears in some nineteenth-century interpretations, but the origin of the black race. It is the “Motherland” (*Poetical Works* 22). As the motherland, Egypt is the origin of the race and therefore a signifier which signifies that Africa belongs to Africans.¹⁵ Instead of Egypt being a place to leave, as was the case during slavery when it signified the land of slavery, it becomes the

womb that brings forth royalty. Garvey interprets “shall come out” bodily instead of geographically; thus, Egypt primarily signifies a mother rather than a geopolitical space. The figure of Ethiopia as a mother is displaced by Egypt because Garvey’s interpretation of the verse focuses on the signifier “Princes” and the emergence of black royalty in the near future. Even though Garvey does not explicitly address the question of time in his interpretation of Psalm 68:31a, he retains the open-ended future tense of the verse. It is clear from the poem that he believes that the twentieth century is the time for Africa’s rebirth and redemption. What is suggested in the interpretations of Crummell and Delany is explicitly foregrounded in Garvey: the rise of a black empire with its own racial nobility and a new global racial hierarchy.¹⁶ Garvey was not the father of either Black Nationalism or Pan-Africanism, but he was one of the twentieth century’s most outspoken advocates of them.

In another poem written after his deportation from the United States, “The Brutal Crime” (1935), Garvey elliptically refers to Psalm 68:31 and Ethiopia’s special status with God. The topics of the poem are the Italo-Ethiopian war and black traitors who stand in the way of Ethiopian liberation.¹⁷ In the seventh stanza, Garvey alludes to Ethiopia’s prophesied future greatness that he understands to be embedded by God in Psalm 68:31 (*Poetical Works*, 88). By 1935, Ethiopia is a recognizable figure in black letters. Its signifying range is both specific to the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935, and as general as the interpretative history of a glorious African future. The promise of Ethiopia’s liberation, both as a country and as a synecdoche for the continent, constitutes Garvey’s engagement with the verse. Garvey does not even have to interpret Psalm 68:31 to demonstrate the workings of God in history. He merely has to refer to the verse itself, even cryptically, to activate the figures of Ethiopia associated with the Protestant readings of Psalm 68:31 since the seventeenth century.

As an institution, Garveyism had ideologically predetermined the interpretation of Psalm 68:31. Echoing Mather’s catechism in *The Negro Christianized*, George Alexander McGuire, a fellow West Indian and one of the spiritual leaders of the UNIA, wrote the “Universal Negro Catechism” (1921) in which the initiated are told what the orthodox interpretation and understanding of Psalm 68:31 is to be:

Q. What prediction made in the 68th Psalm and the 31st verse is now being fulfilled?

A. "Princes shall come out of Egypt, Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God."

Q What does this verse prove?

A. That Negroes will set up their own government in Africa, with rulers of their own race. (Qtd. in Hill 307)

All the major characteristics of Garvey's interpretation are present in McGuire's catechism: Psalm 68:31 is a prophecy taking place in the 1920s; Africa is destined to be free and redeemed according to God's will; Africa will be ruled by Africans when it becomes completely free and redeemed and outside the sphere of European or white influence; and race is the singular most important category for human understanding and organization.

The orthodox Garveyite interpretation of Psalm 68:31 also appears in "The Universal Ethiopian Anthem," a poem written by Ben Burrell and Arnold J. Ford, the latter being another West Indian, the music director of the UNIA and an attendee at the Convention of Negro Peoples of the World held in New York in 1920. At this convention, a resolution was passed that Burrell and Ford's poem would be the anthem of the Negro people. Even though only a couple of verses have a relationship with Psalm 68:31, the poem as a whole is representative of Garvey's racial and theological understanding, as presented in his speeches and poetry, in particular "The Tragedy of White Injustice."¹⁸

Burrell and Ford quote a section of Psalm 68:31b in their poem and it works on two levels. First, they cut off "unto God" so that "hand" would be an exact rhyme with "fatherland," but this is done for poetic purposes, not for theological ones (Garvey, *Philosophy* 2:141). It seems that even though "unto God" is absent, the phrase is implied and signifies another aspect of Garvey's interpretation of the verse, the faithfulness of Ethiopia. This is articulated in the previous apostrophes of the speaker to God (Garvey, *Philosophy* 2:141). In many respects, "The Universal Ethiopian Anthem" is more of a national prayer than a secular national song.

Second, within Garveyism, the liberation of Ethiopia—in this case a synonym for Africa—is the orthodox understanding of Psalm 68:31b. The movement of Ethiopia's hand is its freedom from the chains put on it by non-Ethiopians. Africa for the Africans is the secular political rendition of Ethiopia's hand being unfettered. Burrell and Ford make God the agent

of Ethiopia's liberation, a point that does not disagree with Garvey's understanding of the verse. In addition, their interpretation of Psalm 68:31b is influenced by the biblical story of Israel. Stanzas 2 and 3 refer directly and indirectly to biblical Israel and its movement from slavery to liberation, from exile to homeland. The use of the divine name works to link the modern historical situation of Ethiopia to the biblical historical situation of Israel; the God of oppressed Israelites is the God of the oppressed Ethiopians. The figure of Ethiopia in the UNIA's Negro anthem is a free and redeemed Africa. The only aspect of Garvey's interpretation of Psalm 68:31 that is missing from Burrell and Ford's poem is a reference to the emergence of a Negro government with Negro rulers.

One other point needs to be made about Psalm 68:31b as it appears in Burrell and Ford's poem. Before the second half of the verse is cited, the speaker refers to the biblical verse as God's "voice" speaking in the past of Ethiopia's contemporary moment (Garvey, *Philosophy* 2:141). Accordingly, the veracity of the prophecy resides in God's voice, not in the *grámata* of the biblical text. The institutionalization of an orthodox interpretation of Psalm 68:31 suggests that Garvey and his associates realized the instability of the written word. Taking the prophecy out of its written context and placing it within an oral one, a context that associates truth with presence can bring to a halt further figurations of the verse emerging from future readings. Garvey and the UNIA's interpretation of Psalm 68:31 becomes the official interpretation for those who join the organization. By establishing an official interpretation of the verse, Garvey and the UNIA foreclose the possibility of other interpretations.¹⁹

The other extension of Psalm 68:31 in the Garvey movement is the identification of individuals as the fulfillment of the verse. In James Walker Hood Eason's speech, "Vision," given June 26, 1920, at Liberty Hall, Garvey is referred to as an example of Ethiopian dignity in the modern world: "He [Garvey] had to show us the princely stride of the black sons of Ethiopia" (Burkett, *Black Redemption* 63). Eason combines the two subjects of the verse into a new image: princely Ethiopia. This image is consistent with Garvey's interpretation of the verse. As we have seen, Garvey not only expected a free and redeemed Africa, but an Africa ruled by Africans. In Eason's shaping of Garvey as an Ethiopian prince, a biblical allusion resides in the image; Garvey is the Moses of the diaspora and a free and redeemed Africa.²⁰ Even though Garvey refers to himself

in modern terms as the “Provisional President of Africa,” the biblical image of the princely liberator-lawgiver fits nicely within the religious motifs employed by Garvey and the UNIA.²¹

Taking all of these interpretations of Psalm 68:31 into account, Garvey created a faith, a collection of racial and religious images and beliefs. Despite Garvey’s legal problems and fierce debates with Du Bois and other major Negro leaders, Garvey’s ideology collected and bound thousands of Negroes in the United States, the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa together in the 1920s and 1930s. The nearly mystical faith in Garvey as a savior of the race—and not any material or political changes Garvey affected in the world—accounts for his enduring significance and the ability of Garveyism to outlive the person. Even though Garvey treated Psalm 68:31 as self-evident, his racialization of the verse with his twin notions of racial purity and segregation indicated more about Garvey’s ideological stakes than his hermeneutical prowess. His figure of Ethiopia became a Negro separatist. The ancient history of Ethiopia’s intercourse with the world was displaced by Garvey’s racial essentialism.

Garvey’s embrace of the ideas of race, nation, colonialism, modern subjectivity, and the objectification of knowledge made his figure of Ethiopia antithetical to Du Bois’s. He did not read Psalm 68:31 so much as he employed the verse as if it was a self-evident statement about his moment in order to further his racial philosophy. For example, he generally made whatever point about the Negro, and at the end of his speeches or letters he cited Psalm 68:31 either as biblical proof that his message corresponded to the will of Providence or he provided a short interpretation of the verse. He emphasized more than any other figure in the twentieth century the status of Psalm 68:31 as “prophecy” and loved to refer to the verse simply by the designation “the Psalmist.”²² Surprisingly, although Garvey believed that Africa’s time had come, he did not employ the King James translation of Psalm 68:31 that foregrounded the adverb “soon.” He sensed the pregnancy of his moment, but he did not ground it in reading, but in ideology. Garvey already knew the nature of the world and its dynamics. His interpretation of the written word merely confirmed or disagreed with what he already knew. Even though Garvey could not help but link phrases together as a reader, he erased the moments of his historical inscription and emergence as a subject with his primary emphasis on being always already black and oppressed in a white man’s world.

The Birth of Ghana and Du Bois's Last Reading of Psalm 68:31

The long and winding religious and political interpretative paths of Psalm 68:31 in black American letters came abruptly to an end in the ninth decade of Du Bois's life. In the years after publishing "The Hands of Ethiopia" in *Darkwater*, Du Bois worked tirelessly furthering the scientific study of the Negro while simultaneously combating racism and Jim Crow at home, imperialism abroad, and advocating the decolonization of Africa. He had published major works such as *The Dark Princess: A Romance* (1928), *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), and *Dusk of Dawn* (1940), along with numerous other publications. First with the Niagara Movement (1905–9), then with the NAACP (1909–34, 1944–48), and finally with the Progressive Party, Du Bois fought segregation in America and worked for the complete inclusion of the Negro within the social, political, and legal fabric of America. On the international stage, Du Bois organized five Pan-African Congresses between 1919 and 1945, and had gained international recognition for his work toward justice and global peace. For these activities, the American government punished him during the 1950s. Because he was the chair of the Peace Information Center in 1950, a group dedicated to American nuclear disarmament, Du Bois's passport was unconstitutionally seized for eight years. The federal government also made him a public spectacle. Du Bois was arrested, fingerprinted, handcuffed, and later made to stand trial as an "unregistered foreign agent" only for the case to be dismissed. As a result of being painted with the "communist" tar brush, he was abandoned by numerous Negro writers, politicians, and civil rights leaders whom he had either mentored—directly or indirectly—or for whom he had paved the way for success through his scholarly and political work. In April 1958, a Supreme Court ruling returned Du Bois's passport; four months later he and his wife traveled to Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. It was during Du Bois's stay in Moscow that he wrote his final reading of Psalm 68:31.

In preparation for the December 1958, All-African People's Conference in Accra, Ghana, Du Bois read the *grámmata* of Psalm 68:31 again in an attempt to make sense of the world. The Berlin Conference of 1884 and 1885 literally dissected the continent north of South Africa, among Germany, Italy, Portugal, France, Britain, and King Leopold II of Belgium. Even though some of the players changed due to the outcome of World War I,

the majority of the continent remained under colonial control for most of the twentieth century. One decade after World War II, less than a handful of African regions were independent nation-states: Liberia, Ethiopia, Libya, and Egypt. Before the end of the 1950s, four other regions became sovereign nation-states: Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia, and Ghana. Nevertheless, it was Ghana's independence on March 6, 1957, that initiated a domino effect among sub-Saharan colonies. By the mid-1960s more than two-dozen sub-Saharan independent nation-states would emerge. One year after Ghana's independence, the new nation hosted the first Conference of Independent African States in April 1958, and a few months later in December, the All-African People's Conference took place. In the late 1950s, under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, a friend and political associate of Du Bois, Ghana was at the epicenter of Pan-Africanism and decolonization struggles of Third World peoples across the globe.

Invited to the All-African People's Conference, but unable to attend due to his frail health, Du Bois sent his wife, Mrs. Shirley Du Bois, and she read his speech prepared for the occasion. In that speech, Du Bois alluded to Psalm 68:31b and made a secular interpretation of it: "In this great crisis of the world's history, when standing on the highest peaks of human accomplishment we look forward to Peace and backward to War; when we look up to Heaven and down to Hell, let us mince no words. We face triumph or tragedy without alternative. Africa, ancient Africa has been called by the world and has lifted up her hands! Which way shall Africa go?" (*Autobiography*, 402).

The allusion to Psalm 68:31b is clear, but the figure of Ethiopia is gone. The biblical, Christian, racial, and mythical "Ethiopia" is replaced by the modern Africa. Ethiopia has been reduced to a name for part of Africa instead of being a synecdoche of all sub-Saharan Africa. The Africa of Du Bois's speech is one that is in the process of decolonization. Its future—and that of the world's—is indeterminate. The future of Africa and the world are out of the hands of Providence, and in human hands. But Du Bois does not have an answer, only a question.

Hansberry's Performance of Psalm 68:31

Contemporaneous with Du Bois's address to the new Ghanaian nation was Lorraine Hansberry's play, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959). The main theme of this play is the upward movement of the Youngers from their small and

dingy apartment in Chicago's Southside to a cozy three-bedroom house in lily-white Clybourne Park. The Youngers must overcome their personal frailties and differences and the institutional racism of segregation to acquire their new house. Ultimately, the Youngers prevail and the play concludes with them moving into their new lives in Clybourne Park. In the play, Hansberry makes it clear that the Youngers' move into this neighborhood is not a "political" statement but one of social justice. As Walter tells Linder, he and his family are moving into the house not to integrate the neighborhood ("We don't want to make no trouble for nobody or fight no causes-but we will try to be good neighbors"), but because his father earned the right for them to live in such a house and neighborhood through years of hard work (Hansberry 118).

Despite the importance of *A Raisin in the Sun's* major theme, the play also prefigures an internal debate among black people about the nature of blackness that continues to this day. In the Younger family, Lena, Walter, and Ruth represent "traditional" Negro ways of being in the world. Lena is a church going, hymn singing, Protestant Christian; Ruth is a believer, but she is also a woman of the world. Walter is predominantly secular and materialist. Ruth and Walter are blues people; the secular music of black America is meaningful to them. Beneatha represents the embryonic state of Black Nationalism and Afrocentrism that emerged in the United States after World War II. Internally, America was slowly desegregating both legally and socially. Externally, the dark-skinned peoples of Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean were decolonizing themselves; they were asserting their autonomy and sovereignty alongside European nations and America. Beneatha embodies this new spirit of emancipation, independence, and identity that was sweeping the world in the 1950s. Furthermore, she articulates critiques of the West, America, and Christianity that were emerging during this era. She states atheistic notions, criticizes Christian missionaries in Africa, and considers black music and dance as European derived and hence culturally inauthentic. For Beneatha, Africa holds the key to the "identity" she seeks to find. For Lena, Walter, and Ruth, Africa is not central to their worldview or self-consciousness. Lena supports missionary activities in Africa as a Christian's duty, and Walter and Ruth never situate themselves, their past, or their future in relationship to Africa. Walter wants to be an American businessman, a mover and shaker of high finance. Ruth wants a new living environment, financial and familial stability, and love. Beneatha calls the music they listen to and

enjoy (the blues) “assimilationist junk.” These two opposing orientations are seams that constitute the configuration of the Younger family.²³

Within this thematic and existential framework appears Psalm 68:31b, and a performance of the verse. At the beginning of Act 2, Beneatha, dressed in a Yoruban robe and headdress, dances and shouts to Yoruban music playing on the phonograph in the Youngers’ apartment. Her sister-in-law, Ruth, is completely confused by Beneatha’s actions. In the midst of Beneatha’s performance, Walter enters the scene. He, too, is confused by Beneatha’s dancing and chanting; however, within moments he joins her and shouts with his fists uplifted, “YEAH-AND ETHIOPIA STRETCH FORTH HER ARMS AGAIN!” (Hansberry 74). With Beneatha’s encouragement, Walter proceeds to act as if he is a Mau Mau warrior killing invisible enemies and he gives a speech to his invisible black brothers, as if he is a Zulu chief, about being prepared “for the greatness of the time” (Hansberry 76). He is brought back to the present by the appearance of George Murchison, one of Beneatha’s suitors, and Ruth. George rejects Walter’s call and expression of racial solidarity and Ruth takes both Beneatha and Walter to task and tells the latter to “get down off that table and stop acting like a fool” (Hansberry 76). Walter immediately descends and runs into the bathroom to vomit.

Walter’s words and actions seem to put him within the hermeneutical trajectory of the figure of Ethiopia that this book has examined. He cites a rendition of the verse, and he understands Ethiopia as a synecdoche for black Africa and black Americans. Beneatha’s Yoruban costume and music inspire Walter to gather the Mau Maus, the Zulus, and George Murchison as articulations of Ethiopia with her arms stretched out. Moreover, Walter attempts to embody Psalm 68:31 through his actions and speech. In Hansberry’s stage directions, Walter enters into Beneatha’s performance because he is moved by the sound of the drums in the music. Giving form to what he is hearing, Walter “dances” the music and the figure of Ethiopia. He embodies the predicate of Ethiopia’s stretch. Also, in the tradition of black orators who have given sermons and addresses on Psalm 68:31, Walter employs the anaphoric call, “Do you hear” to the imaginary black brothers he is addressing in the Youngers’ apartment.

Nevertheless, this “play within the play” is only a moment in Hansberry’s script. The figure of Ethiopia disappears when Walter expels it from his body after Ruth stops the impromptu performance. Walter’s words and actions are not an expression of race pride or his commitment to

Ethiopia's rise.²⁴ They are a result of his intoxication, for in Hansberry's stage directions, Walter enters the apartment after he has been out drinking. When he first sees Beneatha in her Yoruban costume performing her "dance of welcome," he is disgusted, but the spirits (the combination of alcohol and the music), acting like a great time machine, transport Walter to another time and space. He and Beneatha are in trance-like states, their "African" imaginaries are activated and they are possessed by something that momentarily transforms them into figurations of Ethiopia.²⁵

The masking of Walter as an African is induced by alcohol and music, but his African imaginary is oddly filled with images from popular media such as the newspaper, radio, and the movies. He can say, "Me and Jomo. . . . That's my man, Kenyatta," because in the 1950s Kenyatta is one of a handful of Africans who American newspapers cover (Hansberry 75). Also we should notice that the delivery of Walter's speech of the impending race war to his imaginary black brothers is in the mode of popular entertainment: "*his posture that of Belafonte singing 'Matilda' mixed with Paul Robeson at fever pitch.*"²⁶ Walter's African imaginary is frankly not African. It consists of popular American images of Africa that Walter performs in this short scene of the play. Hence, Walter's unexpected and unplanned embodiment of Ethiopian figurations dies as quickly as it comes into being. More significantly, after his trance is broken, Walter runs to the bathroom to vomit, and neither Psalm 68:31 nor figures of Ethiopia appear again in the play. Walter and Beneatha's performance does not produce any consequences, and both characters resume their pre-trance roles.

Even though this scene is a thin slice of *A Raisin in the Sun*, one must wonder how it should be read. It is one of the few comic moments in the play, despite Beneatha's serious performance. She is trying to reconnect to her African ancestry, to find her African identity. After Walter runs out of the room, her appearance and African historicist points of view become the new focal point of the scene. George, whom she characterizes as an "assimilationist Negro," is at odds with Beneatha's nascent black nationalism. Of her two suitors, Beneatha is leaning toward the Yoruba Asagai instead of George. The latter is too much like her own family. Despite Murchison's class differences from the Younger, he sees himself as a Negro American much like Walter, Ruth, and Lena Younger.

It is Walter's citation of Psalm 68:31b and his performance that seem to be out of place. Even though intoxication transports and transforms Walter, his drinking is inconsistent with his parents' Protestant values and the

exegetical trajectory of the verse. Walter and Beneatha become figurations of Ethiopia in Lena's absence. The fact that Lena is not home provides an opportunity for their performance. In addition, Walter's citation of the verse has parodic undertones. In his rendition of it he ends with the word "again." The rewriting of Psalm 68:31 is common in literary texts examined in this book, but Walter's alteration of the verse repeats Maria Stewart's rendition in 1833. Redundancy is usually not a characteristic of Ethiopia's movement. The adverb "soon" has been crucial in many interpretations of Psalm 68:31b, but Walter's replacement adverb, "again," does not signify in the same manner. Whereas "soon" is the temporal lynchpin for the fulfillment of the verse for black exegetes, the word "again" signifies an action that has been done once before and is happening now or will happen once more. The urgency of "soon" is replaced with the stasis of "again." His rendition of the verse has Ethiopia stretching forth her arms absent of power. This suggests that Ethiopia's previous movements have been pure gesture without any significance.

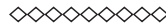
In the context of the scene, Walter's words seem to make fun of Beneatha's appearance and performance. Once more a Negro American is stretching out her arms; this time it is to an African heritage she wants and an African identity to replace her American one. Beneatha is reiterating an old movement of black Americans toward Africa and prefiguring the emergence of Black Nationalism and the Black Arts Movement in the 1960s. This is Beneatha's personal trajectory, not Walter's. Being a representative of black urban nihilism that Cornel West discussed in *Race Matters* (1993), Walter's rewriting of Psalm 68:31b suggests the possibility that Beneatha's stretch is as futile as Ethiopia's previous stretches that were given figuration by black exegetes.

The figure of Ethiopia is ambivalent in Hansberry's play. In both tone and orientation, it is caught between the comic and the serious, Walter and Beneatha, America and Africa. As such, it is a dialectic and linking figure. Presented in the mimetic form of drama, the figure of Ethiopia—the liberation of Africa—takes place and points to its eventfulness as a performance. Functioning as a traditional oral storyteller, Walter is the deictic vector that both verbally and physically articulates the figure of Ethiopia. He is neither promoting nor denouncing it; he simply becomes it for a moment. As an articulation of the figure of Ethiopia, Walter demonstrates the abyss between the doer and the deed. He facilitates the commemoration of Ethiopia, but he does not stand behind it. His performance is just

that—a performance. It is pure form without content. Hansberry's use of Psalm 68:31b echoes Du Bois's Ghanaian address in its open-endedness. The verse in Hansberry's play leaves us with a question: Which way will the Negro American go? Africa? America? Or as the linker of phrases?

In 1860, Delany wrote, "With the fullest reliance upon this blessed promise [Ps. 68:31], I humbly go forward in—I may repeat—the grandest prospect for the regeneration of a people that ever was presented in the history of the world" (qtd. in Delany and Campbell 122). By 1958, Ghana had obtained "a national capacity," but this was not the issue for Du Bois. The question was one of direction. Would Africa imitate its European and American predecessors or would it do something new? Would it work for war or peace? For more than a century, Negro hermeneuts had read Psalm 68:31 to normalize black life, history, and destiny. To be normal was to be a Christian, a member of a racial group and a nation, and to live and think within the parameters of literacy and modernity. Garvey was the last Negro thinker of Psalm 68:31 to promote this understanding of normalcy and reiterate modern essentialism. Du Bois's reading offered an alternative possibility to the ethos of Jefferson Davis and essentialism. Reading the world at the precipice of destruction, Du Bois wrote for peace and life.

Instead of making an assertion derived from a reading of Psalm 68:31, Du Bois leaves readers with a question and a challenge. How will we read it? What will be our response?



Rewriting Psalm 68:31

Narrative Formations of Ethiopia

Frances Harper's ballad, "Ethiopia," marked an unexpected refiguration of Ethiopia in black American letters. Prior to Harper's poem, black writers employed Psalm 68:31 in nonpoetic forms such as letters, sermons, and addresses, and largely within the purview of American Protestantism. As we have seen, within the formal expectations of these nonpoetic genres, black hermeneuts made highly inventive interpretations of Psalm 68:31. Making a hermeneutical leap of signification, black readers saw their past, their present, and their future in the silent written signs of an obscure verse tucked away in the Psalms. More importantly, in the eventfulness of reading, black readers became historical subjects: men and women anchored in time and space, and engaged in that which was around them. In addition, "Ethiopia" signaled new literary possibilities for the figure of Ethiopia. Harper's poem brought the figure out of the church and into the world. It became a literary topic instead of a religious one. Moreover, the refiguring of Ethiopia through the poetic form of the ballad extended the free play of signifiers that black hermeneuts had already activated in their readings of the verse. "Ethiopia" provided more *grámmata* to be read, and therefore more possibilities for the refiguring of Ethiopia every time the poem was read. Harper's poem produced a reiteration with differences that could not be avoided or undone. "Ethiopia" was a refiguration of a figuration that displaced the initial figuration of signifiers freed from their signifieds. The poetic refiguration of Ethiopia did not erase the nonpoetic figurations of Ethiopia that existed prior to it, but "Ethiopia" constituted another reweaving of the "text" named "Ethiopia." In other words, it produced more text to read, and for a larger reading public.

Within a decade after the publication of "Ethiopia" (1851), black writers employed the figure of Ethiopia in the most popular and influential American literary form of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the novel. In the wake of the popularity and influence of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), black writers saw some of the possibilities of the form to tell stories adequate to their moment. Douglass quickly responded to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by publishing *The Heroic Slave* (1853), and he was followed by William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or The President's Daughter* (1853). Black writers published three more novels before the end of the decade, Frank Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends* (1857), Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859), and Martin Delany's *Blake; or the Huts of America* (1859). The last text, *Blake*, was the first novel to integrate Psalm 68:31 into its story structure. Delany's novel initiated a narrative refiguration of Ethiopia that would continue into the early decades of the twentieth century.

Henry Blake as the Arm of the Lord

Blake is the melodramatic story of "African born, [but] Spanish bred" Carolus Henrico Blacus (alias Henry Blake) who organizes an armed rebellion of slaves against white oppression reminiscent of Toussaint L'Ouverture, Gabriel Presser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner (Delany 1970, 200). Blake's rebellion is initiated by the sale of his wife, Maggie. She is the daughter of Colonel Stephen Franks, her master, and she is sold to another master and sent from Natchez, Mississippi to Havana, Cuba. In response to this transaction and familial betrayal, Blake runs away from Colonel Franks and journeys throughout the southern slave states, interviewing slaves on various plantations and organizing them into a revolutionary force. Miraculously, within a couple of months, Blake has a makeshift army assembled in New Orleans and they are ready to begin the greatest slave revolt in American history. However, the plan is thwarted when some slaves betray the cause. Henry sneaks out of New Orleans and back into Colonel Franks's plantation, liberates his in-laws and a couple of friends, and guides them to Canada to start life anew as free people. From Canada, Blake, using an alias of Gilbert Hopewell, goes to Cuba, the land where he was raised, to liberate his wife. Due to his fluent Spanish and familiarity with Cuban slavery and culture, Blake quickly retrieves Maggie and begins organizing slave resistance on the island. Blake is chosen to be "General-in-Chief of the army of emancipation of the oppressed men

and women of Cuba!" (241). As in New Orleans, a slave betrays the cause, thereby derailing the revolt; Havana is put under martial law. The novel ends with Blake and the revolutionary council planning their next move.

Blake is a serial novel written in two parts.¹ Part I is set in the United States, and Part II is set in Cuba during 1852–53.² In Part I, there are only vague allusions to Psalm 68:31; however, despite this apparent absence, Delany has Blake articulate a hermeneutical position that informs the reading of the verse, the Bible, and black religion as a whole. When we first meet Blake in the novel, his wife has recently been sold and he bitterly denounces the "religion of the oppressors" to his in-laws. As people made submissive by the institution of slavery, Blake's in-laws are scandalized by this seemingly anti-Christian attitude and fear he is "gwine lose" all of his "ligion" (20–21). In numerous conversations about religion and slavery, Blake argues that slaves and people of color in general need to develop what today would be called a "liberation theology": "You must make your religion subserve your interests, as your oppressors do theirs! . . . They use the Scriptures to make you submit, by preaching to you the texts of 'obedience to your masters' and 'standing still to see the salvation,' and we must now begin to understand the Bible so as to make it of interest to us" (41). After Blake explains what is tantamount to submitting the Bible to the will of the reader, or interpretation, a fellow slave, Andy responds, "Dat's gospel talk," thereby giving a vernacular confirmation of Blake's exegetical method.³ In Part II, Blake reiterates this same sentiment in his discussions with Placido, the famous Cuban poet and his first cousin: "I still believe in God, and have faith in His promises; but serving Him in the way that I was, I had only 'the shadow without the substance,' the religion of my oppressors. I thank God that He timely opened my eyes. . . . Let us at once drop the religion of our oppressors, and take the Scriptures for our guide and Christ as our example" (197).

Echoing the slave narratives of Douglass and William Wells Brown about the employment of the Bible and Christianity on the plantation, the passages that Blake cites were commonly used to manage slaves and instill docility. During his revolutionary activity in the south, Blake uses "stand still and see salvation" (Exodus 14:13), a biblical verse quoted by slave masters to discourage the slaves from attempting to liberate themselves, as a code word that the time for revolution is not now. Blake's exegesis of the Bible dissimulates his rebellion. Instead of submission, Blake uses Exodus 14:13 as a code word for auto-emancipation. Part I of

Blake encourages Negro biblical interpretation to be subversive, and also dissimulative.⁴

Delany cites Psalm 68:31 in Part II, the Cuban section of the novel. At a meeting of the Grand Council for the policy of the Army of Emancipation and the provisional government, Blake states: “‘Ethiopia shall yet stretch forth her hands unto God; Princes shall come out of Egypt’; ‘Your God shall be my God, and your people my people,’ should comprehend our whole policy” (285). Blake has reordered the verse and combined it with Ruth 1:16. Changing the order of Psalm 68:31 emphasizes the primary status of Ethiopia as the subject of the prophecy. In an attempt to overcome ethnic difference among African peoples, Blake combines this verse with Ruth 1:16. Those familiar with the story of Ruth know that she was a Moabite woman, an enemy of the Israelites, who rejected her gods, homeland, and people and became an Israelite. In the Hebrew Bible, Ruth is a paragon of faithfulness, and the great grandmother of the future king of Israel, David.

The citation of these verses occurs in a section of the novel in which the Grand Council of the revolution is determining its organizational policies. In a previous meeting, the denominational orientation of the Army of Emancipation is decided: “We have all agreed to know no sects, no denominations, and but one religion for the sake of our redemption from bondage and degradation, a faith in a common Savior as an intercessor for our sins; but one God, who is and must be our acknowledged common Father. No religion but that which brings us liberty will we know” (258). Moreover, it is determined at this meeting that only unmixed black people (Ethiopians) can be the real agents of change. In an argument that prefigures Delany’s *The Origin of Races and Color*, the mulatto Placido states that since races are indivisible entities and whites view blacks as naturally inferior, only when pure blacks obtain equality with pure whites can equality be extended to “mixed bloods.” At the council meeting where Psalm 68:31 and Ruth 1:16 are cited as the policy of the Army of Emancipation, Blake, speaking in standard English, explains that due to slave illiteracy, “[rules] should be plain, simple, and at once comprehensible to every black person” (285). This is followed by the two biblical citations and Placido’s assertion, “That’s the word of God,” and a statement by the wife of the minister of war and the navy, Madame Montego, that “God’s word is His will.” Blake concurs with these judgments and says, “Then let God’s will be done” (285).

This scene is unusual because the meaning of Psalm 68:31 is treated as something self-evident. Neither Blake nor Placido explicitly interpret the verse. This is a strange moment in the hermeneutical history of the verse.⁵ For decades, Psalm 68:31 had been the object of numerous creative interpretations, but in the first novel to employ it, an interpretation seems to be absent. The only tangential interpretation of the verse foreshadows its appearance in the novel. Prior to citing the verses at the council meeting, Blake states that traditionally slaves awaited their salvation, but “now” the time has come for them to bring it about with their own hands (284). Retaining their faith in God, slaves must be “self-reliant” and agents of their own salvation. This position echoes Blake’s view of black religion articulated earlier to his in-laws, friends, and cousin. Black Christianity must be an active, self-reliant religion, instead of the passive and submissive kind taught in slavery. Ethiopia’s hands must play an active role in bringing about God’s will. Blake’s reordering of the verse seems to vaguely support the relationship between Psalm 68:31 and black agency: only after Ethiopia has acted in its own behalf will God insure its freedom.

The second appearance of Psalm 68:31 in *Blake* occurs as an allusion. In a show of thankfulness for being rescued from white slavers, Abyssa, an English speaking, Sudanese Christian, moans “with joy in African accents” and Mendi, a Congolese chief, “with outstretched arms fell upon his knees in thankfulness to God for what he had witnessed” (251). This scene is an excellent example of Delany’s subversion of the figure of conversion associated with Psalm 68:31. Mendi stretches to God not in submission, but in thankfulness for the coming redemption of black people. He is literally performing the predicate of the verse as a sub-Saharan African, and hence, an Ethiopian: he is stretching forth his hands to God. In addition, Abyssa is an African Christian, or one who was already an Ethiopian, both spiritually and racially.⁶

Blake’s contribution to the refiguration of Ethiopia takes place through the depiction of Henry Blake himself. Referred to numerous times in the highly poetic phrase, “Arm of the Lord, awake!” Blake is a messianic figure who is literally anointed and then elected general of the Army of Emancipation.⁷ In Part I, after Blake is anointed by Negro conjurors, who are former Revolutionary War veterans, he receives the following blessing: “Go, my son, . . . an’ may God A’mighty hole up yo’ han’s an’ grant us speedy ‘liverance!” (115). In Part II, returning from Africa on the slaver, the *Vulture*, Abyssa whispers in Blake’s ear, “Arm of the Lord, awake!” (224). During

the voyage to Cuba, Blake secretly releases the slaves on the ship and they attempt to take it over. The rebellion is foiled, but it foreshadows Blake's revolutionary activities in Cuba.⁸

In the character of Blake, Delany makes the figure of Ethiopia into the Messiah; Blake is the figure of Ethiopia. He is the "arm of the Lord" striking against whites and the hand of God redeeming the slaves. In addition to changing the gender of Ethiopia, Delany heightens Blake's masculinity by making him both a virile and faithful husband, and a "bad nigger." The synecdochic representation of Blake's "arm" as the trope of black resistance transforms Ethiopia into a militaristic figure. Delany also racializes Blake as a messianic figure. When Henry Blake is introduced the narrator makes it clear that he is at once a unique and quintessential black man: "Henry was a black—a pure Negro—handsome, manly and intelligent. . . . A man of good literary attainments . . . having been educated in the West Indies" (16–17). Blake is neither the suffering servant of Stowe's novel nor is he a mulatto like Douglass or William Wells Brown; Blake is "Blacus," and therefore represents the racially pure Ethiopia.⁹

Delany's refiguration of Ethiopia in *Blake* prefigured how black novelists would later employ Psalm 68:31. In the novels by Hopkins, Griggs, Du Bois, and Walker that will be analyzed later in this chapter, messianic figures abound and the redemption of the race from racism constitutes the messianic mission. More importantly, on a hermeneutical level, Griggs and Du Bois, following Delany's lead, also allude to Ethiopia's stretch and give it a new semantic orientation. Even though the slave rebellions in *Blake* are aborted attempts at liberation, Delany does not miss the poetic opportunity to refigure Psalm 68:31 and make it amenable to the novel. *Blake* transforms the figure of Ethiopia into the subject of an extended story, and in so doing, gives the figure greater narrative depth, breadth, and possibility.

American Romance I: Hopkins's Stories of Race Mixing and Ethiopia

After the initial explosion of black novels in the 1850s in response to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, black novel writing went into literary hibernation, as did the figure of Ethiopia as the subject or the hero of black fiction. The re-emergence of the figure of Ethiopia in black fiction would be tied to events in Louisiana during the 1890s that reverberated throughout the United States and determined the parameters of race relations for the twentieth

century. On June 7, 1892, Homer Plessy bought a first-class ticket on the East Louisiana Railway to go from New Orleans to Covington, Louisiana. Sitting in the white only section of the train, Plessy announced that he was in violation of the recently passed separation of the races law, and refused to move.¹⁰ Plessy was forcibly removed from the train by the police and jailed for violation of the equal but separate legislation. Thus began the unfolding of events that would lead to the most crucial Supreme Court decision in postbellum nineteenth-century American history: *Plessy v. Ferguson*. This decision not only legalized segregation and constituted a legal definition of the Negro and the white American, it also instigated the rebirth of the figure of Ethiopia in black fiction.¹¹

The *Plessy* decision reverberated in black American literature. In response to legalized segregation, black writers wrote major racial romances that challenged the idea of Negro inferiority—be it biological, cultural, historical, or ethical—and questioned the legal definition of the Negro. A dominant figure of these romances was Ethiopia derived from engagements with Psalm 68:31. It was during the era of legal segregation (1896–1954) that the figure of Ethiopia reached its mythological and literary zenith in black American literature. Some writers, such as Pauline Hopkins, wrote a history of Ethiopia as the source of Western civilization intertwined with genealogical stories of the amalgamated nature of Americans. Others, such as Rev. Sutton Griggs, proposed Negro nationalist alternatives to segregated America. Furthermore, two major figures in Pan-Africanism, W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey, as we saw in the previous chapter, employed the figure of Ethiopia in their literary writings.

The first appearance of Psalm 68:31 in the work of Pauline Hopkins is in *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (1900). Twice, in the course of an impassioned speech for Negro rights, the male hero of Hopkins's novel, Will Smith, cites the verse: "Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hand and princes shall come out of Egypt" (*Contending Forces* 266, 272). A number of aspects about this quote are immediately noticeable. First, Smith, in the context of his speech, quotes the verse directly from the psalm. Second, Smith's quote is nearly exact, and thereby indicates that Hopkins was familiar with the biblical text. Third, it takes liberties with the biblical text, echoing Delany's *Blake*. Not only does Smith flip the order of verse 31, he also leaves out the reference to God that appears in the verse. These appear to be minor changes, but in

the context of Hopkins's novel and the tradition of the figure of Ethiopia in black American literature, they are significant.

Will Smith's employment of Psalm 68:31 occurs at a meeting of the American Colored League in Boston. The meeting is called to address the problem of lynching throughout America, especially in the South. At this meeting, a series of speakers with diverse interests address the Negro Question. One speaker, a white southerner, the Hon. Herbert Clapp, offers two solutions to America's race problem: miscegenation or the Negro's submission to the white man. Dr. Arthur Lewis, a Booker T. Washington-like character, with a mouthful of compromises and reconciliation toward the South, follows Clapp. A one-two punch in favor of the Negro staying in his assigned social place opens the meeting. Following the speakers for the status quo are Lycurgus (aka Luke) Sawyer and Will Smith. Sawyer, a Louisiana Latin, tells a personal narrative of racial oppression involving larceny, murder, incest, and rape. His story bears witness that the problem in America is not the Negro, but racism toward the Negro. In addition to providing a counternarrative to the speeches of Clapp and Lewis, Sawyer's story holds a key motif for the plot of Hopkins's novel. Smith follows Sawyer's story and without hesitation critiques Clapp's and Lewis's proposed solutions to the Negro Question and southern racial propaganda of Negro inferiority. After quickly disposing of Clapp's and Lewis's suggestions, Smith argues that the South's narrative of Reconstruction—mainly the right of the Negro to vote and hold office—is at stake. It is at this point that Smith refers to “the deportation of the Negro to Africa” and then quotes Psalm 68:31 as a fulfillment of the prophecy.¹² Interestingly, Smith's employment of Psalm 68:31 does not state his own position vis-à-vis Negro emigration and its relationship to the psalm, but presents the argument of “public men all over this country” (*Contending Forces* 266). He follows this with quotes by southern politicians about the civilizing effect America has had on the Negro.

Smith rejects the deportation argument and its association with Psalm 68:31, and returns the focus to the disfranchisement of the Negro. According to Smith, in a speech that anticipates many arguments made by civil rights lawyers during the twentieth century, the Negro does not constitute a foreign element in the United States biologically, ethically, or politically; the Negro is a victim of racism for multiple reasons. First, the Negro has not received education commensurate with citizenship. He is

barred from obtaining scientific knowledge that is instrumental “in the formation of the character of the individual, the race, the government, the social life of any community under heaven” (*Contending Forces* 268). Second, the charge of rape is merely a cover for suppressing the Negro vote. Smith does not deny that Negroes rape, but the charge does not correspond to the reality. Third, Smith points out the irony of the charge itself in that Negroes are a mulatto people, a people who emerged out of interracial rape. Lastly, the Negro merely “reflects the nature of his environments” (*Contending Forces* 272). In the South, the Negro is brutalized and his character reflects this brutalization; in the North, the Negro is treated more equitably, and therefore has an elevated character. Smith cites a case in New Hampshire in which a Negro defendant received his rights under the law. After making his counterargument against deportation, second-class citizenship, industrial education, and the Negro as a rapist, Smith calls for social “agitation” to educate American citizens and the “civilized” international community about the Negro Question.¹³ He places his program of racial uplift and social agitation within the larger question of life itself and then quotes Psalm 68:31 as the last line of his speech.

Smith employs the verse, but an explicit explanation of it is absent. He outright rejects emigration to Africa as a prophetic possibility, but leaves the interpretation of the verse open-ended. He uses Psalm 68:31 as a sort of proof-text at the end of his speech, but with a twist. The last sentence of his speech, which includes Psalm 68:31, reads, “Lift ourselves upward and forward in this great march of life until ‘Ethiopia shall indeed stretch forth her hand and princes shall come out of Egypt’” (*Contending Forces* 272). Three words—“life,” “until,” and “indeed”—seem to be working strategically in Smith’s last sentence. As with previous interpreters of the verse, Smith sees Psalm 68:31 as referring to the future, but this future is unclear. The program that he proposes to the meeting of the American Colored League in response to lynching in America seems to hinge on the word “until.”

Smith’s metaphors of movement, “upward and forward,” are abiding characteristics of the figure of Ethiopia. The upward movement not only smacks of the image of maturation (the Negro is growing up), but also of the movement of the Negro from slavery (the ground) to freedom (the sky), from freedom to full citizenship and equality, and from ignorance to scientific knowledge. The metaphor of “forwardness” marks movement going straight ahead without going backward. Within the context of

Smith's speech, "forward" seems to be another sign for agitation, marking the starting point of "now" until full civil rights are obtained. The figure of walking ("march of life") suggests not so much the movement through time, but the progress obtained by the Negro.

"Until" marks a specific time, and as such it is used to separate the occurrence of one event from another. According to Smith's argument, when the program of racial uplift and social agitation concludes, then Psalm 68:31 will take place. The goal of his program of racial uplift and social agitation is the full integration of the Negro into American social and political life, meaning civil rights and equality under the law for all Americans. This is on one side of "until." On the other side of it is Psalm 68:31. The necessity of racial uplift and social agitation ends when the Negro achieves full inclusion in America. The meaning of the verse is the future attainment of goals in Smith's plan.

The attainment of full inclusion in America, and hence the end to racial oppression and racism, fulfills the verse. Agitating is an activity, a movement to include the Negro in America fully, that is foreshadowed by the stretching of Ethiopia's hand. Negro agitation for civil rights and a non-prejudicial American public—which in effect makes America into a new nation—is a movement mirroring the movement of Ethiopia in Psalm 68:31 and the redemption of princes from Egypt. The associations of America with Egypt, the place of Hebrew enslavement, or with Babylon, the place of Israelite exile, are common black American references. Because Smith is not an emigrationist, the movement out of Egypt is not the Negro leaving America. In this instance, Egypt signifies a land of injustice, racial oppression, and racism; in Smith's use of Psalm 68:31, coming out of Egypt is the Negro coming out of injustice. As his addition of "indeed" suggests, Ethiopia's inclusion in national life socially and politically—and not its deportation to Africa as the white supremacist and Negro nationalist argue—fulfills the verse.

A scene later in the novel supports this reading. The Negro question becomes the topic of conversation at a dinner party for the Boston literati. Covering much of the same ground as in the meeting of the American Colored League—emigration, miscegenation, and agitation—Smith makes an allusive interpretation of Psalm 68:31: "Agitation will do much," said Will calmly, unruffled by the other's [a southerner's] display of anger. 'It gave us freedom; it will give us manhood. The peace, dignity and honor of this nation rises and falls with the Negro. Frederic Douglass once said:

“Ultimately this nation will be composite. There is a strong demand—a growing demand—for a government capable of protecting all its citizens—rich and poor, white and black—alike.” The causes for such a government still exist. It remains to be seen if the prophecy will be fulfilled” (*Contending Forces* 300). This passage clarifies the vagueness of Smith’s closing sentence at the meeting. The figure of Ethiopia here is not the Negro per se, but the American as a result of amalgamation with Africans and their descendents. Negroes are the agents of America becoming what it claims to be: a just society. The Negro woven into the national fabric is the realization of the lofty ideas described in America’s foundational documents. In *Contending Forces*, the figure of Ethiopia loses the racial and nationalist connotations that were disseminated in the second half of the century by the interpretations of Crummell and Delany. Despite the 1896 Supreme Court decision legalizing segregation and creating the new Negro, Hopkins, working within the integrationist framework of Douglass, takes the focus off race and puts it on racism. The Negro Question is not the Negro’s problem, but rather the result of racism, racial oppression, and white supremacy in America.

Even though the work of Providence is crucial to the unknotting of the plot in *Contending Forces*, it does not play a role in Smith’s interpretation of the verse. The so-called Negro Problem in the novel is political, not religious. Agitation is a secular approach to the problem of race in America. Hopkins goes so far away from a theological usage of Psalm 68:31 that she edits “God” from the verse. American Negroes do not need to be Christianized; most of the Negroes in the novel belong to a church or seek shelter in a convent. Only one Negro character, Madam Frances, the Louisiana fortune-teller, seems to have a marginal relationship with Christianity. Smith’s speech and the absence of “God” from the verse suggest that the Negro Question is a secular, not a sacred, issue. The Negro needs to be included in American secular society, not Christianized. In the course of the novel, the grand plan outlined by Will Smith at the American Colored League and the Canterbury Club dinner party never takes shape. Hopkins’s commitment to writing a racial romance overshadows the making of a new America. Hopkins could imagine how individuals would overcome racism and the limitations of a racial upbringing and come together to form new unions, but she could not imagine how this would take place on a national scale.

The shadow of the *Plessy* decision hangs over all of Hopkins's novels, even her grand narrative of Ethiopian history and destiny, *Of One Blood: Or, the Hidden Self* (1902–3). Directly responding to *Plessy* and the grand narrative of white purity and supremacy, Hopkins writes fictions that present liminal racial characters, many of whom do not know they are Negro or who are hiding their one drop of Negro blood for fear of the social consequences. In Hopkins's fictions, these characters are ciphers of the real America due to three hundred years of amalgamation. As two separate white characters in Hopkins's novel, *Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* (1901–1902), state, "We shut our eyes to many things in the South because of our near relationship to many of these despised people. But black blood is everywhere" and "This idea of race separation is carried to an extreme point and will, in time, kill itself. Amalgamation has taken place; it will continue, and no finite power [read the Supreme Court] can stop it" (*Magazine Novels* 159–60, 270). The tangled nature of American identity, which Hopkins sees as Ethiopian identity, is what constitutes America. For Hopkins, the Negro Problem has a lot to do with the refusal of whites to embrace their Africanness and therefore include the part of the population that has been oppressed and excluded as Negroes. This theme would be further developed in Hopkins's last novel, *Of One Blood*.

The workings of Providence are absent in *Contending Forces*, but in *Of One Blood* this idea returns and is intertwined in Hopkins's figuration of Ethiopia and interpretation of Psalm 68:31. The figure of Ethiopia in *Of One Blood* constitutes both the alpha and omega of the Negro, but also of Western civilization. In a move reminiscent of Augustine, Hopkins folds the figure of Ethiopia within the timeless agency of God. Recall Augustine's explanation for the promise of the ultimate fulfillment: for God there is no past or future, all time to God is the homogeneous present. In *Of One Blood*, the past is the present and the future. Even though chronological time has passed, neither chronological time nor geographical location alters the essential nature of blood—in particular Ethiopian blood—or, in the terms of the nineteenth century, race.

Of One Blood. Or, the Hidden Self is a serial novel that appeared in the *Colored American Magazine* in November 1902 and ran until November 1903. Written in the form of a love story, a racial romance much like *Contending Forces* and *Hagar's Daughters*, it is the story of three characters, Reuel Briggs, Aubrey Livingston, and Dianthe Lusk, who were raised

separately and without any knowledge of the others' existence as blood siblings. Reuel and Aubrey are friends and medical students at Harvard University; Dianthe is a member of the Fisk University Jubilee singers. Reuel and Aubrey are Negroes, but Reuel is passing, while Aubrey believes that he is white and the son of a southern aristocrat and former slaveholder. Dianthe is light enough to pass as a white woman, but lives her life as a Negro. As the subtitle "*Or, the Hidden Self*" suggests, the problem of racial identity, which is hidden due to the history of amalgamation in the United States, is at the crux of Hopkins's novel. This identity is manifest in the course of the novel. As an essence, something always already there, Ethiopianness needs to realize itself out of the shadow of whiteness. The resolution of the problem of identity constitutes the plot of the novel, but there are a number of complications that both impede and facilitate this knowledge. One complication is the love triangle among Reuel, Aubrey, and Dianthe. Another complication is Reuel's journey to Ethiopia, leaving Dianthe behind in Boston, and thereby escaping Aubrey's plan to assassinate him so Aubrey can marry Dianthe. It is Reuel's journey to Ethiopia that sets him on the path to his real racial self and status.

The figure of Ethiopia in *Of One Blood* is a racial-romantic historicism of epic proportion. Hopkins gives her version of the Afro-Asiatic myth in language reminiscent of Delany's *The Origin of Races and Color* (1879), only she provides a detailed narrative of Ethiopian history and destiny. As in most romanticized narratives of literary nationalism, *Of One Blood* tells the story of the past glories of ancient Ethiopian civilization with its own royal line, the reason for its fall (the sin of idolatry), and its rebirth in the character of Reuel, a messianic figure of the royal line, and his marriage to Queen Candace. The symmetry of Hopkins's plot to the larger Christian understanding of time should not be overlooked because it suggests that universal history is Christian history and thereby erases the specific histories that are non-Christian. In other words, Ethiopian history per se is not at stake in Hopkins's novel, but rather the romanticized figure of Ethiopia's history that Hopkins creates.

References to and interpretations of Psalm 68:31 occur four times in *Of One Blood*. Each occurrence takes place in Africa, and in each case, Psalm 68:31 is verbally altered and poetically extended. The first appearance of Psalm 68:31 is allusive in nature. Professor Stone, an "apostle of learning," a scientist and Orientalist, a man of authority, tells the expedition party the history of ancient Ethiopia. His story is more biblical than scientific,

even though he claims the latter supports the former. Using biblical genealogy, Professor Stone puts forth an Afro-Asiatic myth of civilization as a product of Ethiopian peoples: Babylon (eastern Ethiopia) and Cush (biblical Ethiopia). In the midst of his story, two remarks are made by white Americans that account for Hopkins's interest in Ethiopia and its relationship to the American Negro: "Great Scott! . . . all this was done by *niggers*?" and "It is hard to believe your story. From what a height must this people have fallen to reach the abjectness of the American Negro" (*Magazine Novels* 532, 534). Professor Stone's history negates the American narrative of black barbarism.¹⁴

Stone's story recounts how he obtained the manuscripts and map leading to the hidden city of Telassar in ancient Ethiopia. Befriending a native camel-driver, who, in true narrative romantic fashion, spoke "the purest and most ancient Greek and Arabic," Stone receives literary evidence: a parchment and a chart pointing to Ethiopia's hidden treasures (*The Magazine Novels* 534). Furthermore, the nameless but well-spoken camel-driver gives Professor Stone an oral prophecy not included in the manuscript. This prophecy is a variation of the figure of Christianized Ethiopia popularized by black exegetes of Psalm 68:31 in the nineteenth century: "... that from lands beyond unknown seas, to which many descendents of Ethiopia had been borne as slaves, should a king of ancient line—an offspring of that Ergamenes who lived in the reign of the second Ptolemy—return and restore the former glory of the race" (*The Magazine Novels* 534–35). The allusions to Psalm 68:31, modern New World slavery, and missionary emigrationism are apparent in the quote. Whereas earlier hermeneuts of Psalm 68:31 usually cited and interpreted the verse, Hopkins does them one better; she collapses previous figures of Ethiopia into a new mythic Ethiopia with its own messianic hero, Ergamenes, the ancient king of Ethiopia who, according to Diodorus, was a philosopher and obtained a Greek education (Snowden 186). The hero in *Of One Blood*, Reuel Briggs, stands in a figural relationship to the ancient Ethiopian King Ergamenes because he is the fulfillment of the prophecy, Ergamenes, in the twentieth century. At this point in the novel, Briggs does not know that he is Ergamenes; his true self is hidden from him. The plot of the novel concerns the revelation of his true self, and the true selves of all Negro Americans, and the true history of Ethiopia, as they emerge in space and time.

In many theological interpretations of Psalm 68:31 examined in previous chapters, slavery is represented as a "fortunate fall." To make sense

of the vicissitudes of history, the narrative of the “fortunate fall” places African enslavement in the hands of Providence instead of human beings. Seen as a secular event, New World slavery could be understood as random and meaningless. Those enslaved could become nihilistic about life and the possibilities of justice. However, seen from a theological perspective, slavery could become a meaningful event. Slavery becomes the means to a Christian life and spiritual salvation. The latter notion of slavery and its effect on Negro Americans and the remnant of Telassar is present in *Of One Blood*. Professor Stone’s story of ancient Ethiopia focuses on its past glories. Just as the persona of the Negro covers the Ethiopian self, the ruins and sand of the Upper Nile hide Ethiopia’s treasure, its past, and more importantly, its future. As one member of the expedition, Charlie Vance, an American and white supremacist, reflects amidst the ruins of Meroe:

This is what he had come for—the desolation of an African desert, and the companionship of human fossils and savage beasts of prey. The loneliness made him shiver. It was a desolation that doubled desolateness, because his healthy American organization missed the march of progress attested by the sounds of hammers on unfinished buildings that told of a busy future and cosy [*sic*] modern homeliness. Here there was no future. No railroads, no churches, no saloons, no schoolhouses to echo the voices of merry children, no promise of the life that produces within the range of his vision. Nothing but the monotony of the past centuries dead and forgotten save by a few learned savans [*sic*]. (*Magazine Novels* 526)

The ruins are material evidence of an ancient civilization that once existed, but which no longer occupies that particular place. In Professor Stone’s conversation with Reuel, he explains that Egypt attacked Ethiopia and the latter’s priests escaped and hid the treasures of Ethiopia in the vicinity. In the course of the expedition, Reuel comes face-to-face with the past in the present through Ai, the minister to the coming king, Ergamenes. Ai’s position gives his words authority, but his ancestry is even more significant in Hopkins’s novel; Ai and the remnant are unmixed “direct descendents of the inhabitants of Meroe” (*Magazine Novels* 547). It is from Ai that Reuel learns the true reason for the destruction of ancient Ethiopia: “Destroyed and abased because of her idolatries, Ethiopia’s arrogance and pride have been humbled in the dust. Utter destruction has come upon Meroe the

glorious, as was predicted. But there was a hope held out to the faithful worshippers of the true God that Ethiopia should stretch forth her hands unto Eternal Goodness, and that then her glory should again dazzle the world" (*Magazine Novels* 547–48).

Sin, the central figure in the Christian understanding of world history and the significance of Christ, also accounts for the fall of Ethiopia. It explains slavery and transforms the Middle Passage into a great baptismal pool. The figure of Ethiopia is one freeing itself from the bonds of its idolatry and pagan past and submitting itself to God, its Christian present and future. Ai's theological explanation of Ethiopia not only cites Psalm 68:31b directly, indicating that he is familiar with the biblical text, but he also engages in a reading of it. Ai's utterance ties the Christianization of Ethiopia to its reemergence on the world stage of history. The rebirth of Ethiopia is contingent on Negroes becoming Christians.¹⁵

This reading of Ai's interpretation of Psalm 68:31 is confirmed when he discovers the hidden sign, the lotus-lily birthmark on Reuel's breast: "By divine revelation David beheld the present time, when, after Christ's travail for the sins of humanity, the time of Ethiopia's atonement being past, purged of idolatry, accepting the One Only God through His Son Jesus, suddenly should come a new birth to the descendents of Ham, and Ethiopia should return to her ancient glory! Ergamenes, all hail!" (*Magazine Novels* 558–59). Ethiopian history is part of universal Christian history. Like Christ, Ethiopia has suffered. Ethiopia suffered due to its sins, and Christ suffered to redeem sins, such as the sin of idolatry. Attention must be paid to Ai's announcement and his interpretation of Psalm 68:31. The present moment of the novel is foreshadowed in the psalm, the prophecy is being fulfilled in his presence, and the process of Ethiopia's rebirth has begun.

In *Contending Forces*, Will Smith rejects the interpretation of Psalm 68:31 as a prophecy of Negro emigration to Africa. When Ai makes a similar interpretation of the biblical verse, Reuel does not offer a counter-reading. Continuing his interpretation of the verse, Ai reshapes the tense of it. The biblical verse puts Ethiopia's action into the future: "Ethiopia shall stretch . . .," thus giving credence to interpretations that it is a prophecy. Ai rewrites the verse, via his understanding that Reuel is Ergamenes, into an event that is taking place now and is oriented toward the future: "Ethiopia, too, is stretching forth her hand unto God, and He will fulfill her destiny. The tide of immigration shall set in the early days of the

twentieth century toward Afric's shores, so long bound in the chains of barbarism and idolatry" (*Magazine Novels* 573). Put differently, according to Ai's alteration of the verse, the present is not in the shadow of the past as with standard interpretations of the verse in black American letters; the present is in the shadow of the future. Instead of a future action, Ethiopia is performing the action now under God's agency. We are a long way from Wheatley, who cautiously sees the verse being fulfilled with the Christianization of Africans, but who maintains the future orientation of the verse, "Ethiopia shall soon stretch. . . ." Wheatley is well aware that the addition of "soon" signifies not long after the present moment: "I hope that which the divine royal Psalmist says by inspiration is now on the point of being accomplished" (Wheatley 176). However, the moment has not taken place yet; the present and future are still in the shadow of the past. Within Hopkins's novel, the figure of Ethiopia is an instance of *Jetztzeit* and the fullness of time is contracted within it and is ready to explode. The future of Ethiopia is one of possibilities. Reuel, the Harvard-educated Negro American, son of the Ergamenesic line, and Crummell-like hero of Hopkins's novel, has returned to Ethiopia, thereby initiating the return of those Ethiopians exiled to the New World as slaves. He is returning to Africa with English civilization and Protestant Christianity.

Despite Hopkins's figure of Ethiopia as emigrationist and regenerative, only Reuel and his Aunt Hannah emigrate to Ethiopia. He returns to bring his people into the twentieth century. In *Of One Blood*, there is not a mass exodus of Negroes emigrating from the New World to Africa's shores. At the end of the novel, the narrator defers to the mystery of Providence and the future of Africa without referring to Psalm 68:31. Instead, the narrator focuses on Acts 17:26: "Of one blood have I made all races of men." The plot engine of Hopkins's novel is the love triangle among Reuel Briggs, Aubrey Livingston, and Dianthe Lusk. Reuel and Aubrey vie unknowingly for the hand of their sister, Dianthe. In a twisted tale of slavery, miscegenation, incest, deceit, and murder, Aunt Hannah tells Dianthe that she, Reuel, and Aubrey are the children of Mira, her daughter, and Dr. Livingston, the son of Master Livingston, and that all share psychic powers and a lotus-lily birthmark signifying their Ethiopianness.¹⁶ Furthermore, Mira is the half-sister of Dr. Livingston because they share the same father. The Livingston family history, a synecdoche of American history, leads the narrator to make this apostrophe:

The slogan of the hour is "Keep the Negro down!" but who is clear enough in vision to decide who hath black blood and who hath it not? Can any one tell? No, not one; for in His mysterious way He has united the white race and the black race in this new continent. By the transgression of the law He proves His own infallibility: "Of one blood have I made all nations of men to dwell upon the whole face of the earth," is as true today as when given to the inspired writers to be recorded. No man can draw the dividing line between the two races, for they are both of one blood! (*Magazine Novels* 607)

In true American fashion, Hopkins makes the American racial situation into a global phenomenon. This passage and the final sentence of the novel suggest the racial amalgamation of the world, at least between the so-called black and white races. The figure of Ethiopia is on the way to rebirth, not as a black nation, as was the case with ancient Ethiopia, but as a new and therefore modern, racially amalgamated nation under the leadership of its amalgamated and modern king.

Since *Of One Blood* juxtaposes Acts 17:26 and Psalm 68:31, it raises the question: What is the relationship of these two verses in the novel? The former constitutes an Afro-Asiatic Christian history of the world. For instance, the title, the relationship among Reuel, Aubrey, and Dianthe, and the moral of the novel all come back to one theme: human beings, regardless of phenotype, are one race. This is a major point in Hopkins's novel; external or phenotypic differences are incidental and mask an internal commonality shared by all *Homo sapiens*. The latter focuses on Ethiopia's role in the general history of the world. In *Of One Blood*, Ethiopia is the alpha and the omega of world history; it is the cradle of monotheism and civilization that has declined and degenerated into the spiritual darkness of paganism. This is where Psalm 68:31 becomes crucial to Hopkins's novel. Ethiopia's history and its future, its glorious restoration, are understood as central elements of God's activity in world history that emerge in the reading of Psalm 68:31. Reuel is seen as the fulfillment of the figure, the agent to restore Ethiopia's brilliance and bring Ethiopians back to God. In the vision of Hopkins's novel, God's fulfillment of his word amounts to the Christianizing of the world and the recognition of "brotherhood" among all peoples, or "races" in Hopkins's language. In other words, *Of One Blood* is a utopian story. For the narrator, the assertion of Act 17:26 trumps the

prophecy of Psalm 68:31. The universalism of the New Testament negates the particularism of the Old Testament.

American Romance II: Griggs's Story of Race Mixing and Ethiopia

Shortly after the publication of *Of One Blood*, the Rev. Sutton Griggs published a similar tale of miscegenation, segregation, love, betrayal, and race in postbellum America, and an interpretation of Psalm 68:31, *The Hindered Hand: Or, The Reign of the Repressionist* (1905).¹⁷ Griggs was a key player in popular black literature at the turn of the twentieth century. Even though *The Hindered Hand* was not actually a serial novel, Griggs's style was heavily indebted to the serial form. A characteristic of the serial novel form was its use of "cliffhanger endings" that served to close one installment and simultaneously seduce the reader into looking forward to reading the next one. Griggs employed the cliffhanger form at the end of many of his chapters. The structure of *The Hindered Hand*, common to all of Griggs's novels, was short episodic chapters that introduced characters and situations and highlighted plot conflicts.

In dynamics reminiscent of Hopkins's novel and Homer Plessy's conflict in New Orleans, *The Hindered Hand* opens on a segregated train. In this setting, a number of the novel's principle characters are introduced to the reader. Eunice Seabright is sitting in the white section of the train. Her sister, Tiara Merlow, is sitting in the Negro section of the train, as are two friends, Earl Bluefield and Ensal Ellwood. The former man is light enough to pass as white and the latter, a minister, is of a "dark brown" hue. Earl and Ensal are troubled by the institutional racism and violence that Negroes suffer from, particularly lynching (there are three lynchings described in the novel), but they disagree as to the proper methods to change this problem. Earl advocates self-defense and political agitation while Ensal promotes Negro improvement and self-advancement. The Seabrights, legally Negro by dint of the *Plessy* decision, are also fighting against racism, but they attempt to undo it by infiltrating the structures of power and passing as Anglo-Saxons. At the same time, this novel is a tragic love story: tragic due to American racism. Earl and Eunice marry, but their happiness is undone when Eunice is forced to live as a Negro. She goes mad and is institutionalized in a northern hospital, and her marriage to Earl ends. Race also interferes with Ensal and Tiara's relationship. Fearing that Tiara is in love with a white man, Ensal emigrates to Liberia to *redeem*

and uplift the race; however, Ensar returns when he learns that the white man in question is not Tiara's beau, but her brother, the Rev. Percy Marshall. After his return, Ensar proposes a third political party based on "human rights and the civil and political equality of all men" (287). He marries Tiara and returns to Africa to prepare it as a possible home for American Negroes if racism and injustice continue in the United States. Griggs weaves these two strands so that the problem of race infects the two love stories. Griggs's love stories are only a narrative device, a popular motif, to "tell" the story of American racism and at the same time critique it.

In spite of the appearance of Psalm 68:31 on the title page, *The Hindered Hand* only makes allusions to the psalm; the verse is never directly quoted. The title, read within the context of the novel, suggests that American racism, in particular the politicization of phenotype and lynching, is the force that stops the American Negro from succeeding in America. The figure of Ethiopia in this allusion is specifically American, and its movement is one of racial uplift and equality in the United States. Racial oppression does not allow the American Negro to raise his or her hands; thus Ethiopia cannot enact the verse in the midst of living with white Americans. It is American racism that sends Ensar Ellwood to Liberia to pursue missionary emigrationism.

The generalization of the figure of Ethiopia as a synecdoche for Negro Americans constitutes the major theme of the novel, but Griggs also employs the movement attributed to Ethiopia in the biblical verse to present the melodrama of race and its effect on individual characters. For example, in the court scene in which Eunice Johnson (née Seabright) stands trial for bigamy, her sister Tiara Merlow, who has the phenotype that makes her a Negro in the eyes of white Americans, tells the story of Eunice's family history and how she is not a bigamist, and "stretch[es] forth her hands appealingly [to Eunice] and says, 'Sister, come let us leave this country! Come'" (235). Tiara embodies the figure of Ethiopia at this moment in the novel; Ethiopia is stretching out to gather all of her family unto herself. Acting like mother Ethiopia, Tiara extends her arms to Eunice, a child of Ethiopia who though publically is "white," is being welcomed back into the race and is offered emigration to Liberia.¹⁸ According to the narrator, Tiara stretches forth her hands to Eunice "appealingly." An appeal is a request to another, to respond and reevaluate a decision. In this instance, Tiara is appealing to Eunice to remain a Negro. Furthermore, due to the

problem of racial caste, Tiara's gesture toward Eunice is combined with the imperative to leave the country, an imperative reminiscent of God's order to Abram in Genesis 12.

Tiara's testimony drives Eunice insane; she is institutionalized and becomes the tragic mulatta character of American literature.¹⁹ She denies that she is Negro and insists that she and her child are more white—in particular Anglo-Saxon—than Negro: "I am a white woman. My blood is the blood of the whites, my instincts, my feelings, my culture, my spirit, my all is cast in the same mould as yours [the white people in the court]."²⁰ During the course of Eunice's plea, she stretches her hands to the white male jury and asks them to find her guilty of bigamy, but not condemn her child to the Negro race (236). Eunice's stretch recalls the figure of a submissive Ethiopia. Both movements by Tiara and Eunice indicate that Psalm 68:31 not only served as a way for black readers to make sense of their present, their history, and their destiny, but it also provided dramatic images that could be used in fiction.

Another allusion to Psalm 68:31 occurs in Ensai's farewell letter to an organization dedicated "to the general uplift of the race" before his first trip to Africa (196–97). He exhorts them to remain "racially pure" so that it will be evident that they have a "blood relationship to Africa," because with this blood connection, Negro Americans will be able to redeem and uplift the continent (198). Ensai argues that Negro American racial purity is an issue of global importance; the redemption of Africa is dependent on Negro Americans as the agents of redemption and uplift. Ensai's mission to Africa is an articulation of missionary emigrationism.

The last allusion to Psalm 68:31 in Griggs's novel occurs in the final paragraph. Here Ensai and Tiara marry and emigrate to Africa to prepare a home for Negro Americans if America does not extend and guarantee civil and human rights to the Negro. It is the struggle for civil and human rights that "cause[s] the Ethiopian in America to feel that his is indeed 'The Hindered Hand'" (292). The allusion to Psalm 68:31 is clear, but the image is disfigured. Instead of "Ethiopia stretching her hand to God," the Ethiopians in America cannot reach their potential because of the racialization of civil and human rights. The obstacle produced by racial prejudice impedes the modernization of the Negro American. In Griggs's novel, there is tension between "the hindered hand" and missionary emigrationism. The novel implies that the latter is only an option if the former remains the political condition of the Ethiopian in America. Even though

Griggs was a racist, he was also a patriotic American who wanted what we would call “equal rights” for all citizens. This position is born out in Griggs’s other novels, in particular *Imperium in Imperio* (1899).

The novel ends as most Negro fiction ends that addresses the problem of race in America, with the question: What to do? Tiara and Ensal marry and go to Africa “to provide a home for the American Negro” (292). According to *The Hindered Hand*, the Ethiopian in America, the Negro American, at the beginning of the twentieth century is faced with a decision: stay in America and hope that democracy and equality overcome racial oppression and hierarchy, or emigrate to Africa and start anew. Using Eunice and Earl as indices of this decision, the narrator ends the novel with another allusion to Psalm 68:31: “should the demented Eunice prove to be a wiser prophet than the hopeful, irrepressible Earl; should the good people of America, North and South, grow busy, confused or irresolute and fail, to the subversion of their ideals, to firmly entrench the Negro in his political rights, the denial of which, and the blight incident thereto, more than all other factors, cause the Ethiopian in America to feel that his is indeed ‘The Hindered Hand’” (292). Griggs’s secularization of Psalm 68:31 is interesting. Granted, Ensal Ellwood is a Christian minister, but he is more a race man than a religious man. The narrator’s final words are also highly secular in that he transforms Psalm 68:31, a verse that for much of the nineteenth century was interpreted and labeled a “prophecy,” to a secular prefiguration of Eunice about the embedded nature of race and racism in American culture. The opposition of the Christian figure of Ethiopia and the plight of Eunice suggest that the problem of race in America is greater than Providence. The belief that white people will be forced by God to acknowledge the humanity and dignity of Negro life and persons in America is called into question by the emigration of Ensal and Tiara, two of the outstanding examples of cultured, enlightened, and Christianized Negro Americans in Griggs’s novel. This suggests that the possibilities of equality in America for the Negro are slight or nonexistent. A Negro Christian writer—and a minister no less—would not have heard of such an opposition in the nineteenth century. But in the postbellum, post-*Plessy v. Ferguson* America in which thousands of Negroes were lynched, Griggs was pessimistic about America’s ability to solve the race problem.

A common feature in a number of Sutton Griggs’s novels are appendices in which he addresses the problems of his fictions with nonfictional

solutions. In *The Hindered Hand*, Griggs employs the emigration of Ensal and Tiara to Africa and their work among the Africans as his dream rather than the dream of the Negro American in general. Griggs's personal agenda is to engage in uplifting Africa out of the spiritual and intellectual morass of darkness. This is an agenda that mirrors nineteenth-century missionary emigrationism, but there is more. Like his fallen Eunice, he is not sanguine about the possibility of America ending its racial repression. In America, Griggs fears that the figure of Ethiopia will always be bound by racism and hence will not be able to obtain the political, social, economic, and cultural opportunities that America has. The last sentence of Griggs's "Notes for the Serious" at the end of *The Hindered Hand* advises Negro Americans to look to Africa and emigration as a possible solution to the American race problem. Missionary emigrationism is, according to Griggs, "a fact that must never be overlooked by those seeking to deal with this grave question [the Negro Question] in a practical manner" (297). This sentiment is one of the reasons that Wilson Moses in *The Wings of Ethiopia* (1990) refers to Griggs's fiction as "literary Garveyism."

The figure of Ethiopia in *The Hindered Hand* is a new development in the history of interpreting Psalm 68:31. Griggs employs the image of hands in the verse to add to the melodramatic nature of his racial family romance. Tiara pleads with Eunice to rejoin her family and her race, and Eunice pleads with the white jury to accept her and her son into their racial family. Griggs also uses the image of hands to represent the effects of racism on the Negro American: racism binds the Negroes' hands, thereby inhibiting their movement. Of course, hands are more than mere body parts; they allow our species to materially and spiritually advance. In their movement, they connote freedom, in their embrace, fellowship and love, and in their ability to grasp, understanding. For hands to be bound is for them to be crippled, and physically and socially ostracized. American racism cripples the Negro, ostracizes him from his fellow citizens and even his family members, and inhibits his ability to succeed in life. The imagery of the hands from the psalm provides the theme for Griggs's novel.

Even though Griggs retains the language of missionary emigrationism, his understanding of Psalm 68:31 is secular and political. The American figure of Ethiopia is no longer under the purview of Providence, but of history. It no longer animates the will of God, but is situated in the world, and it interprets the political and racial landscape of the moment and re-

sponds accordingly. The figure of Ethiopia in Griggs's *The Hindered Hand* is a secular human engaged in the political struggles of its day.

Zora, You is My Woman Now

Contemporary with the writings of Hopkins and Griggs is W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911). As with *Of One Blood* and *The Hindered Hand*, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* is a love story. Blessed (Bles) Alwyn, a naïve rural Georgia boy who walks to Toomesville, Alabama to attend a Negro school, meets Zora Cresswell, an illiterate, superstitious, unworldly, and "immoral" resident of the local swamp. Bles becomes Zora's friend, beau, teacher, and co-worker in the cotton field. After almost losing Zora because she nearly works herself to death protecting the cotton crop from a weeklong rain, Bles asks God to curse him "if I let me lose her again!" (155). Within the narrative organization of a love story, such a curse merely foreshadows a breakup, and Bles leaves Zora after he discovers that she has lost her virginity to the son of the swamp owner, Harry Cresswell. Both Bles and Zora leave Toomesville after their separation—Bles to escape Zora and take his mission of uplifting the race to Washington D.C., and Zora to escape Cresswell and further her education. They reunite three years later in Toomesville, but the dynamics of their relationship are transformed. Zora becomes Bles's teacher and the leader of the working poor in the town. Zora rejects Bles's first proposal of marriage after his return, but once she successfully obtains the swamp legally from the Cresswells and wealth has been redistributed among some of Toomesville's residents, the novel ends with Bles professing his love for her and Zora responding, "Will you—marry me, Bles?" (434).

Within this traditional narrative of "boy meets girl—boy loses girl—boy wins girl," there are three allusions to Psalm 68:31. Du Bois's allusions are readings against the institutional interpretations of the verse. The first occurs when Elspeth, the conjure woman, prepares to meet Death: "Tremblingly, she swayed to her feet, a haggard, awful sight. She motioned Zora away, and stretching her hands palms upward to the sky, cried with dry and fear-struck gasp: 'I'se called! I'se called'" (209). This passage seems to be a parody of the institutional figure of Ethiopia and her submission to God through conversion, but Elspeth is not repenting for living a life as an un-Christian conjure woman. She is meeting Death to embrace it. As

a black woman, Elspeth is an Ethiopian who stretches her hands to God. Her movement is not in fulfillment of a prophecy, but the action of a person at the brink of death embracing her fate. Absent is the synecdochic interpretation of Elspeth representing the people of Ethiopia; she is a singularity. The fear of death that hovered over Kate Drumgoold in her slave narrative, referred to in a previous chapter, is foreign to Elspeth.

The second allusion to Psalm 68:31b is another reference to a Negro lifting his hands skyward, but as in the previous example, it is devoid of the usual associations linked to the verse. Preacher Jones “stretch[es] his long arms to heaven,” but his action is foreign to Zora (372). The narrator describing Zora’s thoughts during this moment calls Preacher Jones’s prayer and his kneeling congregation “mummery” (372). To Zora, humans, not God, are responsible for history and destiny. Set on the swampy edges of an Alabama plantation during Reconstruction, Zora sees the possibility of Negro advancement residing neither in God nor in white men, but in black people and poor rural white people bonding and taking control of their economic future. In this region of the United States, such control means black people and poor whites owning land, farming it, and selling the fruit of their labor. In this passage, the allusion to Psalm 68:31b is emptied of its religious and institutional meaning. Preacher Jones is a comic and tragic figure who misleads his flock, praying for salvation instead of creating it. He is presented as a man working to keep the Negro in his place, and therefore subservient to wealthy white landowners.

The last allusion to Psalm 68:31b occurs when Bles returns to Tooms County, Alabama (after losing his civil service position in Washington D.C.) and sees Zora for the first time in three years. He returns expecting to find Zora three years older, and still intellectually and emotionally immature: “[Bles] had left her on her knees in the dirt with outstretched hands, and somehow he had expected to return to some corresponding mental attitude” (378). The image in Bles’s mind of Zora outstretched in ignorance corresponds to the previous usages of Psalm 68:31b in *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*. Whereas Wheatley, Allen, and numerous other interpreters of Psalm 68:31 read Ethiopia’s submission as a positive action, a step toward God and salvation, Du Bois associates Ethiopia’s submission—in this case Zora’s submission—as a negative action. Zora outstretched is Zora face down in the mud and wallowing in ignorance and immorality.

This image contrasts with the character of Zora in the novel. By the time Bles returns to Toomesville, Zora can boast, "This is my university," as Bles regards her books: the *Republic*, Gorky's "Comrades," Tennyson's poems, Balzac's novels, Spencer's "First Principles," and a Cyclopaedia of Agriculture (399). It is Zora who stands up against the wealthy white land-owners; it is she who tricks them into selling the rich land of the swamp to grow her cotton, and unites the white mill workers and black share-croppers. After the first fruits of Zora's and Bles's labor, the silver fleece (the conjured cotton crop from Cresswell's swamp) is stolen by Harry Cresswell, and Zora is resolved to find a "Way" to overcome the limitations of race and peonage. Near the end of the novel, after being exposed to the ways of the world and obtaining a literate education, Zora finds "the Way": "she would protect *all* black girls. She would make it possible for these poor beasts of burden to be decent in their toil. Out of protection of womanhood as the central thought, she must build ramparts against cruelty, poverty, and crime" (359). To be able to protect "*all* black girls" from the predatory forces of wealthy white men, Zora realizes that the Negro community in Toomesville needs land to ground labor, residency, and community (362). Instead of submitting to God, Zora submits to the Jetztzeit of her moment. The time for landless people to own land, accumulate wealth, and provide for their own progress is now. Zora seizes the moment and does something new. She creates a cotton crop that can enter the market, compete, and be sold alongside the products of the white plantation owners.

Reading to Historically Emerge

As we have seen, for many black readers, Psalm 68:31 became a dominant heteronomic subject constituting text that is the basis of how they made sense of the their world, their history and destiny, and themselves. The final example of the figure of Ethiopia in black fiction was published in 1982. Readers of *The Color Purple* know that Walker's novel is a contemporary instance of epistolary fiction. The letters, written by Celie and Nettie, constitute the story of the novel. The first third of the novel is comprised of Celie's unsigned letters to God. In these letters, Celie pours out her heart to God about her trials and tribulations and her loveless life in the homes of her "father" and Mr. _____. In Celie's very first letter she writes, "Dear

God, I am fourteen years old. I have always been a good girl. Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me" (Walker 1). Structured like an oral prayer, but written in the form of a letter, Celie confesses her life to God in writing and asks God to help her make sense of it. This initial letter is just one in a series of letters that Celie writes to God, informing the divine, yet absent, interlocutor of her life. They all take the same form, "Dear God," and end without Celie's signature.

The absence of Celie's signature in her letters is an important linguistic omission. Without Celie's signature, the use of the first person pronoun is put in question. Linguistically, "I" refers to the speaking or writing subject, but "I" in an oral situation functions differently than "I" in writing. Orally, when one refers to oneself in the course of speaking, the speaker employs "I." This "I" is understood as a word pointing back to the speaker who is speaking. In writing, one might assume the same indicating function is at work for the pronoun "I," but this is not the case. When "I" is used in writing, a question emerges: whom does "I" refer back to, the writer, the narrator, or the character? For example, does the "I" in *Invisible Man* belong to the writer, Ralph Ellison, or the narrator and character Jack-the-Bear? The novel answers this question when, at the end of the prologue, the narrator gives a name, Jack-the-Bear, to replace the pronoun "I." This sole reference to a name clarifies whom "I" refers to in *Invisible Man*. Until the name Jack-the-Bear is given, "I" is a pronoun without an antecedent proper noun. Without this antecedent, particularly in writing, "I" is readable as a grammatical subject of a phrase and as an instance of language taking place, but whom it refers to remains unreadable. Using "I" without the antecedent is a linguistic erasure of the proper noun and who it stands for; it makes the person of the "I" invisible and ineffable. The name of "I" cannot be articulated.

In *The Color Purple*, Celie does not use her name until her seventh letter, and when her name does appear, it is as an object in her father's discourse with Mr. _____: "But I can let you have Celie" (8–9). After this moment, the association of "I" and Celie is made, but Celie writes as if she is talking to God instead of writing to Him. For example, Celie prefaces a number of the letters from Nettie with "say," "the first one say," "Next one said," "Next one say," indicating that she understands letters as an oral medium (131, 133, 134, 136). She presents herself as a person having a conversation with an interlocutor who has asked her a series of questions to which she is responding to orally, even though as the second

sentence of the novel makes clear, she is writing. Recall that Celie crosses out “I am” and replaces it with “I have always been. . . .” This editorial moment, the only time Celie crosses out words, and her way of referring to her husband, “Mr. _____,” are graphic acknowledgements by Celie that she is writing to God instead of speaking to Him.

The answer to Celie’s prayers arrives when she is able to read Nettie’s letters that Mr. _____ has kept from her. In these letters, she finds out that Nettie is a missionary in Africa, the man she thought was her father is really her stepfather, her children are alive and well and under the watchful eye of her sister, and that she is loved. It is in the course of reading Nettie’s letters that Psalm 68:31 is quoted, the process of reading is presented, and a figure of Ethiopia emerges.

In the fifth letter Celie has read—but the fourth one written by Nettie—Nettie writes about the images of Africa in her mind. After Nettie establishes that she is writing from Africa and is living with missionaries from her hometown, she writes, “But I never dreamed of going to Africa! I never even thought about it as a real place.” Nettie then fills Africa not with Africans, but with the stereotypical images of Africa taught in American schools in the early decades of the twentieth century: “Miss Beasley used to say it [Africa] was a place overrun with savages who didn’t wear clothes” (137). These images of Africa are completely displaced when Nettie starts to read about Africa:

In the morning I . . . started reading all the books Samuel and Corrine have on the subject [Africa].

Did you know there were great cities in Africa, greater than Mill-edgeville or even Atlanta, thousands of years ago? That the Egyptians who built the pyramids and enslaved the Israelites were colored? That Egypt is in Africa? That the Ethiopia we read about in the Bible meant all of Africa?

Well, I read and read until I thought my eyes would fall out. I read where the Africans sold us because they loved money more than their own sisters and brothers. How we came to America in ships. How we were made to work.

I hadn’t realized I was so *ignorant*, Celie. The little I knew about my own self wouldn’t have filled a thimble! (138)

In language stylistically and rhetorically different from Douglass, Nettie makes the same claim for reading that he does: the eventfulness of reading

has transformed her. To make her case, Nettie employs conversion-like language to illustrate her transformation from ignorance to knowledge. Furthermore, reading has provided a deictic anchor for Nettie to emerge as a historical subject who is engaged in her world. She can now make sense of her world, her position in it, and her history.

In Nettie's next letter, the heuristics of reading is referenced again, but in this letter it is related to Psalm 68:31b. In Samuel's church in Georgia a banner hangs over the pulpit reading: "*Ethiopia Shall Stretch Forth Her Hands to God.*" Nettie interprets this to mean, ". . . Ethiopia is Africa! All the Ethiopians in the bible were colored" (140). Nettie reads Psalm 68:31b as if the past, the biblical verse written over twenty-five hundred years ago, is referring to her present. She is in Africa to bring Africans to the light of Christ, to bring them to the truth.²¹ This is Ethiopia lifting her hands to God. But Africa, according to Nettie, is merely another name for Ethiopia. Therefore, her mission to Africa is foreordained by the verse. Moreover, Nettie racializes the verse in the language of American racial discourse: the Ethiopians are "colored." Nettie's choice of adjectives is significant. "Colored," within the historical context of the novel, is used among "black people" to differentiate class and ancestral backgrounds. Often it is used as a marker of difference from "Negro," or it is a polite designation used to avoid the more problematic terms of "Negro" and the dreaded "black." "Colored" is also a designation for any person who is nonwhite. It is this last point that is important to Nettie. The people of the Bible—the Egyptians, the Ethiopians, and even the Israelites—were colored people, not white people. Nettie instructs Celie to read the graphic signs in the Bible and she will see this truth (140–41). The racial makeup of biblical people is important to Nettie because she is trying to negotiate both the narratives of colored inferiority and white supremacy.

Nettie's interpretation of the Bible produces a number of figurations, such as biblical people as colored, and Ethiopia as a synecdoche for Africa. But these figurations also undo her production as a subject to what she has read. In her letters to Celie, Nettie attempts to rewrite history in which colored people—especially those in antiquity—are the makers of civilization and the agents of history. The history she writes to Celie is the "colored" version of the modern Eurocentric conception of temporal history. Nettie's reading bookends history; ancient Africa to the future Christianization of colored people contains all time, and places Nettie,

her adopted family, and Celie within its flow. Nettie's universe makes sense to her; she understands it and puts it in her letters. Nevertheless, her transcendental understanding of human history erases the articulations of her subjectivity. According to Nettie's letters, written well after the eventfulness of reading, she is a transcendental subject who is an agent of history. The dispersed nature of her position as a reader is displaced by an abstract transcendentalism. She writes on the world, her life, and history from above, not from within their midst and their configurations. From this non-place, Nettie stops being a reader; she erases her emergence as a historical subject, writing modern stories that represent history as "beads on a rosary" that narrativize her world, its past, and herself, and place them within homogeneous, empty time. In other words, Nettie rejects the possibilities and uncertainty of figural history and its dispersed subjectivity for the modern grand narratives of historical progress and transcendental subjectivity.

Even though Celie does not respond to Nettie's reading of Psalm 68:31b or the verse itself, reading Nettie's letters transforms Celie from a human doormat to a historical subject engaged in her world. After reading a number of Nettie's letters Celie has the strength to stand up to Mr. _____. In fact, Shug Avery—who is both Mr. _____'s and Celie's lover—has to talk Celie out of killing Mr. _____ for hiding Nettie's letters from her. Celie also writes in one of her last letters addressed to God, "Now I know Nettie alive I begin to strut a little bit" (154). Reading Nettie's letters gives Celie a new sense of herself as a person. It affects how she walks in the world. Furthermore, Celie begins to sign her name at the end of her letters to Nettie. This could be seen as Celie mimicking the form of Nettie's letters to her. It is the case that Celie, under the formal influence of Nettie's correspondence, begins some of her reply letters "Dearest Nettie" and ends some with "Your sister, Celie," but Celie's signature goes beyond mere mimicry (221, 223, 232, 247, 253).

Celie's first signature, which she sometimes combines with her name and sometimes does not, is "Amen," the Hebrew-English word that means "so be it" and "truly." The word functions linguistically like an interjection without an emotive connotation, but in its performance it is a pure articulation of situatedness. By signing "Amen" at the end of her letters, Celie indicates that her letter was written, and that there exists something to read. This legible something is not Celie's subjectivity or herself, but

it is something personal. The proper name, “Celie,” is the name of the articulation, the link between the letters of Nettie she has read as a reader and the letters she has written to Nettie as a writer.

Prior to reading Nettie’s letters, Celie wrote letters to God without receiving a response, a letter to read. She wrote from a non-place and in the abstract. She did not live her life; she watched it as if it belonged to someone else. Despite the compelling nature of Celie’s stories of abuse, loneliness, and lovelessness, Celie as a historical subject and as a person was lacking articulation. When Celie reads Nettie’s letters, when her person is addressed as “Celie” and she is the addressee, the “you,” of Nettie’s letters, Celie as a historical subject emerges, and she marks this emergence by signing her letters. In these letters, Celie notes her transformation from one who watched her life as if it was taking place on a Nickelodeon to one who lives her life and is actively engaged in the world. In the longest letter that Celie writes to Nettie, she is no longer afraid of Mr. _____. United in their love for Shug, Mr. _____ and Celie become friends, and they even discuss the contents of Nettie’s letters. By the end of the novel, Celie is transformed by reading Nettie’s letters; she emerges from “an addressee” to becoming a historical subject. She no longer refers to her husband as “Mr. _____,” but refers to him by his first name, Albert.

The Color Purple presents both Nettie’s and Celie’s emergence as historical subjects through the process of reading. Nettie reads books about Africa and the Bible, and in so doing, can articulate who she is in the world and her relationship to it. Nettie’s reading situates her toward the Olinkas as human beings and allows her to account for her physical existence, a Negro American missionary in Africa. Psalm 68:31b provides Nettie with a scriptural basis to link both the Ethiopians of the verse and Negro Americans as being “colored people.” For Nettie, this association is important and helps her make sense of the world. Celie also responds to the writings she has read. Nettie, as a name, indicates an articulation between what Celie reads and what she writes. Celie reads Nettie’s letters and they situate her, not toward the Olinkas or Nettie’s missionary life and trials, but in relation to Mr. _____, Shug, her stepfather, and her life in the American South in the 1920s and 1930s. Neither Psalm 68:31b nor Nettie’s interpretation of it resonates with Celie. To Celie, it is much more important to learn that Nettie is alive, that the man she believed to be her father is really her stepfather, and that her children are alive and well, and they are not her siblings. Celie emerges as a historical subject after reading

Nettie's letters. In response to Mr. _____'s comment that she is "nothing at all," Celie says to him as she is leaving, "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, . . . But I'm here." Reading Nettie's letters has given Celie the power to proclaim her being in time and space, her presence. Celie's historical situatedness is something nonexistent to Mr. _____, but the "Amens" that come out of Shug's mouth verify her existence (214). These interjections acknowledge Celie's statement of historical presence. It does not matter who says or writes "Amen," because the word marks the betweenness, the articulation, the place where historical subjects emerge.

The Novel and the Absence of the Final Word

The novel as a literary form offers narrative possibilities that other genres do not. It is almost cliché, but the novel is the modern representational literary form *par excellence*. Beyond being able to represent the world and the events within it, the novel also has the ability to represent the interior life of characters and their quest to discover themselves and fix their identity. In addition to its representational power, the novel presents the possibility of participating in an endless dialogue in which there is no final word. The craftsmanship of the novelist is the linking of opposing phrases and discourses to create fictional worlds and possibilities for human action. Within the novel, words are the arena of signifying conflict. In this jostling of different deictically anchored accents, no one accent wins out, even if it claims a position of authority. For example, in many black American novels, the legal and normative social position vis-à-vis the Negro is presented, and in each instance when a word pretends to be the final word, it actually is not. When legal decisions are cited that separate the Negro from the citizens of the United States, or when scientific judgments are made that put the Negro beyond the pale of humanity, black American novels present an accent on "the final word" of the law or science as juxtaposition, therefore making "the final word" dialogic.

The explosion of novels either grounded in Psalm 68:31 or alluding to it did not constitute a dominant trend in black American fiction. The first major literary work of the century, James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), did not even hint at the hermeneutic or literary figure of Ethiopia. Johnson's novel prefigures the turn to the vernacular that many black American novels would follow for the rest of the twentieth century. By the 1920s, the era of the Harlem Renaissance,

while the question of race and miscegenation continued to be at the forefront of many black narratives, the figure of Ethiopia in black fiction was out of vogue. As discussed in the previous chapter, Psalm 68:31 continued to resonate as a topic of sermons, addresses, songs, and poetry, and it was instrumental in the articulation of Garveyism and the decolonization of Africa, but the figure of Ethiopia derived from it stopped being a topic for black novelists until Walker's *The Color Purple*.

The novelization of the figure of Ethiopia had a short and disjunctive history. Starting with Delany's *Blake*, emerging in the late 1850s in response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, one would have thought that the possibilities of contributing to the literary-mythological formation of Ethiopia would have drawn the attention of many black writers after slavery. As we have seen, the sheer grammatological open-endedness of "Ethiopia" and its action provided a treasure trove of hermeneutical and figural possibilities. Despite the possibilities that the novel offered to form a sense of collective identity and represent the world and how readers should orient themselves to it, the figure of Ethiopia could not capture the imagination of black novelists other than Hopkins, Griggs, Du Bois, and Walker. Even with Walker's use of Psalm 68:31 in her highly popular and influential novel, the figure of Ethiopia has faded as a serious literary theme in black American fiction.



Figural Exhaustion

Parodying the Figures of Ethiopia

The Emancipation Proclamation, even with its exceptions, marked a watershed moment in American history. By an executive order, the slaves held in Confederate states were proclaimed free. Even though only three-fourths of the American slave population was covered under Lincoln's proclamation (the other one-fourth of the slaves in areas and states still faithful to the Union fell outside of Lincoln's constitutional powers and hence the purview of the proclamation), it was one of the early steps taken during the war that would eventually change the course of life for both slaves and free people of color in America. This road would eventually transform all slaves into free men and women, from human chattel to United States citizens; however, this transformation lacked the suddenness of Gregor Samsa's overnight metamorphosis from man into vermin. It took more than three years after the end of the Civil War for "all persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to its jurisprudence" to become citizens of the United States. The legal and historical significance of the Fourteenth Amendment cannot be overstated because this was an event that transformed the Negro and colored populations—and by extension, the majority white population—in the United States. For the first time in American history, Negroes and colored people had constitutional rights as citizens. Despite the creation of Black Codes and other means of repression, and even the failure of Reconstruction, the passing of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments constituted a legal and political break with antebellum America for slaves and free people of color. The legal end of slavery, the incorporation of Negroes and

people of color as American citizens, and the right to vote made Negroes and people of color Americans.

The Civil War and Reconstruction had a chilling effect on the interpretation of Psalm 68:31 and the figurations of Ethiopia in the United States for almost thirty years. Before 1861, the hope that princes would leave Egypt and the promise that Ethiopia would lift her hands to God dropped from the lips and dripped from the pens of ministers, emigrationists, journalists, abolitionists, writers, and poets in the United States. For almost one hundred years (from Wheatley's 1774 letter to the Rev. Samuel Hopkins to Crummell's publication of the *Future of Africa* in 1862) the emancipation of the slaves, free people of color, and West African Negroes from the shackles of ignorance and heathenism and from the tyranny of irresponsible power (slavery and the denial of civil and human rights) were tied to the figures of Ethiopia that emerged out of the engagement between black readers and the *grámmata* of Psalm 68:31.

The Union victory and Reconstruction had a profound effect upon black exegetes of Psalm 68:31. Their hopes and dreams derived from reading Psalm 68:31 went into what I will call "figural hibernation." American democracy was in the midst of redefining itself and so were the various "black" populations (Negroes, colored people, the Latins, and the Seminole Negroes) in the United States. For decades, the figure of Ethiopia was dormant. It appeared sporadically between 1865 and 1896 (for example in Edward W. Blyden's *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 1888, and in Delany's *Origin of Races and Color*, 1879), but by and large it did not reemerge until its renaissance in the middle of the 1890s. Nevertheless, it was during this period of figural hibernation that Douglass employed the figure of Ethiopia and turned it into one of parody. Douglass, followed by Ralph Ellison, took away the authority of the figure of Ethiopia by reducing it to the level of comedy. Instead of rendering Ethiopia as a sacrosanct figure, Douglass and Ellison made fun of it. These parodies indicate that the hermeneutical trajectory of Psalm 68:31 among black readers had turned inward and begun to cannibalize itself. This activity created new figures of Ethiopia that were disfigured and resonated with poetic power, yet lacked the religious, mythical, racial, and moral authority of their predecessors.

Criticizing the Freedmen

Recall Douglass's second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), published during slavery. Psalm 68:31 appeared in the last sentence of the penultimate paragraph of his narrative. Douglass's interpretation of the verse, as we have seen, neutralized Ethiopia as a figure of Christian conversion, racial or national identity, and missionary emigrationism. As Richard Allen before him, Douglass was an ardent American who did not believe that phenotype should exclude Negroes and colored peoples from the political and social fabric of America. In 1869, he argued that the United States was a composite nation and therefore should include and enfranchise all people within its borders (Blassingame and McKivigan 240–59). In his usage of Ethiopia derived from Psalm 68:31, Douglass de-Africanized it, and in doing so, refigured it. His figure of Ethiopia was the free people of color obtaining culture and thereby elevating their status in antebellum America. Douglass was hopeful that the elevation of free colored people would eventually lead to the end of slavery.

Douglass de-Africanized the figure of Ethiopia during slavery, but in his postbellum writings he makes it one of ridicule. On two separate occasions, the first in a speech given in Louisville, Kentucky in 1873, "Recollections of the Anti-Slavery Conflict," and the second in an address made in St. Michaels, Maryland in 1878 (the place where Frederick was Thomas Auld's slave), "Coming Home," Douglass takes the proud figure of Ethiopia and turns it on its head. In the first instance, Douglass criticizes the lack of thrift and forethought of the freedmen. He argues that if the freedmen want to be responsible, respected, and equal citizens they must be independent:

No people can be respected who are not independent; a man may pity you if you have not got money, but he cannot respect you. He may be sorry for you, poor fellow, and wish you had some, but he has not respect for you. But the trouble with many of us now is that as soon as we get money we want to travel. Ask a colored man in Chicago how long he has lived there, and he will say about six months. "Well, where did you come from when you came to Chicago?" He answers, "I came from Detroit." "How long did you live in Detroit?" About three months. "Well, where did you live before you went to Detroit?" "I came from Buffalo, N.Y., and lived there about

three months. (Laughter.) I have been traveling all over, and as soon as I got money enough I came to this place." Old age overtakes such a man and then what? Here it is Ethiopia stretching forth his hand again. He is always stretching out his hand. (372–73)

The figure of Ethiopia here is begging, one who cannot fend for himself. Ethiopia's stretch is a request for a handout; it is a figure of economic and social dependency. Gone are the figurations of conversion, liberation, elevation, and emigration; Douglass's parody of the postconversion and postemancipation figure of Ethiopia is free to do what he wants and to go where he pleases, but this freedom is ill spent and his choices are infantilizing. Douglass, in no mean terms, presents the figure of Ethiopia who still thinks like a slave, a dependent being who needs verbal prodding to take full control of his emancipation.

Four years later, Douglass was still beating the drum for Negro independence, and employing the figure of Ethiopia in a parodistic manner. Challenging his Negro audience to disprove the hierarchy of race and with it white superiority and Negro inferiority, Douglass once again presents the figure of Ethiopia as a dependent beggar. The following quote is from the *Baltimore Sun* and is written from the reporter's perspective:

A poor people are always a despised people. To be respected they must get money and property. Without money there's no leisure; without leisure no thought, without thought no progress. Their preachers should tell them more about what to *do* and less about what to *feel*. They should cultivate their brains more and their lungs less. They should not depend upon being helped, but should do for themselves. He was tired of Ethiopia's holding out her hands. The man that can get up would be helped to do it. They should not depend upon the Lord for everything. The Lord is good and kind, but is of the most use to those who *do* for themselves. No man has a right to live unless he lives honestly, and no man lives honestly who lives upon another. (480)

In 1877, states' rights were returning to the forefront of the American social and political scene. The grand national ideas of radical republicanism that ended slavery, made the freedmen citizens, gave them the right to vote, and protected their civil rights were disappearing, and a new, conservative Republican party was emerging from its ashes. The *Baltimore Sun*

reporter who covered Douglass's speech might have tilted his message to echo southern voices that complained that the Negro was given special social and political privileges due to Reconstruction; however, this is probably not the case. Douglass was critical of freedmen who did not take control of their lives. During slavery, he made himself into Frederick Douglass through literacy and auto-emancipation. The more salient aspect of Douglass's speech is his critique of religion, and hence one of the institutional interpretations of Psalm 68:31. The figure of Ethiopia stretching to God is submissive and prayerful. For Douglass, this figure had exhausted itself. The freedmen must take matters into their own hands if they wished to succeed in the world.

In 1873 Douglass de-Africanized the figure of Ethiopia, and in 1877 he de-Christianized it. No longer in chains, Ethiopia's emancipation also became part of the antebellum history of Psalm 68:31. Douglass's position toward the figurations of Ethiopia is indicative of the general usage of the figure of Ethiopia among Negro Americans from the end of slavery to *Plessy v. Ferguson*. During this period, the figure of Ethiopia went into hibernation. Douglass uses it as a parody and to prod Negroes into becoming competitive and independent citizens in America. Even though the emigrationists and racial nationalists such as Delany, Blyden, and Crummell continued to employ the figure of Ethiopia in their writings, the usages of Psalm 68:31 diminished in their frequency and signifying elasticity after the Civil War. As seen in the previous chapters, the repeal of the 1875 Civil Rights Act as unconstitutional in 1883, the American epidemic of lynching, and the legalization of segregation in 1896 enflamed the rebirth of the figure of Ethiopia and a series of refigural interpretations of Psalm 68:31. Nevertheless, for Douglass in the 1870s, the figure of Ethiopia was one to parody.

The Rise of Orality and Alienated Characters in the Twentieth-Century Black Novel

After the rebirth of the figure of Ethiopia in the mid-1890s and in the first three decades of the twentieth century, especially during the Garvey movement, once again the interpretations of Psalm 68:31 by black American readers began to fade. The emergence of folktales, songs, music, and dance into black American literature as subject matter displaced the Bible and allusions to and interpretations of Psalm 68:31. By the late

1930s, replacing the tradition of the figurations of Ethiopia as the foundation stone of a national Negro literature, Richard Wright launched a program for the development of a vernacular Negro literature ("Blueprint for Negro Writing," 1938), one that he claimed would reflect the largely illiterate consciousness of the Negro masses.¹ Wright, in many respects, echoes the turn to the "Negro herrenvolk" and the vernacular for Negro authenticity, which was a movement away from the tradition of literacy developed in the nineteenth century and articulated during the 1920s in publications such as James Weldon Johnson's *Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922) and *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* (1927), and Alain Locke's *The New Negro* (1925).² Wright reiterated the importance of the vernacular and Negro literature in "The Literature of the Negro in the United States" (*White Man, Listen!* 1957). One of the major architects of the Black Arts Movement, LeRoi Jones, reinforced the logocentric metaphysics of presence and the black voice in his essay "The Myth of Negro Literature" (1963).

The turn to the vernacular accompanied the transformation of "Negro writing" into "Negro Literature," but this alone did not bring about the retreat of the figure of Ethiopia in black letters in the middle decade of the twentieth century. There were a series of forces working in the first half of the century in the United States that made the story of Ethiopia, derived from interpretations of Psalm 68:31, inadequate for post-World War II black Americans. First, Garvey's imprisonment and deportation for mail fraud disfigured the figure of Ethiopia into a spiel of a confidence man exploiting the religious and racial dreams of an already oppressed people. Respected Negro writers and leaders such as George Schulyer, Du Bois, and A. Philip Randolph were instrumental in presenting Garvey as a charlatan and his plan for Negro colonization of Africa as bunk.³ Second, the migration and urbanization of Negroes north and west was more than a demographic shift; it signaled a crisis of Negro institutions—in particular the family and the church. The effects of that crisis were represented in alienated literary characters such as Bigger Thomas (Wright's *Native Son*, 1940), Bob Jones and Lee Gordon (Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 1945, and *Lonely Crusade*, 1947), Lutie Johnson (Ann Petry's *The Street*, 1946), Jack-the-Bear (Ellison's *Invisible Man*, 1952), Walter Lee Younger (Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, 1958), Negro-Sarah (Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, 1962), Clay Williams and Walker Vessels (Jones's *Dutchman* and *The Slave*, 1964), Sula Peace, Milkman Dead, and Jadine Childs

(Morrison's *Sula*, 1973, *Song of Solomon*, 1977, and *Tar Baby*, 1981), Zooman (Fuller's *Zooman and the Sign*, 1980), and Troy Maxson (Wilson's *Fences*, 1986), who were at odds with themselves, tradition, their families, and their communities. In 1993, Cornel West called this the problem of urban black Americans' nihilism, or "*the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness*. The frightening result is a numbing detachment from others and a self-destructive disposition toward the world" (14). Third, the twentieth century witnessed a dramatic rise of college-educated black readers and writers. Due to their university and scientific training, many of these were skeptical of the religious and mythological nature of the figure of Ethiopia or had cut their ties with the Protestantism of election, prophecy, and Providence. Lastly, and probably most importantly, despite the legal, economic, political, and attitudinal hurdles that black people continued to face in the second half of the twentieth century which separated them from the larger and heterogeneous white populations in the country, black people became increasingly interwoven into the new, post-World War II, "multicultural" national fabric in a geographic, educational, professional, social, political, linguistic, and cultural sense. In other words, as black Americans became more integrated into America, and America became culturally "blacker," the figure of Ethiopia became less and less relevant to the black imaginary, and the interpretations of Psalm 68:31 grew rare.

Sidestepping Ethiopian Historicism

Given the displacement of the figure of Ethiopia by the illusion of the black voice, the secularization of the black imaginary, and the dismantling of numerous structures of segregation, the fading and ultimate disappearance of Psalm 68:31 in black American letters in the 1950s makes sense. One of the last literary references to Psalm 68:31 in black American fiction occurs in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). Whereas in the novels of Hopkins and Griggs the figure of Ethiopia takes on mythic proportions, in post-World War II America the figure was suffering from a second bout of figural exhaustion.⁴ For almost two hundred years, the figure of Ethiopia had been defined and redefined into numerous and conflicting figurations by black Americans, but by the time it reached Ellison, it was a figure associated with madness; Ethiopia is not mad, but those who employ the figure are. In the two instances where Psalm 68:31 appears in *Invisible Man*,

the figure of Ethiopia is a joke and not to be taken seriously.⁵ Ellison refigures Ethiopia in ways that are reminiscent of Douglass.

The first appearance of the figure of Ethiopia occurs in chapter 3, at the Golden Day. After hearing Trueblood's blues—his story of taboo sex (miscegenation and incest)—Mr. Norton becomes completely unhinged to the point of a breakdown. The hero, Jack-the-Bear, can only think of the Golden Day, a bar and brothel (or as Jack-the-Bear calls it, a "sporting-and-gambling house"), as a place to get Mr. Norton something to revive him. The movement from Trueblood's cabin to the Golden Day is merely a movement from the proverbial frying pan into the fire. One of the powerful structural elements of *Invisible Man* is the insertion of Jack-the-Bear into chaotic events that he has to read, negotiate, and attempt to make sense of without getting killed. He takes his bumps and bruises (the blues), but he manages to live with his head in the lion's mouth without losing it. The Golden Day is another site of chaos in *Invisible Man*, and it is from the mouth of an inmate from a nearby insane asylum that the figure of Ethiopia is articulated.

After being verbally accosted by numerous inmates calling him Thomas Jefferson, Mister Eddy, and John D. Rockefeller, and being knocked out by another inmate, Mr. Norton gets an Ethiopian history lesson from one of the patients enjoying his afternoon at the Golden Day: "I'm a student of history, sir,' another interrupted with dramatic gestures. 'The world moves in a circle like a roulette wheel. In the beginning black is on top, in the middle epochs, white holds the odds, but soon Ethiopia shall stretch forth her noble wings! Then place your money on the black!' His voice throbbled with emotion" (81). Citing part of Psalm 68:31b, the inmate hits upon many of the familiar figurations of Ethiopia in nineteenth-century black literature: the figure of idyllic Ethiopia, the figure of fallen Ethiopia, and the figure of phoenix-like Ethiopia. The inmate's improvisation on Psalm 68:31, with "her noble wings," could be an allusion to Delany's *Origin of Races and Color* (1879), which employed the figure of the phoenix with long wings as an emblem of Ethiopia along with the motto "we regenerate ourselves" (80–83). Another possible allusion is to the appearance of a set of wings with an hourglass between them and a banner underneath, containing the inscription, "The End," at the end of Griggs's novel *The Hindered Hand*. In the context of Griggs's novel, this image seems to signify the decision that Ethiopia (the American Negro) must make concerning emigration or remaining in America. A third possibility

is that the “wings of Ethiopia” could be an allusion to Isaiah 18:1 (“Ah, land of the buzzing of wings, / Which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia”), a verse that John W. Gilbert, a minister in the Colored Methodist Church and president of Miles Memorial College in Birmingham, Alabama, refers to as a prophecy about the rise of black Africa (Hill and Kilson 119). While all of these are possible intertextual allusions in *Invisible Man*, I believe there is yet another literary reference with the use of wings in this passage.

The inmate’s history lesson is set within a simile of a game of chance, roulette. Even though the roulette table is circular, it is sheer chance whether the ball lands in a white or a black space, unless the board is rigged. The inmate suggests that the game is rigged because there seems to be a preordained order to where the ball comes to rest: first black, then white, and then black again.⁶ This would be Providence, the agency that has accompanied the figure of Ethiopia since Wheatley’s letter. But Providence or any rational agent does not guide history in *Invisible Man*; history is governed by chance. As Jack-the-Bear discovers in his bruised and battered life, history is a boomerang, the course of which is unknown. Time is out of joint, the falcon has flown outside the falconer’s range. The literary reference informing the inmate’s addition of “wings” to Psalm 68:31 is Yeats’s poem, “The Second Coming.” Similar to the inmate’s circular theory of history (and Jack-the-Bear’s metaphor of the boomerang), Yeats also presents a circular history in “The Second Coming,” but instead of history returning to some sort of initial equilibrium as in the inmate’s understanding of Psalm 68:31, the hopeful Parousia is disfigured and hence unfulfilled (Hunter 483–84). The irony of the inmate’s reference is lost on him, but not on the reader.⁷ One can bet on the black, but there is no guarantee that the black will win. And even if it does, there is no guarantee that equilibrium will be restored. There is no redemption in *Invisible Man*, no point for Jack-the-Bear, Mr. Norton, Trueblood, Brother Jack, or America to start again. One is always in the midst of living, incessantly reading (and hence being inscribed), linking phrases and discourses.

To drive home the point after this clearly articulated Ethiopian version of history and destiny, Ellison’s inmate breaks into babble: “His voice throbbed with emotion. ‘Until then, the sun holds no heat, there’s ice in the heart of the earth. Two years from now and I’ll be old enough to give my mulatto mother a bath, the half-white bitch!’ he added, beginning to leap up and down in an explosion of glassy-eyed fury” (81). The figure of Ethiopia in the mouth of the inmate loses its signifying power; it is

disfigured in his speech. The story of Ethiopia's once-idyllic past and the romanticization of Ethiopia common to the figure in nineteenth-century black literature are present, but its merger with suggestions of incest and profane language has disfigured it. The signifying power of Ethiopia in the nineteenth century was its sacred purity and ability to allow black Americans to transcend the violence and absurdity of American slavery and racism. The figure of Ethiopia in the mouth of the inmate does not transcend America, but is caught within it and all of its material salaciousness. It functions much like the tattoo of the American flag on the naked blonde's stomach at the smoker at the Battle Royal (19). It is obscene.

The second appearance of Psalm 68:31 occurs in a scene reminiscent of the Battle Royal. On a dark Harlem street, Jack-the-Bear, Tod Clifton, and some men from the Brotherhood fight with Ras the Exhorter and some of his men. As in the Battle Royal chapter, an oration and a dialogue takes place, only this time Ras is giving a lecture, with a Garveyesque theme, to Jack-the-Bear and Tod on their duty to the race as black men. Both Jack-the-Bear and Tod respond to Ras's racial essentialism as madness. Departing from the scene, Clifton, mimicking Ras's Jamaican accent and his nationalist ideology, says, "Ethiopia stretching forth her wings" (376). Nevertheless, the meeting with Ras is instrumental in Tod's and Jack-the-Bear's eventual departure from the Brotherhood. The closing dialogue between Tod and Jack returns to the question of history posed throughout the novel. Tod's analysis of Ras is that his racial nationalism is a narrative safety valve; it has pushed him outside of history, but it has probably prevented him from murder or being institutionalized.

To be outside of history, according to the Brotherhood, is to be outside a scientific material understanding of society and change, or of cause and effect. Ras's passion and appeal to the superstition and mysticism of race is completely outside of history from the perspective of the Brotherhood. Nonetheless, various interpretations of Psalm 68:31, such as the figure of the Ethiopian race and the unity of black people, also reflect a historical understanding just as modern as the Marxist analysis of the Brotherhood. Instead of the romantic figure of Ethiopia where Providence makes history, men make history, and both the nationalists' and the historical materialists' ideological positions create stories that attempt to explain history and submit it to human understanding.

As with the roulette wheel in the Golden Day chapter, or even the second paragraph of chapter 1 when Jack writes, "And yet I am no freak of

nature, nor of history. I was in the cards . . ." history in *Invisible Man*, even though it is man made, does not submit to a grand narrative or narratives of explanation (15). Narratives explaining history are asymmetrical to the events they attempt to explain. This incessant gap between the event and the narrative is the space where the agency of chance plays. Neither the historical materialists, the academic American social scientists, nor the nationalists can manage, negotiate, or eliminate chance. Eventually, both Tod's selling the Sambo dolls and Jack's retreat to the underworld step outside of history, because they ultimately reject the Brotherhood's scientific understanding of it and its policy toward Harlem, and both embrace the possibilities of chance. Tod ultimately becomes a hustler selling paper dolls, and Jack becomes first Rinehart and then a blues hero.

Nevertheless, Tod's allusion to Psalm 68:31 as a way of identifying and summarizing Ras's racial chauvinism demonstrates how ingrained the associations of this single biblical verse are to the ideologies of nation, race, and uplift among literate black Americans. Black American nationalism, and even the non-nationalist notion that black Americans are diasporic Africans, owes a debt to the numerous interpretations of Psalm 68:31 and its refigurations of Ethiopia. In *Invisible Man*, Ras, a self-named and proclaimed African prince, embodies the figure of Ethiopia, and in doing so parodies it. As Jack-the-Bear describes him in his "African" outfit and on his horse during the riot: "A new Ras of a haughty, vulgar dignity, dressed in the costume of an Abyssinian chieftain; a fur cap upon his head, his arm bearing a shield, a cape made of the skin of some wild animal around his shoulders. A figure more out of a dream than out of Harlem, than out of even this Harlem night, yet real, alive, alarming" (556). Ras attempts to live the figure of Ethiopia as if it is a role written by the hand of Providence, and in doing so gets a spear through his jaws, brings chaos to Harlem, and facilitates the writing of Jack-the-Bear's blues memoirs.

The figure of Ethiopia in black American letters is literary in nature, and it emerged from interpretations of Psalm 68:31 by seventeenth-century Protestant Anglophones in the New World. The figure emerged from reading, and its figurations are effects of writing. As readers of *Invisible Man* know, the novel is both a picaresque tale and a Bildungsroman. Jack-the-Bear's blues existence—living with one's head inside the lion's mouth—is the picaresque element of the novel (16). He moves and is moved from one chaotic situation to another, and he is beholden to many masters, much as characters in picaresque novels are. Jack-the-Bear's American

context makes his life a nigger joke; he runs from one place to the next without advancing. The Bildungsroman aspect is the transformation of Jack-the-Bear from ranter to writer. In both instances when Psalm 68:31 is cited, the characters are speakers, not writers, and in both cases the figure of Ethiopia is parodied to the point of neutralization and disfiguration. Ellison's novel suggests that the figure of Ethiopia is anachronistic and has lost its usefulness. In the overall movement of *Invisible Man*, the figure of Ethiopia has no place. Whereas many black writers from Wheatley to Du Bois have employed the figure of Ethiopia to counter the narrative of black inferiority, Ellison does not. As the memoir of Jack-the-Bear contends, the Negro is a figment of the American imagination, but this figment is not Jack-the-Bear. In other words, the so-called Negro Problem is in the American mind; it is an image that does not correspond to the phenomenal existence of Negro Americans.

Jack-the-Bear, who is a figure of speech, may not be the Negro of the American imagination, but he must negotiate America's figuration of the Negro. In the prologue, when he nearly beats a man to death for calling him a "nigger," Jack-the-Bear must interact with the Negro in the American mind, even if he does not see himself in this mirror. Figuration is not essence, and in the economy of figures, figures are dialogic. The figure of Ethiopia, as this book has demonstrated, is an example of the protean and autopoietic nature of figures. The figurations of Ethiopia take many articulations and orientations, all of which are the figures of Ethiopia, and none of which exhaust it. The figure of Ethiopia is both Crummell's grand narrative of an Afro-Asiatic myth and Douglass's parody of Ethiopia begging. There is no final figuration of Ethiopia. The Negro as a figure is also dialogic, and therefore must be (not in a metaphysical sense) both a figure in the American mind and a self-defining blues hero as is Ellison's Jack-the-Bear.

Furthermore, the figure of Ethiopia in the work of many black American writers is employed to reject the history of slavery and the Americanness of the Negro. I elaborated on the function of Afro-Asiatic myths of the past in chapter 6, but such myths have no place in *Invisible Man*. Jack-the-Bear clearly starts his history, and the history of all Negro Americans, with the end of the Civil War: "And yet I am no freak of nature, nor of history. I was in the cards, other things having been equal (or unequal) eighty-five years ago [1865]. I am not ashamed of my grandparents for having been slaves. I am only ashamed of myself for having at one time

been ashamed. About eighty-five years ago they were told that they were free, united with others of our country in everything pertaining to the common good, and in everything social, separate like the fingers of the hand" (15). Ellison's novel argues that Negro Americans are a historical and emergent population. This is not to suggest that Negro Americans magically appeared in 1865 with no biological or cultural antecedents, but the end of the Civil War and the passing of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments produced a people who never existed prior to 1865. This date constituted a new beginning and metamorphosis of the chattel slave into an American citizen. Taking the historical emergence of Negro Americans seriously, Ellison has no need for the figure of Ethiopia. By the early fifties, following on the heels of the integration of the United States armed forces in 1948 by President Truman's executive order, and anticipating the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision overturning *Plessy* and making segregation unconstitutional, Ellison does not see Negro Americans as diasporic Africans, unsaved heathens, chosen people, or people subject to a verse in the Old Testament. He sees Negro Americans as the quintessential Americans and hence as modern human beings. Ellison's Negro American is so integrated into the cultural and historical fabric of America that America has been and continues to be Negro just as the Negro has been and continues to be Americanized. Only the illusion of race covers the amalgamated cultural and historical nature of America.

Conclusion

Reading and Refiguring the Figures of Ethiopia

A given of modernity is that subjects of knowledge precede objects of knowledge, that subjectivity is prior to reading. This not only puts the proverbial “cart before the horse,” but more importantly, it erases the eventfulness of reading and makes the subject an ahistorical or transcendental abstraction. The positing of an always already subject effaces the asymmetry of the subjectless, non-situated reader and the historical subject that emerges from the eventfulness of reading. This book argues that subjects are historical and that identities are figures of reading that have been transformed into narratives, but they are not ahistorical substances.

The figures of Ethiopia in this study are figures of reading, images of thought that emerge with the engagement between readers and a single biblical verse: “Princes shall come out of Egypt; / Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.” The effects of reading are the following: Readers are deictically situated as historical subjects. They become, if only for a moment, tangible presences. As historical subjects, anchored readers act in the world and interact with other human and inhuman intelligences, such as writing, by counterphrasing or riposting a phrase to the one they have given voice to as readers. In addition, the agency of time contained within the figure provides readers with the possibilities to not only experience the intensities of life, but to invent counternarratives and new stories to live. For example, Wheatley’s historical subjectivity and its engagement in “the world” are spiritual rather than physical in nature. She is concerned with the unconverted and unsaved African soul. According to Wheatley’s view of the world, the Negro in the New World and England has access to the Gospel and the possibility of conversion and

salvation. Nevertheless, the Negro in Africa is bereft of the benefits of the Gospel due to the sheer dearth of Christians in Africa. This is a state of emergency that demands immediate attention and the establishment of Christianized Negroes in Africa. Douglass's historical subjectivity during slavery understands Psalm 68:31 as a call to form literate and educated free people of color into a critical mass to undo slavery. Nearly two decades later, Douglass disfigures the figure of Ethiopia to critique the freedmen and their lack of initiative. Linking phrases oriented black readers toward Psalm 68:31, other *grámmata* (silent written signs), the world, and the human beings in it. Anchored as articulations between phrases, black readers became part of the ever-expanding social, political, religious, and linguistic fabrics of America, Africa, and the world.

A Return to Reading

Since the seventeenth century and George Fox's inclusion of the Negro within the divine story of God's grace, the figure of Ethiopia has been a collection of stories attempting to meet a human need: the quest for adequate stories to educate, entertain, make sense of the world and events, and most importantly, to produce time, or lived experience—what German philosophy calls *Erleben* as opposed to *Erfahrung* [conceptual experience]—for readers to live and act. All readers of Psalm 68:31, not merely Wheatley and Douglass, emerge as historical subjects, deictically anchored in the world, and from their situatedness, engage the world with an oppositional riposte. Psalm 68:31 is not a magical verse that uniquely produces historical subjects. Every event of reading does this. But this obscure verse from a poem over twenty-five hundred years old, written in a foreign script and translated into English in modernity, has been one of the principle vehicles that situated black readers in time and space so they could interact with their world.

From readers situated in time and space emerge stories, narratives to make sense of their historical subjectivity. To understand the figures of Ethiopia in black American letters, one needs to see them as stories that attempt to be adequate for their moments. When stories no longer make sense, they are no longer told. As an investigation of the figure of Ethiopia in black American letters, this book is a particular tracing of larger human activities: reading and telling stories. Despite all the hype and propaganda

about the naturalness or providential nature of the figures of Ethiopia in black American letters, in all of their articulations they are nothing but stories; or to be more exact, a collection of stories derived from reading Psalm 68:31. This is not to denigrate the figures of Ethiopia or stories. The latter are as necessary to human life as food and water. The former are the figures of this critical inventory. Nonetheless, the figures of Ethiopia are material fictions that have been mistaken for foundational and transcendental substances.

The figures of Ethiopia emerged from the eventfulness of reading. They were responses to an unredeemable debt that readers of Psalm 68:31 owed to the verse's *grámmata*, an irreducible Other, which inscribed them in time and space. These stories attempted to make sense of the reader's historical inscription, but in so doing they erased the moment of the reader's emergence as a subject and left the illusion of subjectivity in the narratives of homogeneous time: salvation, self, race, nation, origin, citizenship, and destiny. Despite the inherent abstraction of narratives of homogeneous time, reading is always concrete in that it is an engagement with something that is at once outside and irreducibly Other than the reader. All readers are other than themselves, asymmetrical to themselves, or liminal, because all readers can only be deictical anchors of phrases in memoria; no reader can comprehend the otherness of *grámmata* or make himself commensurable to it. The heteronomy of *grámmata* is what all readers must negotiate and manage. The quest for identity, both personal and collective, is an attempt to erase the heteronomic nature of our existence with the fiction of autonomy and essence.

Many of the figures of Ethiopia examined in this book are attempts to establish a coherent and uniform identity. In the wake of the printing press, the universalization of literacy, digitalized information, and the ever-expanding memorial universe that constitutes our present age, the materiality that is of primary importance is *grámmata*, not phenotype or blood. The fundamental condition of the modern reader is reading the *grámmata* of unknown writers, oftentimes in translated scripts, within an infinite and ever expanding memoria. There is no final word here—only more signs and figures to read. In the event of reading, the reader is exposed to the vast memoria of *grámmata* and, because this is the case, the linking of phrases can assume an infinite number of articulations, as the figurations and disfigurations of Ethiopia demonstrate. The universal

condition of all readers is to face a readable exteriority (*grámmata*) that they can neither comprehend nor reduce to themselves. Reading constitutes historical subjects, but it does not predetermine how they will link and invent phrases. Educational institutions, ideology, and hermeneutical methods are ways of trying to determine and predetermine the possible linking of phrases, but as this book has shown, the reading of Psalm 68:31 produced figures of Ethiopia that were incessantly changing. In many instances, the figures of Ethiopia disrupted the institutional understanding of Psalm 68:31 and its attending historicisms with messianic possibilities for new knowledge and new life. The black Anglophone readers of Psalm 68:31 are “phrase linking mulattos,” historical subjects who emerge in the eventfulness of reading. Reading does not produce “black,” “Negro,” “African,” “Ethiopian,” or “American” readers, but it does create modern historical subjects who subsequently produce new stories of origin, identity, history, and destiny.

Phrase Linking Mulattos

I have called the black exegetes examined in this book “phrase linking mulattos,” and as I wrote in Chapter 7, the mulatto is an index of race in America, but I want to de-biologize and de-racialize this sign so that it can be refigured. Historically, the mulatto is the living evidence of race mixing, the coming together of two supposedly heterogeneous races. The mulatto in America is the liminal boundary for defining whiteness. Due to the de facto status of the “one-drop rule” in America, the mulatto—no matter his phenotype—is the other of whiteness. Being mixed does not bring one closer to whiteness: it is a sign of racial impurity, the very other of whiteness. In American racial thinking, the grand narrative of whiteness and purity in a biological and cultural sense are coterminous with one another; but instead of maintaining the biological and racial figure of the mulatto, we can refigure it through the eventfulness of reading.

In refiguring the mulatto, let us remember an important element about the performance of reading in ancient Greece. According to Jesper Svenbro, ancient Greeks characterized reading as pederasty in which the reader (the beloved) submits to and is penetrated by the *grámmata* of the writer (the lover). Reading thus is figured according to pederasty and Greek education. The teacher’s writing inscribes his student. The ability

to read provides the possibility for a student to learn his teacher's wisdom, and the interaction brings forth the subjectivity of the reader and a text. To read and receive the love of one's teacher is one thing, but to read the *grámmata* of and "to make the words 'of a stranger,' 'another' [*allótrioi*], sound forth" could become a vice. The irreducible otherness of *grámmata* and the violence of reading moved the Greeks to apply moral sanctions to the event. To be a reader of *grámmata* that did not come from one's teacher suggested loose morals on the part of the reader, in that he takes pleasure in being penetrated by strange *grámmata*. In the distribution of pleasure in sex, the lover derives pleasure in penetrating the beloved. If the beloved derives pleasure in being penetrated, this is a vice. Therefore, freedmen in ancient Greece had slaves read in their stead. The transformative force of *grámmata* is so powerful and alienating that only the slave should be subject to its violence, not freedmen (Svenbro 193).

The ancient Greeks understood the alienating effects of reading. Its performance makes the reader other than himself. The ability to ventriloquize the *grámmata* of another inscribes the reader into a network of signifying practices that at once constitute the reader as a historical subject and make him other than himself. Reading makes the figure of identity a complex historical entity, a material trace of the otherness of the self, both on a personal and collective level. The reader is possessed by an irreducible otherness and in giving his *lógos* to the *grámmata* a text is produced. The emergence of the text, with the reader as its deictic anchor, is a singular event of the intertwining of difference that takes place in all readings. Seen from this vantage point, all readers, not just black readers, are "phrase linking mulattos," subjects who are literally the articulation between phrases.

The encounter with Psalm 68:31, making the verse "talk Ethiopian," is one of a series of events that transformed slaves, free people of color, and Negro Americans into first historical subjects and then Americans and constituted an American literature written by these peoples. In giving their voice to the otherness of the verse, the readers of Psalm 68:31 are subjected to the signified other. These readers also signify on what they read, and in so doing produce more *grámmata* for others to read. As links between phrases and discourses, historical subjects emerge in the eventfulness of reading as articulations, or as I call them "phrase linking mulattos." Maybe this is the way we should understand presence and identity in a world where reading is a necessity.

Why Reading Matters

Why does all of this matter? What difference does it make if readers are ahistorical essences or historical subjects? Why does it matter if readers are differentiated as nouns (substances) or prepositions (that which takes place “between” phrases and discourses)? It matters in that the materiality of existence is constructed in the latter, and this provides the possibilities to rethink, reread, and rewrite our personas, our possibilities, and that which is around us. The former concept perpetuates the violence of the grand narratives of modernity, a violence not only imposed on Europeans and Euro-Americans, but also directed at and absorbed by people of color throughout the world for more than five hundred years. For centuries, people of color have both opposed and reiterated the grand narratives of personal and collective identity as constructed in Western Europe and America. The figures of Ethiopia attempt to naturalize the state of emergency imposed on black people by slavery, segregation, oppression, and racism.

The signifying power that accompanied the interpretation, and hence domestication, of Psalm 68:31, is significant. Black readers appropriated the dominant authoritative text in America, the Bible, and disfigured the Matherian image of submissive Ethiopia initiated by *The Negro Christianized*. By treating the verse as a knowable object, black readers made authoritative responses to Mather’s figuration of Ethiopia and other images and institutions designed to denigrate black people. The figurations of Ethiopia among black readers produced responses to the world that the readers found themselves in; they presented phrases, sentences, stories, and even cries to the figures written and institutionalized about them. Figural Ethiopia became significant to black churches, black social and political organizations, and black literature.

These figurations also played another crucial role. Responding to Psalm 68:31 provided one of the entryways for black readers into a dialogue with white Americans. The ability to engage in this dialogue was predicated on the emergence of black readers as historical subjects, as articulations between phrases. Without this emergence of subjectivity in time and space, there could not be a dialogue about the nature of freedom, America, civil and human rights, and justice.

Furthermore, the interpretations of Psalm 68:31 emerged out of the proximity of slaves, free people of color, and eventually Negro American

readers to literate English speaking Protestants who by the eighteenth century were defining themselves as “white.” The fact that the figures of Ethiopia both opposed and echoed the modern world and its grand narratives makes complete and utter sense. During both the colonial and postcolonial periods of American history, slaves, free people of color, and whites lived together, worked together, spoke the same language, intermarried with one another (and with Native Americans), and even worshipped together, despite their social, legal, and political inequality and segregation. The very possibility of a Negro or a free person of color as a reader was due to the social proximity of this reader to literate white people who dwelt nearby. What differentiated them was the color line, that asymmetrical figure of difference that made its presence felt in the lives of the black hermeneuts of Psalm 68:31 who read the verse in search of justice because they dwelt in the midst of injustice. Just like their white neighbors, black readers of Psalm 68:31 erased the eventfulness of reading and substituted (in an essentialist metonymy) the always already “Ethiopian subject” for the historical subject constituted in reading to oppose the always already “white subject” of the American mythology.

The figures of Ethiopia are ripostes to various articulations of whiteness that were first developed in colonial America in the late seventeenth century and became institutionalized in the centuries that followed. There is a dialogical relationship between figures of whiteness and figures of blackness. The latter attempt to provide structures to live life to its fullest, critique white supremacy and the racialization of civil rights and human dignity, and give voice to the disenfranchised. The production of black letters means that, just as so-called “white literature” was the literature of reference for Negroes and inscribed them as historical subjects, black literature has become a literature of reference for white American readers and inscribes them as historical subjects. This has been the case since George Washington’s letter to Phillis Wheatley thanking her for her poem, since Harriet Beecher Stowe’s appropriation and rewriting of Josiah Henson’s slave narrative, and since the canonization of Ralph Ellison and Toni Morrison as representatives of twentieth-century American literature.

Lastly, we must remember the eventfulness of reading that produced the figures of Ethiopia. It drops the lie on the grand narratives of modernity, but more importantly, the *Jetztzeit* of reading transformed readers into historical subjects. The agency of contracted time produced a door

for deictically anchored black readers to walk through and hence dwell in the world, and in doing so, change it, their neighbors, and themselves. Furthermore, it presented the possibilities to question, critique, and even subdue institutional knowledge and its articulations of power. Like the Apostle Paul, black readers such as Phillis Wheatley, Prince Hall, David Walker, Frederick Douglass, T. G. Steward, W.E.B. Du Bois, Zora, and Celie recognized the cries of the oppressed and the exigency of their moments, and they blasted their “specific eras from the continuum of history” (Benjamin 1969, 262). The agency of *Jetztzeit* filled their responses as these readers sent counterphrases against the institutions of oppression, but these weak messiahs, who could neither redeem nor repair, emerged in the event of reading and produced more time, and hence more possibilities for living historically in the world and with other human beings. They did not fix the past, but they reoriented their respective moments toward the future and the possibility of change [*Erleben*].

The history of the readings of Psalm 68:31 demonstrates that America is the intertwining of deictically anchored readers. Despite the visible and invisible walls that racism and its supporting apparatus of law, custom, culture, and violence attempt to build to keep the races apart, it is impossible to erase the influence of proximity. The eventfulness of reading bears witness to this. Reading always makes the reader irredeemably indebted to the otherness of *grámmata*, and it positions the reader between and in close proximity to the phrases and discourses of others. It makes others instantaneously the reader’s neighbors. The lesson of this book is that we as readers must figure out what it means to be simultaneously products of irredeemable debt to otherness and what it means to be historical neighbors, deictically anchored subjects linking phrases and discourses. These are the challenges we must face personally, locally, nationally, and globally in the twenty-first century and beyond.

Notes

Preface

1. A variety of designations are used in this book to identify “racial” populations in the United States and Africa. I follow the designations used in the texts I examine. However, at times I also employ the adjective “black” as a figure to indicate either a heterogeneous collection of people of color, as opposed to white people, or in reference to the literature commonly referred to as “African American.” This contemporary term will not be used because as a figure it suggests a grand narrative of historical and racial continuity that I find questionable.

Introduction: The Inch and Ells of Psalm 68:31

1. Psalm 68:31 is Psalm 68:32 in the Tanakh and Psalm 67:31 in the Vulgate. To avoid any confusion among these various orders of versification I will follow the Protestant versification of the Bible, King James Version, in this book.

2. Because the focus of this book is the use of Psalm 68:31 in black American letters, I will not spend too much time on its appearance in Caribbean and African letters. (This would actually constitute another book.) I do pay significant attention to Garvey and Garveyism during the height of his and its influence in the United States, but I will not engage in an exhaustive study of them after his deportation in 1927. I will refer to the writings of Edward W. Blyden (from St. Thomas) and his uses of Psalm 68:31, but he will not play a significant part in this study.

3. For another articulation of the reading methodology I follow, see Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s *Production of Presence*. In this book, Gumbrecht argues that close readings oscillate “between ‘presence effects’ and ‘meaning effects’” (2).

4. For expositions on the organization of knowledge and the formation of the subject in modernity, see Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture” in *The Question Concerning Technology* and Gumbrecht’s “Metaphysics: A Brief Prehistory of What Is Now Changing” in *Production of Presence*, 21–49.

5. See Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations*, 253–64.
6. *Ibid.*, 263. For the German, see Benjamin's *Illuminationen*, 261.
7. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 462; *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 5.1, 577. See *Illuminations* for references to "messianic time" (263) and "Jetztzeit" (261, 263).
8. See Giorgio Agamben's *The Time That Remains* (2005).
9. Svenbro, *Phrasikleia*, 63. For another discussion of reading in antiquity see Bernard Knox's "Silent Reading in Antiquity," *Greek-Roman and Byzantine Studies* 9, 4 (Winter 1968): 421–35.
10. Godzich is even more emphatic than Svenbro about the voiceless nature of writing and its relationship to reading in ancient Greece; see "Reading Against Literacy," 133. Both Godzich and Svenbro show that reading in Greek antiquity (seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E) was a sonorous event and that silent reading emerged centuries later.
11. Svenbro, *Phrasikleia*, 164. As Svenbro explains, *kléos*, even though it is usually translated as "fame" in English, "is the technical term for what the poet bestows on individuals who have accomplished something remarkable"; he adds, *kléos* "belongs entirely to the world of sound. . . . If *kléos* is not acoustic, it is not *kléos*" (14–15).
12. See "In Memoriam" (xiv–xv), Wlad Godzich's foreword to Eugene Vance's *From Topic to Tale*.
13. One of the important aspects of both Smith's and Callahan's respective interpretations of the Bible in black culture is their focus on the body. Through their discussions of conjure, black music, and dance, they bring the black body into relationship with the Bible, but this relationship is mediated by black culture and consciousness. The fixity of the latter informs the former. According to Smith and Callahan, black bodies conjure the Bible or dance it, but these bodies are already grounded in black culture and consciousness beforehand. Therefore, in Smith's and Callahan's arguments a tautology is at work: black readers read black because they are black. In Benjamin's notion of reading neither fixity nor tautology nor culture nor consciousness play a role in the asymmetrical configuration of the figure. Benjamin's reader undergoes continual positional dispersion every time he reads. This is not the case in Smith's or Callahan's understandings of the Bible and black culture.
14. See Heidegger, "Age of the World Picture"; also see Gumbrecht's "Metaphysics," *Production of Presence*, 21–49.
15. Gates, *Figures in Black*, 14–21. Gates also writes in *The Slave's Narrative*, "Without writing, there could exist no *repeatable* sign of the workings of reason, or mind; without memory or mind, there could exist no history; without history, there could exist no 'humanity,' as defined consistently from Vico to Hegel" (xxviii).

Chapter 1. Early Jewish and Christian Figures of Ethiopia

1. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham*, 41–46. In the opening of Homer's *Odyssey*, Ethiopia is described as worlds away from Olympus and at the outer limits of human habitation (1.23–26).

2. After Auerbach shows how *figura* signifies in the Latin of the Church Fathers, he demonstrates that the figural readings of Tertullian and St. Augustine are beholden to the typological hermeneutics of Paul (49ff).

3. At numerous points in his essay Auerbach sets out the historical parameters of figural interpretation (58ff, 76).

4. Auerbach's differentiation of figuralism from modernity echoes Martin Heidegger's 1938 essay, "The Age of the World Picture," 128ff.

5. In Exodus Rabbah, the Messiah rebukes Rome; in Pesahim, this is the work of the angel Gabriel.

6. Origen also employs Psalm 68:31 in his homily on Jeremiah to argue that Israel will be saved when "all serve God under a single yoke," or when Gentile nations have converted to Christ. Origen cites Psalm 68:31 and Zephaniah 3:9–10, which foreground the figures of Ethiopia as a remote land, Ethiopia's conversion, and Ethiopia as a synecdoche for all Gentiles and as a metonymy for sin; see *Homilies on Jeremiah* (45–47).

7. Origen, *The Song of Songs*, 276. In Origen's *Homilies on Jeremiah* (109), Ethiopian blackness is a metonymy for sin.

8. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, 1159–60. For an English translation of part of Cyril's exegesis on Psalm 68:31 see Goldenberg's *Curse of Ham*, 247.

9. See Psalm 74:12–17.

10. Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 298. In his commentary on the Song of Songs, Origen suggests that Psalm 68:31 is a prophecy (102–3). Ambrose echoes this view in *Theological and Dogmatic Works* (135), as does Cyril in *Patrologiae* (1159–60).

Chapter 2. Managing Blackness: Protestant Readings of Psalm 68:31 in Colonial America

1. Fox, *Gospel Family-Order*, 15. Fox makes similar arguments in his letters and journals. See *The Works of George Fox*, vol. 2, 117–20 and Fox's *Epistles*, 64–65, 210–14.

2. *Gospel Family-Order*, 10. Fox warns of divine punishment for those who do not adhere to Christ's gospel (*Works*, vol. 2, 120).

3. The question of the slave's status after conversion was legally decided in 1729. The English judicial system ruled that baptism did not emancipate the slave within the British kingdom. See David Brion Davis's *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 209.

4. Fox, *Gospel Family-Order*, 9. Fox uses figure later on in his discourse to draw a relationship between the Ark of the Covenant residing in Obed Edom's house (2 Samuel 6: 10–13) and the notion that Christians have Christ and the New Covenant living in their hearts (12).

5. Cyril of Alexandria makes this same association in *Patrologiae*, 1159–60.

6. In 1657, Fox encouraged Quakers to evangelize blacks and Indians. See *Epistles*, 64–65.

7. Rabbinic interpreters also pay attention to the rapidity of Ethiopia and Egypt's gifts to God and their acknowledgement of God's sovereignty. See *The Midrash on Psalms*, vol. 1, 549.

8. See Sidney Kaplan's commentary in Sewall's *The Selling of Joseph*, 28.

9. Race mixing is anachronistic, but the mixing of nations would be more familiar to Sewall. "Race" as a category of natural difference in America and Western Europe is more of an eighteenth-century notion. See Stephen Jay Gould's *The Mismeasure of Man* (1996).

10. Mather's essay was known about prior to its printing. Sewall refers to it in his 1700 diary entry. See Kaplan's commentary in Sewall, *Selling of Joseph*, 38. Mather's essay is also in dialogue with Morgan Godwyn's *Negro's and Indians Advocate* (1680). Godwyn, an English Anglican minister and missionary, argues for the Christianizing of slaves and Indians on colonial plantations. In this essay, Godwyn refers to Psalm 68:31 and associates it with the prophesied Christianization of the Negro, but he provides neither an exegesis nor a citation of the verse.

11. Mather reiterates Godwyn's position concerning the slave. Godwyn cites Abraham's circumcision of his slaves as proof that spiritual salvation does not alter the slave's physical enslavement (140–41).

12. Fox has the same message for the slaves in Barbados in 1671. See *Works*, vol. 2, 119.

13. See Wilson Moses's *The Wings of Ethiopia*, 141–58.

14. Sewall, *The Selling of Joseph*, 10–11, and Mather, *Rules for the Society of Negroes*, 4.

Chapter 3. Uplifting Ethiopia in America: Conversion, Self-Consciousness, and the Figure of Ethiopia

1. In his narrative, Allen uses paternalistic terms to characterize his "good master." Nevertheless, neither the master's goodness nor his parental concern impeded Allen's quest for emancipation (18).

2. Allen's narrative belongs more to the genre of American conversion narratives than to the slave narrative.

3. According to librarian and historian Dorothy Sterling, Stewart's lecture was the first public address given by "an American woman" (154).

4. *Spiritual Narratives*, 53. In her address to the African Masonic Lodge, Stewart vehemently rejects colonization. She sees it as further evidence of American injustice (72–73).

5. “Daughters of Bethel” is printed in its entirety in Newman, Rael, and Lapsansky, eds., *Pamphlets of Protest*, 261.

6. Specifically, read verses 13–20 of “Daughters of Bethel.”

Chapter 4. Missionary Emigrationism: Psalm 68:31 and Uplifting the Ethiopians in Africa

1. Recaptives were Africans who were enslaved and transported to the Americas after 1807 but later liberated by the British navy and released in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The recaptives were not from Freetown but were from other places and peoples within the continent. The recaptives were an alienated people who attempted to make themselves and other Africans into black Englishman; see Davidson, *Black Man's Burden*, 25–26. In addition to the Anglophile recaptives, the Saro were English-educated Christian converts who returned to their people of origin (usually Yoruba and Igbo) to missionize among them. Davidson describes their mission as “to introduce the light of civilization to an unregenerate paganism, and the advantages of British democracy to a savage despotism” (28).

2. The discourse of race erased the diversity of peoples in sub-Saharan Africa. Prior to the modern ideas about human collectivities, the various peoples of Africa did not see themselves as belonging to one racial group. Instead, they differentiated themselves “ethnically.” The modern category of race ignored ethnic differentiation and self-definition. Under the influence of figural interpretations of Psalm 68:31, Africa was transformed from being a continent with hundreds of diverse peoples with their own unique histories to the divinely ordained home of the Negro race.

3. In Jefferson's America, diversity—especially racial diversity—could undo the fledgling American democracy; see *Writings*, 264. Jefferson also argues that blacks are inferior to whites and that this inferiority is not due to slavery, but to natural (that is, racial) differences. Therefore, free people of color should be removed from the United States for both political and racial reasons.

4. See Albert Raboteau's *Slave Religion*, 109, and Gayraud Wilmore's *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 101.

5. See Lorenzo J. Greene's *The Negro in Colonial New England*, 278–79. Greene tells the story of Hopkins's meeting with Stiles and their missionary plans.

6. For the entire poem, see *Collected Works of Phillis Wheatley*, 18.

7. The conception of Africa as a land of spiritual and intellectual darkness was a popular eighteenth-century notion. See the Rev. Walter Shirley's authenticating pref-

ace to James Gronniosaw's 1772 narrative in Gates and Andrews, eds., *Pioneers of the Black Atlantic*, 33.

8. The curses of Cain, Ham, and Canaan are referenced and examined in a number of studies on racism, slavery, and biblical interpretation. See David M. Whitford's *The Curse of Ham in the Early Modern Era: The Bible and the Justifications for Slavery* (2009), David M. Goldenberg's *The Curse of Ham* (2003), Stephen R. Haynes's *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (2002), and Cain Hope Felder's *The Stony Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (1991).

9. The biblical justification for defining herself as an Ethiopian from Africa provides Wheatley with a way to negotiate her empty significance as a commodity. In the Bible, there are no blacks or Negroes, only peoples separated along theistic, geographic, and linguistic lines. To be a commodity is to be merely a piece of property and an object of exchange; to be black is to be reduced to one's phenotype. Wheatley's reading of Psalm 68:31 bestows upon her a self, a persona in the etymological sense of the word, which is that of an Ethiopian.

10. We tend to overlook the gigantic semantic leap that literate Anglophone black writers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries made when they identified themselves as Ethiopians. Some black English writers identified their African place of birth or their African people of origin. For example, James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw cited Bornu near Lake Chad, and Quobna Ottobah Cugoano cited the Fanti respectively. But the emergence of Ethiopian as a designation signifies the relocation of the writer away from a specific affiliation (a Fulani, a Bambara, a Yoruba, a Ga) to a general and non-African-derived scientific category of race. The simultaneous emergence of Ethiopian as a self-referential designation in the writings of black Anglophone authors in the late eighteenth century and the emergence and dissemination of the idea and science of race was probably not coincidental (see, for example, J. F. Blumenbach's *On the Natural Variety of Mankind* [1775]; Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* [1781]; Johann Gottfried Herder's *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Mankind* [1784]; and Immanuel Kant's *Anthropology From a Pragmatic Point of View* [1797]). The black Anglophone writers of the eighteenth century were people of their era; they were moderns who employed—and seemed to be invested in—the scientific discourse of race as it was being articulated at the time. Whereas the discourse of science focused on phenotype, the figure of Ethiopia accentuated the spiritual and scriptural prefiguration of Ethiopia.

11. Delany was one of a number of black writers to articulate an Afro-Asiatic (or Hamitic, Ethiopic) myth of racial origin. It was a popular story that emerged in the nineteenth century and continued into the twentieth century through Garveyism, the Nation of Islam, and the development of Afrocentrism. The important thing to remember about the Afro-Asiatic myth is that it relies on literacy, not orality. The much-vaunted oral culture of the slaves, the so-called authentic foundation stone of

black American culture, is not the source of the myth. It is derived from reading and is heavily invested in the “science” and romanticism of race.

12. Delany struggled with the “mulatto” Douglass for much of his political life over issues of emigration, civil rights, and race. Douglass opposed emigration and argued forcefully that the Negro was American and that the United States, not Africa, was the Negro’s home.

13. See Wilson Moses’s *Afrotopia*, 44–95.

14. The West Indian Edward W. Blyden was also a major thinker and exegete of Psalm 68:31 in the second half of the nineteenth century. Blyden’s most famous work, *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race* (1888), has numerous essays and speeches that employ Psalm 68:31; see “Ethiopia Stretching Out Her Hands Unto God (Africa’s Service to the World)” and “Africa and the Africans.” Blyden and Crummell worked shoulder to shoulder in Liberia in the 1860s until their falling out in 1871. V. Y. Mudimbe’s “E. W. Blyden’s Legacy and Questions” demonstrates how Blyden’s “African Personality” and “blackness” foreshadows Négritude and other nationalist and racialist ideologies; see *Invention of Africa*, 98–134.

15. Crummell, *The Future of Africa*, 311–12. This is another allusion to Psalm 68:31 that presents the figure of Ethiopia as an enlightened and regenerated being. Ethiopia’s stretch is for civilization and salvation. In a couple of Crummell’s Liberian addresses given in 1860 and 1861, he elaborates on the nature of true civilization that the Liberians—and by extension other Africans—must acquire to be a national and racial force in the world.

16. In an 1861 analysis that owes much to Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*, Crummell writes, “So far as *Western Africa* is concerned, there is no history. The long, long centuries of human existence, there, gives us no intelligent disclosures” (*Future of Africa* 107).

17. See “The English Language in Liberia” in Crummell’s *Future of Africa*, 7–54.

18. One of the stories Crummell tells to support his theory of the concealed-revealed nature of Providential history is the Genesis tale of Joseph and his brothers. Crummell provides the reading Sewall avoided making; see *Africa and America*, 416.

19. Crummell, *Future of Africa*, 312. This quotation may also be referenced in the essays “Along the West Coast of Africa” and “Emigration, an Aid to the Evangelization of Africa,” in *Future of Africa*, 129, and *Africa and America*, 429, respectively.

20. “Joy to thy savage realms, O Africa!” appears in its entirety in Moses, *Alexander Crummell: Destiny and Race*, 35–36.

21. Moses, ed., *Destiny and Race*, 35. Croswell wrote this poem in honor of Rev. Olsten’s ordination; a free man of color, Olsten went to Africa to minister to the natives. For Croswell, Olsten is a living fulfillment of Psalm 68:31b.

22. One of the interesting aspects of Croswell’s poem, besides its alterations of Psalm 68:31, is its use of the Coverdale translation of the Bible. “Morian’s land” is

the 1535 Coverdale word for “Ethiopia,” and the whole verse is rendered “The Morian’s londe shal stretch out hir hondes vnto God.” (The Coverdale usage appears in the 1851 *Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*.) There is nothing esoteric about Croswell’s use of Coverdale’s translation. It allows him to create an exact end-rhyme with “hand” in line 13. Croswell’s poetic rendition of the psalm constitutes both a rewriting and an interpretation. “Princes” are American men, like Rev. Olsten and Crummell, who leave the land of slavery (“Shall come from Egypt”) and go to Africa to convert the pagan natives (they bring “joy,” the joy of the Gospel). Their mission and movement are “holy.” The poem emphasizes the uncultivated nature of Africa and, by extension, its people, by repeating the line 1 observation, almost like a refrain in line 14, that Africa is “savage.” Croswell removes the future tense of Psalm 68:31b and puts Ethiopia’s action, its stretching, in the present. This poem is a literary articulation of Crummell’s ministry and his reading of the figure of Ethiopia. Crummell’s writings on Psalm 68:31, however, include his own agenda: the superiority of English and Anglophone civilization, the importance of enlightenment, the role of Providence in history, and Crummell’s version of the fortunate fall.

Chapter 5. Psalm 68:31 and the Fight for Freedom and Equality in Antebellum America

1. One of the initial positions taken at the First Annual National Negro Convention (1831) was that free men of color be granted citizenship. See Bell, ed., *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions 1830–1864*.

2. The Haitian Revolution sent shockwaves through the new American republic. It was rightly feared that news of Santo Domingo would trigger similar upheaval among slaves in the United States. In response, the American government instituted immigration laws restricting relocation of West Indian Negroes to the United States; see Du Bois, *Suppression of the African Slave Trade*, 71–72, 84). The Denmark Vesey slave revolt in Charleston, South Carolina, was inspired not only by Vesey’s interpretations of the Bible, but also by the example of Haiti. The *Trial Record of Denmark Vesey* cites claims that Vesey believed Haiti would come to the aid of a slave revolt in the American South (13).

3. Williams’s interpretation is reminiscent of the rabbinic reading of Psalm 68:31. Ethiopia has gifts in hand to give to the world instead of to God.

4. In the *Appeal*, Walker confirms that knowledge of Christianity is limited among Africans, whom he refers to as Ethiopians (17). In a footnote, Walker states his belief that the world will soon be Christianized, and that black people will be the agents of conversion. He does not, however, cite Psalm 68:31 as a verse foreshadowing this mission. The strongest relationship between this footnote and the preface is that

Ethiopia's redemption from slavery will take place within the same timeframe as the Christianization of the world.

5. As a thematic touchstone of black American culture, the biblical figure of Israel enslaved has been referenced numerous times in studies on slave culture and black religion. For example, see Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (1972), Lawrence Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (1977), and Theophus H. Smith's *Conjuring Culture* (1994).

6. Walker differentiates the American colored population from other colored populations globally. In Walker's analysis of the world, color divides populations to a great extent. He does not invest color in and of itself with a moral quality, but he does see that colored people are globally oppressed and that their emancipation is also promised due to God's justice (29).

7. For the full text of "Ethiopia," see *Complete Poems of Frances E. W. Harper*, 7–8.

8. Douglass's autobiography sold more than thirty thousand copies and went through numerous editions in the first five years after it was published. See Houston A. Baker's introduction to *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 21.

9. In an 1849 speech against the American Colonization Society and its support of Negro emigration, Douglass argues against the historical, religious, and cultural basis of racial difference. Douglass shows that historically, people of color are co-terminus with whites in America, that racial antagonisms are neither innate nor natural but are human and therefore alterable, and that only education separates the races in America; see Brotz, ed., *Negro Social and Political Thought 1850–1920*, 215.

10. See Douglass's July 14, 1848, speech, "What Are the Colored People Doing For Themselves?" in Brotz, ed., 203–8.

11. This phrase is lifted from a Douglass lecture against the American Colonization Society in 1849; in Brotz, ed., 213.

12. See Wheatley's praise poem, "To His Excellency General Washington," and the letter that accompanied it wishing Washington "success in the great cause you are so generously engaged in" (*Collected Works*, 145–46, 185).

Chapter 6. Reading for Independence: The Figure of Ethiopia and the New Africa

1. Delany uses this phrase three times to describe the colored population of America in *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and the Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (see 12, 13, and 209). For Delany's discussion of emigration see chapters 17–24.

2. According to Delany scholar Victor Ullman, Chatham "was the fugitive slave capital of Canada" (185). In 1856, it was home to nearly 2,400 colored people. By

1860, the colored population in the Province of Ontario was between fifty and sixty thousand.

3. See Don Fehrenbacher's *The Dred Scott Case*. Fehrenbacher points out that 44 percent of Chief Justice Taney's opinion was dedicated to the question of Negro citizenship (340).

4. The clarion call of the Garvey movement, "Africa for the African," is a phrase derived from Delany's expedition report.

5. Du Bois's critique of Teutonic individualism harkens back to Douglass's reading of Africa's "unwoven garment" and the notion of "civil strife" in ancient Greece. America and the modern world are unbalanced. The domination of the individual has nearly erased the dark-skinned people, the servants, from the social bonds of society. Thus, the modern world suffers under the tyranny of the individual. See Du Bois, *Reader*, 17.

6. See Du Bois's *The Negro*, 242, and *Darkwater*, 56, 74.

7. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 74. In the last chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon advocates abandoning the European and American notions of humanity and their histories of violence and dehumanization of non-Europeans and non-Americans. Replacing these antihuman figures, Fanon proposes the invention of a new figure of the human to save the world and the people within it.

8. To read "O Africa, My Native Land!" in its entirety, see Martin, comp. and ed., *African Fundamentalism*, 202.

9. Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions* 2:54. Even though Garvey was imprisoned at the time, his eulogy for Harding probably signified his sense that as the provisional president of Africa, he and Harding had something in common besides a dislike of race mixing. UNIA representatives attended Harding's funeral and were mistakenly taken for foreign dignitaries; see Martin's, *Race First*, 51, 354–55).

10. Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions* 2: 350. Powell was a leader of the Anglo-Saxon Clubs of America, a white supremacist organization. Garvey did not have any qualms about aligning himself with white supremacists. He and they both agreed about the irreducibility of race and the need for Negro emigration to Africa.

11. See Martin's *Literary Garveyism* (1983) and *African Fundamentalism* (1991).

12. In his Christmas message of 1921, Garvey ties Jesus's Egyptian sanctuary and Simon of Cyrene together as instances of the fulfillment of Psalm 68:31. See Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions* 1:64–65.

13. In his textbook for Black Nationalism, *Message to the People* (1986), Garvey instructs his teachers to read and study the poem as a synopsis of white injustice (11).

14. To read "The Tragedy of White Injustice," see Garvey, *Poetical Work*, 3–23.

15. Within Garvey's parochial and racial worldview, the four races naturally belong to four separate geographical locations. According to "The Tragedy of White Injustice," the "mongrelization" of the races is due to European colonialism and

imperialism, and Garvey states numerous times that the solution to “white injustice” is the geographical segregation of the races. In another poem, “Africa For the Africans,” the speaker reiterates Garvey’s view of the relationship between geography and race; see Garvey’s *Poetical Works*, 24–25).

16. In the “Historical Knowledge” section of the Universal Negro Catechism, members of the UNIA were expected to know about Edward Blyden, James Horton, and Alexander Crummell and their African missions. See Robert A. Hill, ed., *Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. 3, 310–11.

17. See Garvey’s *Poetical Works*. Many of his late poems address the Italo-Ethiopian War in which Mussolini is the embodiment of evil.

18. To read “The Universal Ethiopian Anthem” in its entirety see Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions* 2:140–41.

19. In his edited volume *Black Redemption* (1978), Burkett presents the speeches and editorials of ten prominent Negro nationalist-religious figures of the 1920s who spoke at Liberty Hall and whose speeches and writings appeared in the UNIA organ, the *Negro World*. In this collection, Psalm 68:31 is cited or alluded to a number of times, and the interpretations are within the parameters of Garveyism. Arnold Maloney’s May 30, 1922, speech, “The Victory That Overcomes” cites the verse as if its meaning were self-evident (93). James Robert Lincoln Diggs’s speech of August 1, 1922, interprets the verse as an indication that the Messiah will be the agent of fulfillment and Ethiopia will be freed from oppression just as God liberated the biblical Israelites (102–3). William Henry Moses’s July 15, 1923, speech mimics an Old Testament prophetic vision in which continental Africa is liberated and the Africans in the diaspora return to the continent (136–37). George McGuire’s August 1, 1924, “What Is That in Thine Hand?” interprets Psalm 68:31 as a prophecy of African liberation, redemption, rehabilitation, and redemption (170–71).

20. The Mosaic character of Garvey has been the subject of many pieces. See E. David Cronon’s *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (1955) and Randall Burkett’s *Garveyism as a Religious Movement* (1978), 15–17.

21. The title of “prince” derived from Psalm 68:31 identified those in the UNIA who deserved special recognition for their service to the race. One of these UNIA members who became an official prince of Africa was Robert Posten. After his untimely death in March 1924, the *Negro World* characterized his funeral as one befitting a prince and cited Psalm 68:31 in its totality as a verse that corresponded to Posten’s person; see Martin, *Literary Garveyism*, 72–73. Posten was an active contributor to the *Negro World*, writing both literary criticism and poetry. After his death he was given the title “prince,” which according to Martin, in *African Fundamentalism*, was the highest honor the UNIA bestowed on its members (352).

22. See Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions*: 61, 73, and 2: 54. The phrase also appears in Garvey's poetry; see 22, 88, and 111 in *Poetical Works*.

23. The orientation of the youngest member of the Younger family, the preteen Travis, is a mystery. He represents the tenuous future of the Younger family.

24. Walter is neither a nationalist nor a religious man. He feels neither a connection to Africa nor to the figure of Ethiopia.

25. The eyes of both characters are described as looking "back to the past" (Hansberry 74).

26. The referencing of Belafonte's "Matilda" is not gratuitous. In this song, Belafonte sings of a woman who steals the money that he has been saving to buy a house and some land. This parallels Walter's misfortune. Willie Harris runs off with sixty-five hundred dollars of the Youngers' money (Hansberry 74).

Chapter 7. Rewriting Psalm 68:31: Narrative Formations of Ethiopia

1. Part 1 of *Blake*, chapters 1–23, 29–31, was first published in *The Anglo-African Magazine* in serial form between January 1859 and July 1859. The complete novel, in serial form, appeared in *The Weekly Anglo-African* from November 1861 to May 1862. In its current state, the novel is missing a number of chapters and is therefore incomplete. See Floyd J. Miller's introduction to *Blake*, ix–xii.

2. *Blake* is an anachronistic novel. It claims to be set in 1852–53, but it refers to events that occurred after 1853, such as the *Scott* decision (1857) and John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry (1859).

3. In his *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852), Delany criticizes colored people for being too religious and for confusing their spiritual necessities with their political-material liberty (36–40).

4. Blake embodies black dissimulation; he has a number of noms de plume to cover his identity throughout the novel.

5. There is a similar appearance of the verse in Henry Highland Garnet's *The Past and Present Condition, and the Destiny, of the Colored Race*, 11. In this 1848 address, Garnet cites Psalm 68:31 and refers to it as a prophecy, but he does not interpret the verse.

6. Whereas the conversion of Ethiopia has been central to many exegetes of Psalm 68:31, in *Blake* the state of the Negro's soul is not Delany's concern. Ethiopia enslaved, not Ethiopia unsaved, is the focus of *Blake* and its use of Psalm 68:31. Delany is a secularist, and Ethiopia's movement to God is her movement toward auto-emancipation from slavery. God is no longer a divine being or a personal savior but a signifier for liberation. For the religious Negro, whom Delany critiqued seven years earlier in *Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*, the figure of "God" appeals to their religiosity, but it functions as a pragmatic, not a

religious, sign in *Blake*. “God’s will” in *Blake* is the end of Negro slavery, not the Negro Christianized.

7. Delany, *Blake*, 69, 224, 257, 260, 288.

8. Two of the slaves on the *Vulture*, Mendi, a character who recalls the Amistad revolt of Mendi slaves, and Abyssa, readily submit to Blake’s status as general. They become important members of the Army of Emancipation. Abyssa actually introduces the phrase, “Arm of the Lord, awake!”—a metonymy for Blake—to the General Council. She offers a moving prayer prior to the meetings of the Council.

9. The phonemes that comprise Blake’s Spanish name, “Blacus,” sound like “Black us.”

10. The Jim Crow section on trains became a matter of law in Louisiana on July 10, 1890. Act No. 111, the Separate Car Law, stated that all railway companies must provide “equal but separate accommodations for the white, and colored races.” See Fireside, *Separate and Unequal*, 331.

11. Fireside, 1–7. The Supreme Court ruling of May 18, 1896, decided that Homer A. Plessy’s rights as an American citizen were not violated when he was booted from the train and jailed, but it also recategorized Plessy as a legal and social entity. Prior to 1896, Plessy was a Latin, belonging to a community of Creoles, many of whom were descendents of free people of color who had lived in Louisiana for decades and were the economic and cultural lifeblood of the region. Even though Plessy retained his self-definition as a Latin, the May 1896 decision redefined him—and by extension the rest of the Latin community in Louisiana—as Negro (99–114). Phenotypically, Plessy was a white man, or in the words of the court documents, “the mixture of colored blood was not discernible in him” (332); nevertheless, the algebrization of his ancestry was figured to be seven-eighths white and one-eighth African, or thirty-one thirty-seconds white and one thirty-second African.

12. Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, 266. The question of emigration, without referring to Psalm 68:31, was common to many nineteenth-century black novels. See William Wells Brown’s *Clotel: Or, The President’s Daughter* (1853) and Frances Harper’s *Iola Leroy: Or, Shadows Uplifted* (1892). (Both are reprinted in Gates, ed., *Three Classic African-American Novels*.)

13. Hopkins makes Smith into a Douglass-like character by repeating the latter’s mantra of social agitation.

14. One of the functions of the figure of Ethiopia in *Of One Blood* is to offer a counternarrative to the American view of the natural intellectual inferiority of the Negro articulated by Jefferson in *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Also, Stone’s story of ancient Ethiopia and its American descendents recalls Smith’s speech to the American Colored League in *Contending Forces* to educate “public opinion” about the Negro.

15. The use of the deictic adverb “then” in Ai’s rendition of the “fortunate fall” is the linguistic cement of his figural interpretation.

16. In true messianic fashion, Reuel and all members of the Ethiopian royal line have a birthmark in the shape of a lotus-lily on their breast. Aubrey and Dianthe, as closet Ethiopians, also have this birthmark. The remnant of ancient Ethiopia is a pre-Islamic Arabic-speaking group of Hamites who dwell under the ancient city of Meroe. As King, Reuel is the agent to restore Ethiopia's glorious past to its present and its future. According to *Of One Blood*, Ethiopia is the origin of monotheism, civilization, and knowledge—both mundane and mystical. Before Reuel ascends the throne and marries Queen Candace, a woman who looks exactly like Dianthe, he returns to Boston to avenge the treachery of Aubrey. Besides attempting to have Reuel murdered during his Ethiopian expedition, Aubrey drowns his finance, Molly Vance, and poisons Dianthe. For these crimes, Aubrey, under the power of hypnotic suggestion, drowns himself in the Charles River. Reuel returns to Meroe, Telassar ("the Hidden City"), marries the queen, and begins his rule.

17. Even more reminiscent of Hopkins's *Of One Blood* is Griggs's 1902 novel, *Unfettered*, in which the hero, Dorlan Warthell, is African royalty (with a distinguishing birthmark) in the guise of an American Negro.

18. Eunice, Tiara, Rev. Percy Marshall, their brother, and Mrs. Arabelle Seabright, their mother, are all descendents of the infamous union of Thomas Jefferson and his slave, Sally Hemings.

19. Eunice's madness is a result of her rejection of her race—a penalty in Griggs's world—and the removal of the veil that allowed her to pass as white. In that Eunice is socially a Negro, she believes she is socially dead. Aubrey Livingston and his moral depravity in *Of One Blood* would be a male articulation of this figure.

20. Griggs, *The Hindered Hand*, 235. "Blood" as the metaphor for race is referenced throughout the novel, and as in other works of black American writings, Acts 17:26 is cited to neutralize the hierarchy of blood that American racism attempted to naturalize (274).

21. Walker's novel presents Samuel as a Cartesian missionary. He doubts whether or not he and his family should be missionaries (243).

Chapter 8. Figural Exhaustion: Parodying the Figures of Ethiopia

1. See Wright and Fabre, eds., *Richard Wright Reader*. Wright writes about the vernacular and its relationship to Negro literature in 1938, "In the absence of fixed and nourishing forms of culture, the Negro has a folklore which embodies the memories and hopes of his struggle for freedom. Not yet caught in paint or stone, and as yet but feebly depicted in the poem and novel, the Negroes' most powerful images of hope and despair still remain in the fluid state of daily speech" (41).

I believe that Wright's essay contributes to the misguided notion that Negro and black nationalisms are oral movements and institutions instead of literary ones.

Wright writes, “Let those who shy at the nationalist implications of Negro life look at this body of folklore, living and powerful, which rose out of a unified sense of a common life and a common fate” (41).

2. See Moses’s “The Lost World of the New Negro, 1895–1919: Black Literary and Intellectual Life before the ‘Renaissance,’” in *The Wings of Ethiopia*, 1990.

3. See Schulyer’s satirical novels for critiques of Garvey and Pan-Africanism: *Black No More: Being an Account of the Strange and Wonderful Workings of Science in the Land of the Free, A.D. 1933–1940* (1931), *The Ethiopian Murder Mystery: A Story of Love and International Intrigue* (1935–36), *The Black Internationale: Story of Black Genius Against the World* (1936–37), *Black Empire: An Imaginative Story of a Great New Civilization in Modern Africa* (1937–38), and *Revolt in Ethiopia: A Tale of Black Insurrection Against Italian Imperialism* (1938–39). The last four novels were published in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, a weekly Negro newspaper. In his introduction to Schulyer’s *Ethiopian Stories*, Robert Hill reminds contemporary readers that Schulyer’s writings “helped to make [the *Courier*] ‘the most influential black newspaper in the country,’ with a circulation that would reach a quarter million” (2). See Du Bois’s essays on Garvey and emigration to Africa: “Back to Africa” (*Century Magazine*, 1923), “A Lunatic or a Traitor” (*The Crisis*, 1924), and “Marcus Garvey and the NAACP” (*The Crisis*, 1928) in *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader* (1995). Also see James Weldon Johnson’s, George Schulyer’s, and A. Philip Randolph’s essays on Garvey and Pan-Africanism in Vincent’s *Voices of a Black Nation*, 1973.

4. This time the possibilities for its resurrection are negligible. Despite the continued presence of racial injustice in the United States and the decolonialization of Africa, the grand narratives of nation and race no longer hold in the world. Contemporary science has demonstrated that race is an illusion and that *Homo sapiens* are nearly identical to one another genetically. Furthermore, the global economy has reconfigured traditional national and ethnic definitions. For example, Europe’s population and citizenry are getting darker with the influx of Africans and Arabs. The colored peoples of both the commonwealth and former colonies such as Pakistan, India, Jamaica, and Nigeria are immigrating to England and becoming part of the social fabric. Thousands of people from Central and South America and Asia (Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, China, and India) are coming to the United States to work, live, and become part of the American experiment in democracy. Populations that were at one time separated by vast expanses of time and space are separated no longer, due to the contemporary technological global economy. It is difficult to see the world along national and racial lines when both of these ideas are in constant flux. See Amy Chua’s *World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability* (Doubleday 2003).

5. See Moses’s essays on Ellison and *Invisible Man* in his 1982 *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms* (“Messianic Oratory and the Theme of ‘Ethiopianism’ in Ralph Ellison’s

Invisible Man") and in his 1990 *The Wings of Ethiopia* ("The Wings of Ethiopia': Consensus History and Literary Allusion in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*").

6. See Ellison's 1944 short story, "King of the Bingo Game," reprinted in *Flying Home and Other Stories* (1996). In this story, an unnamed character believes he has figured out how to control the jackpot wheel of chance, but before he can fully exercise his agency and win the prize money of \$36.90, he is clubbed on the head from behind a curtain.

7. See Mr. Norton's theory of history and his paternalism toward Jack-the-Bear in chapter 2 of *Invisible Man*, 41–42.

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The History of African American Religions

- Laborers in the Vineyard of the Lord: The Beginnings of the AME Church in Florida, 1865–1895*, by Larry Eugene Rivers and Canter Brown Jr. (2001)
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