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The Founding Mothers:

Black Female Itinerant Preachers and Teachers

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of

the requirements for the degree Master of

Arts in African American Studies

by

Elizabeth Renee Flowers

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Founding Mothers:

Black Female Itinerant Preachers and Teachers

by

Elizabeth Renee Flowers

Master of Arts in African American Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Brenda Stevenson, Chair

History notes the strivings forged during the American Revolution by many nineteenth century black founding fathers in pursuit of community and liberation. Central to the narrative of freedom is the creation of black religion during the Second Great Awakening leading to independent black churches. Yet, often absent is the narrative of the black founding mothers. Black women confronted and outmaneuvered the double oppression of race and gender. Theologian James H. Cone's, *A Black Theology of Liberation* utilizes a masculine framework to analyze the black experience in America, thus negating black women. This research asserts, Jarena Lee and Maria W. Stewart two nineteenth century proto-feminist pioneers of socio-religious justice radically challenged the sexist ideology of black male leadership. Rather than

accepting Cone's idea of liberation, this research will examine the full mirror theory of liberation in the lives of the founding mothers elucidating how they found freedom in religion.

The thesis of Elizabeth Renee Flowers is approved.

Ellen DuBois

Sarah Haley

Brenda Stevenson, Committee Chair

University of California Los Angeles

2017

This work is dedicated to my mother and the many woman of faith who for generations have taught their daughters that true liberation is not given by men, but comes from our heavenly Father, our destiny has been ordained. “For I know the plans I have for you.” Declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Jeremiah 29:11, New International Version

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The Founding Mothers: Black Female Itinerant Preachers and Teachers

Introduction

Pathology is the study of disease and anatomical change that leads to death. Typically, a pathologist orders an autopsy with the goal of comprehending what caused physical disruption to the anatomical system that resulted in its death. During an autopsy all organs, cells, tissues, and fluids are examined which work in concert to reveal the patient's hidden medical history. From the perspective of the relatives of the deceased, an autopsy provides both physical and emotional closure in three ways. First, usually an autopsy will reveal an almost certain diagnosis of the cause of death. Second, the autopsy will reveal the hidden genetic history of the deceased. Genetic history allows the deceased's surviving family to engage in preventive practices that benefit their present and future generations. Lastly, death from newly discovered or rare diseases becomes public knowledge for the benefit of humanity writ large. An autopsy is frightening to some as an idea, but the process of discovery involved in performing one is attractive and often will not turn the curious away. A clinical autopsy reveals the anatomical history of a patient. After examination, family and extended can put aside questioning the cause of death and focus on healing through memory of the legacy of the deceased and collectively create oral narratives about their loved one.

Although this researcher has left the field of Pathology to become a historian, the idea of uncovering unknown history and legacy of the dead has provided a lens for this thesis. It is with the concept of autopsy that this research endeavors to study social change in African-American history, as the two fields are remarkably interchangeable.

Historians and autopsy technicians examine the people and social climate of the historical past, which at times connects to present states of being. Second, both fields use research to provide understanding for the betterment of the present and future society. Both fields also use research to inform and encourage future scholarship. It is important for the reader to understand that autopsy in this research is used as a metaphor. This metaphor symbolizes the uncovering of death to resurrect the life and legacy of black ancestors. In the medical field death begins when the bodies organs begin to shut down and eventually shut off. So when does death arrive in the field of African American history? An African philosopher once noted, "Africans believe death occurs when no one living who knew you personally can remember you."[1] Applying that same concept, death arrives in history when an individual who has been central to forming, sustaining or creating community, is no longer mentioned in the context of their contributions to that community. In the context of black women's history, agency is underemphasized, yet the agency of their black male counterparts is often overemphasized despite important contributions of both genders that implement to social change.

Americans use the term "founding fathers" to represent those men whose brilliant ideas bolstered the foundations of society. There are founding fathers of religion, democracy, and of the nation, and every professional and business organization founding fathers. This term is also applicable to African American history. For African Americans, this term is appropriate because it psychologically reincarnates the legacy of ancestors and their radical acts of agency as models for future generations to base revolution upon. For instance, David Walker, a gifted writer and abolitionist, cemented his legacy in the historical canon with his anti-slavery document *Walker's Appeal; to the Colored Citizens of the World*. By 1829 *Walker's Appeal* was banned in the South, yet more than one hundred fifty years later *Walker's Appeal* is well respected in scholarly

circles and for this Walker is one of the founding fathers of Black Nationalism. Similarly, the rhetorical skill and argument of Fredrick Douglass' speech *The Hypocrisy of American Slavery* cemented his legacy as one of black America's most effective and powerful public speakers. Lastly, Richard Allen is known as the founding father of the African Methodists Episcopal Church (AME). Allen's legacy and memory live in AME Church doctrine, song and annual celebrations. It is more than commendable that Allen, Douglass, and Walker and all the black founding fathers remain cherished and immortalized…but what about the *founding mothers*?

For every founding father cited above there is a contemporary founding mother who took great pains to foment equality on behalf of the black community. In areas of social justice, founding mothers stood with, and at times in front of, the black founding fathers who worked for equality. Black founding mothers are our first teachers emphasizing the value of education while transmitting their wisdom from generation to generation to ensure survival of the people. Founding mothers are reproducers of community culture and implementers of community consciousness. Founding mothers are advocates for the *human* family, which extends well beyond phenotype and blood quantum. Founding mothers are ambassadors of an otherworldly spirituality and introduce younger generations to their spiritual creator. Where in the body of black history is her legacy? How do we as a people celebrate the courage of faithful women who boldly pursued their destiny? And how can we simultaneously reject and dismantle the designated feminine sphere created to control them?

Let us now examine this hidden history for the benefit of the present. The first founding mother's life to exhume is Jarena Lee. Lee was the first black female itinerate preacher of the AME Church under the leadership of Richard Allen. Additionally, the life of Maria W. Stewart the first black female political speaker, mentored by David Walker will also be examined. In the

lives of Lee and Stewart, common threads of self-determination, spirituality, divine purpose, and freedom are central compasses of their life's work. The contributions of Lee and Stewart as founding mothers should not be underestimated. Both women confronted centers of power creating lasting change thus laying a proto-black feminist foundation for future revolutionary, radical, and humanitarian causes. The men who dared to go against convention to facilitate the revolutionary actions that these women took during their lives are important, but serve here as ushers rather than central figures. In the case of Jarena Lee, Richard Allen was one such usher.

Lee/Allen

Born as a slave on February 14, 1760, Richard Allen would eventually be elected America's first black Methodist Bishop in 1816; a position he would hold until his death. However, Allen's journey to become an official religious authority of the Methodist faith started in his youth. In 1777, on the Delaware plantation of the Sturgis family, Allen and his enslaved brethren heard the sermon of a Methodist itinerate preacher.[2] At the age of seventeen, Richard Allen began to feel the weight of his sinfulness and decided to become a born-again Christian. After conversion, he continued to study the bible, Methodist teachings, and began leading bible studies on his master's plantation.[3] Allen's biblical knowledge, zeal and commanding style of preaching eventually bought his freedom and led to a career as an itinerate preacher.[4] Richard Allen's knowledge of the gospel made him a popular itinerant on the Methodist's preaching circuit. In fact, Allen was such a great exhorter that the leading Methodists itinerate Francis Asbury asked Allen to "travel abroad" with him into the Deep South to convert souls.[5] Richard Allen declined Asbury's request noting, "slave counties" scared the hell out of him.[6] Although Allen was free and felt the call to exhort and preach the gospel, he also understood his freedom as a black man in the north. Another issue compounding his decision not to travel into slave

areas was Allen's freedom was conditional and he could face re-enslavement if he traveled too far south. Allen's logic about his freedom was not uncommon as the trajectory of most blacks was to move from the south to the north staying as far away from the slavery as possible. However, emancipated northern blacks were in a precarious situation, as they were not enslaved, but also without citizenship and their freedom confined to certain geographic locations.

Richard Allen remained in the northern Methodist itinerant circuit teaching and leading a large body of black followers to St. George Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. However, by 1787 black Methodist membership swelled the pews of St. George's Church. Blacks soon became the majority of members and often occupied the preferred seats on the main floor. After complaints from white members, church officials announced a policy of segregated seating. The following Sunday, Richard Allen and Reverend Absalom Jones entered the church and seated themselves in the upstairs gallery the newly designated space for black members. Unfortunately, seating upstairs was insufficient. St. George's new segregation policy prompted church trustees to insist Allen and Jones move again to a smaller upstairs corner location.[7] It should be noted that the trustee's insistence of their removal occurred as Allen and Jones, "had not been long upon our knees."[8] Allen notes, "I raised my head up and saw one of the trustees . . . having hold of Reverend Jones, pulling him up off his knees . . . saying, You must get up, you must not kneel here."[9] The reaction from Bishop Allen, Reverend Jones and black members was swift and all walked out of the sermon together launching the Independent Negro Church Movement.[10]

In 1794, Allen along with other former members of St. George founded Bethel Church. Despite the independent spirit of Bethel's members, their building was legally under the control of white Methodists. However, Richard Allen would resolve the issue of ownership with a

lawsuit that would end in Allen's favor.[11] By 1800, Bethel Church became known for its spirit of black self-determination. This focus attracted many freemen and freewomen in addition to enslaved, and runaway black people. Some visitors were drawn to the notion of an independent black space free of white control. For others, the loving fellowship, racial uplift clubs, and abolitionist activism were a draw. Overwhelmingly however, most were drawn to the leadership and preaching of Reverend Richard Allen who by that time was a respected community leader by both black and white Philadelphians.

Jarena Lee was one of the churchgoers at Bethel Church. In her diary, Lee reflected on the life changing decision she made after her initial visit to Bethel. The power of Allen's message and the love she felt from members instantly united her with the Bethel community. As Lee notes, "during the labors of this man that afternoon, I had come to the conclusion, that this is the people to which my heart unites. . .and it so happened, that as soon as the service closed he invited such as felt a desire to flee the wrath to come, to unite on trial with them I embraced the opportunity."[12] This excerpt from Lee's diary describes an atmosphere of love, family and divine purpose that Richard Allen often emphasized among Bethel's members. Additionally, the prospect of being accepted into a "church family" filled Lee's loneliness because she was hired out to work from the age of seven. Lee worked in white households as a maid often far away from her family.

Seven years after her spiritual conversion in 1811, Lee began to hear her divine commission in meditation and prayer. Lee shares, "[there was a] voice which I thought I distinctly heard . . . which said to me, 'Go preach the Gospel'."[13] Lee's initial response was to dismiss the voice urging her to preach. In her own words she felt, "no one will believe me."[14] Perhaps Lee believed no one would believe her not because she was unequipped for such task,

but because Christian denominations (except Quakers) strongly were against a woman's call to preach the gospel. Most Protestant denominations subscribed to the Paulina doctrine, which silenced and limited women's participation and leadership in the church. After a long period of contemplation, Lee became convinced that itinerate preaching was her divine purpose and shared her revelation with Reverend Allen. Lee recalls, "I now told [Reverend Allen] that the Lord had revealed it to me. That I must preach the gospel."[15] Reverend Richard Allen proposed that Lee, like previous women supposedly divinely lead to preach, hold prayer meetings and exhort at the discretion of the male itinerate. In other words, Allen softly declined by offering Lee a lesser conditional role. Although Richard Allen verbally permits Lee to hold prayer meetings and exhort, such verbal permission is limited and at the discretion of male authority. Bethel's male leadership held firm belief that a woman preaching was not only uncommon, but against biblical law. In contrast, if a male made such a request, he would be judged on his skill of exhortation and command of the gospel like Richard Allen as an itinerate in his youth.

At this point, it is unclear if Allen personally has an issue with women preaching because his answer reflects the protocol established by Methodist religious leadership to which Bethel is firmly attached. Lee recalls Reverend Allen's decision "as to women preaching . . . Our discipline knew nothing at all about it . . . it did not call for women preachers."[16] The hypocrisy of Richard Allen is remarkable as Allen broke with Methodist protocol in the formation of Bethel Church and in his critique of northern Methodist's oppressive attitudes toward their black brethren. But the freedom Allen fought for did extend to women. Jarena Lee ultimately accepted Allen's ruling despite knowing her divine purpose. However, the question of Lee's authentic divine purpose would continue to challenge Reverend Allen and the male leadership at Bethel Church on three separate occasions.

In 1811, Jarena Lee married Joseph Lee, pastor of Snow Hill Church. From this, Lee became a church mother for some time assisting her husband with church affairs. Joseph and Jarena Lee were married for six years and had two children. Unfortunately, the couple's marriage came to an end when Joseph Lee died abruptly. Around the same time, Jarena Lee lost five other family members.[17] Lee spent considerable time grieving with her church family while reorganizing her family life and aligning closer to her divine purpose. Lee distinctly mentions in her journal, "It was now eight years since I had made application to be permitted to preach the gospel, during which time I had only been allowed to exhort, and even this privilege but seldom. The subject now was renewed afresh in my mind; it was as a fire shut up in my bones."[18] Lee once again approached Richard Allen with her request to preach the gospel. However, the transitions in the lives of Lee, Allen and the Bethel community created an opening for new traditions. Jarena Lee, now a widow and single mother of two returned to Philadelphia in 1818. However, by 1818, Reverend Richard Allen became *Bishop* Richard Allen of the first independent northern black church. The denomination known as the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church was a collective of independent black churches from various northern urban centers looking to unite into one independent body and thus no longer subject to the control of white religious authorities.[19] As Bishop, Allen was official leader of the AME Church and now had the power of choice. He could lead the AME Church to continue to follow Methodist traditions and the Paulina doctrine, or, he could pivot to a more equitable direction.

At this moment of independence, Bishop Allen had the option to create a new AME Church radical tradition that promotes the message of the cross regardless of gender, but for every radical decision Allen had to count the cost for himself and Lee. For example, what if Lee was a more effective exhorter than Allen and the people desire to hear Lee preach more than

Allen? What would be the stake for his livelihood afterward? Would Allen and other male leaders of the AME Church feel emasculated due to Lee's success? Also, what if Allen and Lee work together and everything is effective? Would their partners and other mainstream church leaders accept a new policy of female preachers which some consider an abomination? These are the some of the possible outcomes Allen had to seriously consider. Despite the independence of the AME Church, upon Lee's second request of asking to pursue her spiritual gift she presented a more specific question. Lee notes, "I had solicited of the Rev. Bishop Richard Allen . . . to be permitted the liberty of holding prayer meetings in my own home, and of exhorting as I found liberty, which was granted me."[20] Although Lee was granted permission, it was still only verbal. However, because barriers were not explicitly addressed verbally, Lee had the power to determine the limits. Men often underestimate the power of a women's home. The home sphere, like other private spaces are seen as areas of containment. For Lee, home was her first pulpit and congregation in addition to a missionary training site. Lee turned her home into a house church "free" space where she could exhort and preach as she felt.

The third interaction between Lee and Bishop Allen was not Lee asking to preach, but Lee acting against official church decorum by preaching. Lee recalls:

> [T]he Reverend Richard Williams was to preach at Bethel Church, where I with others were assembled . . . the text he took is in Jonah" . . . 'salvation is of the Lord.' But as he proceeded to explain, he seemed to have lost the spirit; when in that same instant, I sprang as by supernatural impulse, to my feet, when I was aided from above to give an exhortation on the very text, which my brother Williams had taken. I told them I was like Jonah . . . during the exhortation God made manifest his power in a manner sufficient to show the world that I was called to labor according to my ability, and the grace given unto me, in the vineyard of the good husband."[21]

Lee then explains:

> I now sat down. Scarcely knowing what I had done, being frightened. I imagined, that for this indecorum . . . I should be expelled from the church . . .But instead of this, the Bishop [Allen] rose up in the assembly, and related that I had called upon him eight years

> before, asking to be permitted to preach, and that he had put me off; but that he now as much believed that I was called to that work, as any of the preacher's present.[22]

Despite Bishop Allen's approval of Lee's preaching and his encouragement for her to embark on her spiritual destiny, Allen did not make Lee's appointment official by ordination. William L. Andrews notes, "Lee seems to have found an accommodation with the all male AME hierarchy, not as a licensed preacher, but rather as an official teaching exhorter."[23] The position of exhorter traditionally occupied by men was an intermediate state between testimony and preaching eventually leading to Reverend of a church, but not for women.[24] This intermediate state was the position licensed for Lee, but without official ordination, she encountered tremendous opposition by both male and female colleagues thus limiting perceptions of her authority. Lee notes one encounter as particularly malicious as she recalls, "He told me he had sent a letter to Pittsburgh to stop me, although I had my license from the Bishop."[25] Perhaps Lee felt her license from Bishop Allen and her skill as an exhorter would quell all questions of her legitimacy as a female exhorter, but it did not. In fact, most black men perceived female itinerants as a threat to their livelihood and feared the competition. In the incident mentioned above, Allen intervened on Lee's behalf, yet she was never ordained. Bishop Allen's decision not to ordain Lee is not an indication that he did not support her however. Lee notes in her diary on several occasions that Bishop Allen gave her speaking engagements at AME Church, in addition to preaching with her at camp revivals.[26] Allen's support of Lee is made clear throughout the pages of her writings, but it is the opposition of other male leaders within the AME Church that frustrated her most. Nevertheless, Lee persisted in cultivating a successful itinerate ministry for many years.[27]

While it was a humanitarian act for Allen to encourage and support Lee, there were stakes in maintaining the male over female power dynamic. There was a tradition of patriarchy, masculinity, and black male power within the AME Church that placed limits on what Lee could do or become despite being touted as a "free" black space. Churches including independent black churches offered limited freedom to their female members due to their embrace of traditional systems patriarchal authority. For black women, male religious leaders' decision to maintain systems of patriarchy in the "free" black space led to the further oppression of black women. This is because they are oppressed within a structure where black males occupy the top tier of the intra-racial social order. In other words, the free space known as the black church was a contradiction as the space was only free to black men, but embraced limitations for black women. Thus, black women such as Jarena Lee maneuvered both internal and external opposition to pursue a divine self.

In 1970, the popular theologian James H. Cone wrote *A Black Theology of Liberation* as a religious response to the black power movement of the era. *A Black Theology of Liberation* outlines the trials and experiences of black oppression in America. Using Christian biblical scripture, Cone argues that the God of the Old Testament, who freed the enslaved Israelites, is the answer to the African American experience of oppression. Cone further notes that the message of Jesus Christ is a message of social justice for the present. Hence, God is on the side of the oppressed opposing the enemy of the oppressed. It is obvious that males are Cone's intended audience despite the word "black" within the title. Other evidence of Cone's preference for men is found in use of male pronouns and the term "man" rather than "mankind". Cone sites the experiences and the speeches of black male leaders of the 1960s such as Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Stokley Carmichael, and Eldridge Cleaver, and elucidates the African

American experience through the lens of masculinity to the exclusion of black women. In 1986, Cone reprints *A Black Theology of Liberation* and in the preface laments the fact that he did not include research on liberating black women or the role of sexism in the black church and community. Yet, Cone did not make up for his omission by adding any additional research on the lived experience of black women. In fact, his thoughts on the subject do not go beyond the preface. As a historian, we are to look at the places where disruptions happen. Why Richard Allen could not officially ordain Jarena Lee and why at the height of the Black Power Movement in the 1970s, James Cone felt it necessary to omit the experiences of black women, shows that his theory of *universal* black liberation is incomplete. The title *A Black Theology of Liberation* suggests, institution [theology] and individual freedom [liberation] secondary. This order follows a tradition of hierarchy that collective nation-state/institutional sovereignty led by dominant patriarchal rule determines individual freedoms which redundantly carries the same order for opportunity and expression; males first…women (if ever) last.

I argue that Lee and Stewart are pioneers for women in social justice challenging the paradigm of black male church leadership in its early development. evidence of a mirror radical thought and action from the archives free black women create a more comprehensive humanitarian imagining of Cone's idea of theological liberation. For Lee and Stewart, whose contributions historians are recently beginning to research and understand, the drive, necessity, and move toward liberation were primary for their cause because of their gender and race, thus theology followed after further solidifying their ideas of human equality.

Background

Both Jarena Lee and Mariah Stewart, who will be discussed later, are models for social justice and humanitarianism both within religion and without religion. They were ambidextrous

in their covering of social justice issues, but it all culminated into the center of something new to black women, freedom. Lee and Stewart's positions of privilege as free women of the north capable of reading, writing, and public speech fueled their efforts to empower their communities. Through biblical scripture both women began to see humanity in its proper context, which created a model for future black activists such as Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X to continue to link religion to freedom. Additionally, this model of activism centering religion projects a vision of how the world can be more humanitarian, just, and understanding. Therefore, the importance of women in social movements is that the female voice generally adds a holistic perspective focused on community in a male dominated space.

Women conditioned as "keepers of the home sphere" have always had one solid foot in the home and the other in community care. During the nineteenth-century, abolitionist women often formed cross-cultural coalitions for women's suffrage, women's education, and general community uplift. However, such efforts by women are often understated historically, while male participation in such efforts is often amplified. This research flips James Cone's theory to its proper and balanced humanitarian order, *Liberation Theology*.

Liberation means something different for black women than it does for black men. It means something different when women remain stagnant in a position of oppression while black brothers claim freedom. A free black man is going to experience freedom differently than a free black woman because each gender has experienced oppression differently. For the free black woman, the system of patriarchy continues to be present even with emancipation or citizenship rights; hence, limitations to female freedoms. The idea of liberation is what Cone intended in writing *A Black Theology of Liberation*. Yet Cone's theory falls short as he only looks at half the mirror when analyzing black liberation that is the importance of this study to further examine the

elements of liberation in the lives of two nineteenth century black female pioneers, Jarena Lee and Maria W. Stewart. Therefore, this research will examine the other side of freedom centering black women. However this is not to claim that the experience of these women is the experience of all black women of the nineteenth century or the present era.

Review of Literature

The most important themes for this study are in the areas of: radical resistance, conversion narratives, religious accommodation, and power and gender.

Radical Resistance:

Published in 1998 Gayraud Wilmore's, *Black Religion, Black Radicalism* establishes the historical connection between black radicalism and religion. Wilmore acknowledges the general elusiveness of the term radicalism, but notes he accepts the context black intellectuals have traditionally used, "meaning black opposition to white racism and oppression."[28] Throughout the text, Wilmore attempts to isolate the black radical tradition as it has, "ebbed and flowed in black religion since slavery and in particular has been organized in the black church."[29] Moreover Wilmore argues, "radicalism over the years has taken on a sharpened definition, but there are three characteristics of radicalism still present in the black church."[30]

1. Quest for independence
2. Revitalization of the image of Africa
3. Acceptance of protest and agitation as theological prerequisites for black liberation and the liberation of all oppressed peoples

Wilmore argues the significant difference between black and white religions in order to dispel the myth that white Methodist itinerants implanted ideas of black radicalism in their

converts. Wilmore notes that black Methodists were far more radical in their means to achieve liberation due to the black Methodists combining traditional African religion with their faith. Moreover he asserts, "Plenty of data to support the convention that their were distinctive and disruptive social liberation motifs in the development of black religion and the impetus for fundamental change in American society did come out of the black community and the indispensible support and organization given by the black church."[31] Lastly, Wilmore cites the example of various slave revolt leaders such as Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner and David Walker who aligned with the black Methodist tradition. Wilmore's writing focuses mainly on the physical acts of resistance and organization within the church, but also notes other forms of protest such as letters petitioning for freedom.

Published in 2005 David Howard-Pitney's, *Afro-American Jeremiad* further expands the idea of the black radical tradition in his research on the Jeremiad tradition adopted by nineteenth century African Americans. Pitney defines the Afro-American Jeremiad as, rhetoric of indignation expressing deep dissatisfaction and urgently challenging the nation to reform."[32] Pitney notes, "the term Jeremiad means lamentation or doleful complaint deriving from the biblical prophet Jeremiah who warned the Israelites of their downfall due to sin."[33] He observes this is the nineteenth century tradition black leaders have used to challenge white America's sins such as slavery and racism toward their fellow black brethren.

Pitney further argues, "white America has its own civic religion and rituals which can be seen in the flag, the expectations of patriotism, the daily pledge of allegiance taught in grade school, but also in the Declaration of Independence,"[34] which Pitney calls the American Bible as it dictates sacred national values such as equality and citizenship. Additionally, Pitney cites, "early white American traditions of pronouncing their conquering of the land as providence or

manifest destiny according to God's will in order to Christianize the nation. Thus they see themselves as the New Testament church scattered from the old land into the new to convert Christians." In contrast, Pitney argues, "African converts to Christianity identified with the enslaved Israelites of the Old Testament who will soon be free." Yet Pitney points to the differing worldview of blacks towards whites as blacks quickly realized their fate is intertwined with white Americans. Thus, if one race fails we all fail or rise together. One can hear these details in the Afro-American Jeremiad as the speakers condemn racism, slavery, and discrimination while simultaneously braiding the fate of both black and white America throughout their speech. Some examples of Jeremiad speakers cited by Pitney include Frederick Douglas, Ida B. Wells, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Pitney expands the idea of the black radical tradition to include speech that some may not think of in terms of radicalism, but such presentations are a verbal attack on the white supremacist culture of America.

The essay *Sympathetic Violence: Maria Stewart's Antebellum Vision of African American Resistance* by Christian Henderson (2013), expands the concept of the black radical tradition, as Henderson's central focus is Maria W. Stewart. Henderson argues for further expansion of radicalism as she notes, "women are often overlooked"[35] and Stewart is a primary example of such negation of history. Henderson argues, "Stewart's writing and public speeches often utilize the traditionally male Afro-American Jeremiad. Yet Stewart's use of the Jeremiad is unique as she alters its format by combining the themes Christian love and violent resistance."[36] Stewart, a protégé of David Walker, utilizes the Jeremiad much like Walker but adds her own unique two-prong approach. Stewart uses what Henderson calls, "Christian mercy and retributive violence."[37] Tactics unlike her mentor David Walker because it is a two-pronged approach. For example, the author notes, "on the one hand [Stewart] specifically warned white Americans of a

wrathful and violent God who was on the verge of sending devastation and destruction to the nation because of slavery and racism to black people."[38] However, if whites repented, "a glorious future for all would emerge."[39] This is the binding of black and white into fateful outcome that is conditional and thus dependent on one another. This is the example of the concept of Christian love found in Stewart's writing. Contrasting Stewart's Christian love Henderson argues, "Stewart urges her readers to cultivate violent resistance toward slavery."[40] Henderson mentions such examples reflect Stewart's position between and within the abolitionist and Black Nationalist traditions. Stewart's style does not squarely fit in the abolitionist tradition, which Henderson notes is the accepted approach for nineteenth century women. Stewart's position between these two activist's positions demonstrates her training from Walker but also her intellectual expansion beyond her mentor's teaching as she calls for Christian love, repentance and violence. However, the call to violence is secondary only if whites do not repent. Stewart notes such violence is justified as children of God. Stewart unlike Walker chastises the black community for its unloving attitudes toward one another.

Conversion Narrative:

Published in 1991, Virginia Breton's, *From Sin to Slavery* argues, " nineteenth century narratives gave women voice in the public sector and was one of the few spaces available to women."[41] The author asserts that the primary purpose of the conversion narrative was two-fold to inspire others to become Christians and to teach Christian community values.[42] Nineteenth century women's conversion narratives follow the well-established traditional Puritan template which some have deemed the souls journey.[43] Breton argues, "Women were often the majority of church members in most church congregations."[44] Consequently, women's consistent church presence, vulnerability, and lack of public voice helped them to master the art of writing

conversion in addition to becoming public educators. According to Breton, "between 1830 and 1860 women acquired the position of teachers in the religious and eventually public sector."[45] This expansion of women to the public sphere is true for both white and black women. Lastly, Breton's analysis revealed that the emergence of the "divine self" is present in conversion narratives. This allows the reader to obtain a glimpse of nineteenth century women's roles in the public sector. Breton notes black women's unique contribution to the conversion narrative as a narrative based on their lived experience.

Published in 1989 Joan Braxton's, *Black Women Writing Autobiography* further adds to theme of conversion narrative stating, "Narratives and autobiography for black women have been more often than not attempts to regain their sense of place in the world."[46] The author states, "two primary traditions of autobiography by black women slave and free. Each draw from the writer's lived experience using a format dependent on the writer's purpose. The differences between the enslaved and free narratives are that the texture of gender shapes the narratives as both have suffered different forms of oppression."[47] Braxton notes, "Similar to the blues [music] most autobiographies by black Americans, male or female, tend to have a dominant internal strategy such as, incorporating communal values in the performance of the autobiographical act sometimes rising to function as the point of consciousness for her people."[48] Braxton argues:

> Nineteenth century black women have expanded the conversion narrative by using tools of liberation, sass, invective as well as biblical implications and biblical imagery. Thus language is the first line of defense, as she knows God is on the side of the oppressed and essentially on her side.[49] …black women's quest for freedom link's with a quest for literacy. To be able to write, to develop a public voice to assert a literacy self represents significant aspects of freedom[50]

Similar to Breton, Braxton argues the craftsmanship and mastery of nineteenth century black women's writing as the author claims, "Black women have developed common themes in

spiritual narratives, archetype figures and have established an enduring tradition within the tradition of black autobiography."[51] In the space of conversion, Braxton asserts, "personal power can be found in the idea of the assertion of the self, attaining freedom, literacy and telling a free story of the soul's journey."[52] Within conversion narratives black women often state their divine purpose, purity, authority and the power they have with God by being the vessel committed to his purpose. Within their narratives black women often reclaim their Christian birthright, justify their ministry, but also chastise male patriarchy. For example, Robert J. Patterson's *A Triple-Twined Re-Approach: Womanist Theology and Gendered-Racial Protest in the Writings of Jarena Lee, Francis L. Harper, and Harriet Jacobs* (2013), examines Jarena Lee's expansion of her conversion narratives, which includes her ministry travels, but also protests and condemnation of black male leaders who tried to sanction her ministry.

Religious Accommodation:

Published in 2004 Albert J. Raboteau's *Slave Religion* examines the establishment of an underground religion among the enslaved. Raboteau notes, "despite planter attempts to eradicate the customs and beliefs of the enslaved in the new world, African beliefs and customs persisted and were transmitted by slaves to their descendants. Shaped and modified by a new environment, elements of African folklore, music, language, and religion were transplanted in the new world by the African diaspora."[53] The author further argues, "One of the most durable and adaptable constituents of the slave culture, linking African past with American was his religion."[54] It is in the previous statement that the author throws himself into the age-old debate about the survival of African religious traditions and culture in North America. Raboteau's answer is a firm "yes" and "no" illuminating parts of African traditions that survived while other parts perished. Raboteau claims a fusion of religion that is not wholly African or completely Christian which

some have termed "black religion". Nevertheless, Raboteau notes, along with the enslaved captives came memories, customs and beliefs from the homeland.[55]

The author further argues, the number of slaves on a plantation factors into the holding or loss of African religion and culture.[56] However, as the gods of Africa gave way to the God of Christianity, the African heritage of singing, dancing, spirit possession, and magic continued to influence Afro-American folk beliefs.[57] Raboteau cites examples in contemporary black religious culture that are also found in traditional African religion such as the ring shout, spirit possession, and ritual styles of worship. Additionally, the author uses the works progress administration (WPA) interviews of ex-slaves as evidence of the survival of African culture. Lastly, Raboteau argues, "it is important to remember also that no single African culture or religion, once transplanted to alien soil could have remained fully intact. Yet a common religious heritage resulted from the blending and assimilation of the many discrete religious heritages of Africans in the new world."[58]

Published in 1990 and contrasting Raboteau, Jon Butler's, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, chronicles the three hundred year history of America from the 1500s to the 1800s. Butler presents evidence of eclectic religions throughout American history thus destroying the myth of America's Puritan founding.[59] Butler explores the early colonial push to convert colonists toward Anglicism. However, such efforts failed leading to dissenter religious groups that would use the American Revolution and the Great Awakening as impetus to question and eventually overturn state religion.[60] Though most notable is Butler's ideas of an "African holocaust."[61] In contrast to Raboteau, Butler argues, "The single most important religious transformation to occur in the American colonies before 1776: an African spiritual holocaust that forever destroyed traditional African religious systems in North America and left slaves remarkably bereft of traditional

collective religious practice before 1760."[62] Further contrasting Raboteau, Butler argues what became African American religion was more European in nature than African. Lastly, Butlter asserts, "What survived among Africans were not African religious systems but discrete religious practices that crossed African cultural boundaries and had individual rather than collective connotations."[63] Butler acknowledges the following African religious practices; 1) funeral and burial practices 2) traditional African grave decorations 3) east facing burials (but mentions a lack of physical evidence that these systems were ever operating in North America prior to 1760) 4) a lack of collective community evidence is the basis of his African-Holocaust theory. In essence Butler is arguing the evidence that is seen is more personal preference rather than African tradition.[64]

Aligning with Raboteau and contrasting Butler, In 1998 author Michael A. Gomez's *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, examines the Atlantic slave trade in North America and the formation of black culture:

> The creation of the African-American collective involved a movement in emphasis away from ethnicity and toward race as the primary criterion of inclusion…that is to say, an identity based upon ethnicity was often a practice both very African and very ancient.[65]

Right away Gomez notes the retention of African concepts of identity that did not disappear in the new world but were purposely done away with by enslaved Africans for the purpose of community formation. Gomez further notes, despite previous beliefs that enslaved African's ethnic identities were unknown, "advances in the study of Africa has made it possible to push beyond perfunctory discussions of great Sudanic empires…We can now discuss with greater accuracy the origins of subject African populations and the specific forms of their cultural and political accouterments."[66]

In the realm of religion Gomez asserts, "Africans transported via the transatlantic trade also brought with them their own religious beliefs such as Islam."[67] The author cites several documents as evidence such as, WPA interviews, Muslim names of enslaved children in the ledgers of slaveholders. However, most notable is the author's use of runaway slave advertisement referencing the Muslim dress and ancestry of enslaved runaways. Furthermore, Gomez acknowledges conversion among the enslaved but claims the majority of enslaved Africans in the South converted to Christianity after the Civil War.[68] Therefore before Christian conversion many continued to practice African traditional religions passed down from parents. Gomez argues, "the adaptability of Christianity and African traditional religion as some of the symbols transferred, such as the ring shout and worship rituals."[69] Gomez further acknowledges Christianity has been present in West Africa among the Congolese since the seventeenth century but altered or fused with the indigenous religion of the Congo. Consequently, Gomez's research expands the idea of the fusion of African religion with Christianity because such practices were the normal in Africa. For example Gomez notes, Nigerians fusion of Islam with traditional African religion, such practices continued in America eventually forming black religion. A black religion oriented to meet the needs of the enslaved.

Power, Gender:

In 1970, the popular theologian James H. Cone wrote *A Black Theology of Liberation* as a religious response to the black power movement of the era. *A Black Theology of Liberation* outlines the trials and experiences of black oppression in America. Using Christian biblical scripture, Cone argues that the God of the Old Testament, who freed the enslaved Israelites, is the answer to the African American experience of oppression. Cone further notes that the

message of Jesus Christ is a message of social justice for the present, hence God is on the side of the oppressed thus opposing the enemy.[70]

The author confronts the errors of white theologians as he further asserts, Christian theology is a theology of liberation but "with clearer theological sophistication white theologians defined the discipline of theology in the light of the problem of the individual unbeliever and thus unrelated to the problem of slavery and racism."[71] Thus taking the onus off the institutions that implemented such discriminatory practices. The author notes, "Racism is a disease that perverts one's moral sensitivity and distorts the intellect. It is found not only in American society and its churches but particularly in the discipline of theology, affecting its nature and purpose."[72] White racist theologians are in charge of defining the nature of the gospel and of the discipline responsible for explicating it. Cone identifies the theological institution as a source of oppression further distorting the message of social justice.

In 1989 *The New Cultural History* by Lynn Hunt, author Patricia O'Brien gives analyses to Michel Foucault's, *History of Culture.* In contrast to Cone's notion of power being within an institution Foucault asserts, "power does not originate in the economy, politics or religion and is not grounded there, power exists as "an infinitely complex network of micro-powers" of power reactions that permeate every aspect of social life."[73] Moreover, Foucault argues, "do not study power merely as a form of repression, and do not reduce power to a consequence of legislation and social structure."[74] Foucault then presents rules to understand power as follows. First, one is never outside of power, there are no margins, no peripheries, as there is no center "power is coextensive with the social body,"[75] Second, relations of power are interwoven with other kinds of relations (production, kinship, family and sexuality. Third, relations of power are interconnected and their interconnections delineate general conditions of domination organizing

power into a more or less coherent and unitary strategic form.[76] Essentially, Foucault is stating that power is within individual relationships and at anytime the individual can up end the power dynamic.

The mirror concept focusing on women's liberation is a relatively new thought. There is a large amount of history that centers the experience of black men in positions of religious leadership and power. Moreover, this researcher's recent experience has shown that the realm of religion continues to be patriarchal, particularly in terms of social justice. It seems the black male has a lot at stake regardless of aside from risk radicalism. The black male has to carry the entire race through gender, so the diversity between genders becomes a blurred masculine representation leaving out the female voice. The aim of this project is to challenge such trends.

Methodology/Theoretical Framework

Jarena Lee and Maria W. Stewart are pioneers of American, African-American and Women's history. In order to illuminate that fact, this research chose to examine the archive of Lee and Stewart. Additionally, this research examined the history of the black church. Of particular focus is the independent black church and how it managed women's biblical interpretations of personal liberation. This research utilizes various primary and secondary sources. Primary documents include *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel* 1849 edition, *Meditations From the Pen of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart* 1832 edition, four speeches pages 24 –73 *The Life Experience, and Gospel Labors of the RT. Rev. Richard Allen*, and *David Walkers Appeal*. Other primary source documents include newspapers such as, *The Christian Recorder*, *World Methodists Council First Friday Letter*, *National Citizen* and *Ballot Box*. A close reading of these primary documents provided additional historical insights into the lives and relationships supporting the work of Lee and

Stewart. In addition to the previously listed primary sources, various secondary sources have been utilized to create the four organizing themes for this research.

Primary and secondary sources provided historiographical insight on women, religion, and liberation that bolsters the four overarching themes of this research. The theoretical framework for this research utilizes Foucault's notion of power to analyze the past. In addition, this research examines the work of Lee and Stewart through the lens of the black radical tradition and how it relates to an adjustment of Cone's black theology of liberation. This approach creates a mirror image of freedom that I am naming "liberation theology". This lens is helpful, as it will reveal the central source that empowered Lee and Stewart despite laws prohibiting such work for women.

Chapter 1: Revolution and Black Liberation Strivings

Despite colonial attempts to create an exclusive ideology of liberty all colonists whether enslaved or free looked to gain freedom using the language of liberty. For example, Historian Silvia Frey notes black desires for liberty as she cites the, "panic of white citizens as enslaved blacks chanted the same cry, liberty"[77] after watching white protests of the Stamp Act. Frey further notes some whites simply dismissed the black protesters as "thoughtless imitators."[78] Yet nothing could be further from the truth as Frey's research indicates black protests to enslavement was rife with various degrees of resistance before and after the American Revolution. Furthermore, Frey argues, "blacks, slave and free, urban and rural, artisan and field hand, literate and illiterate, were swept up by the force of ideological energy."[79] In other terms, the spirit and language of liberty could not be contained.

As the possibilities of war grew more probable, enslaved blacks working inside plantation households were a direct source of regular communication to other enslaved people on white colonial sentiments of resistance to British authorities. Furthermore, as civil war became more eminent, enslaved blacks created their own "triangular war complete with two sects of white belligerents."[80] Additionally, enslaved blacks created various methods of resistance, from concealment to overt objections and everything in between, based on their own best interest.

After passage of the Stamp Act, white colonists became distracted with counter protest. Enslaved blacks in Georgia and South Carolina took the opportunity to form maroon societies in the swamps.[81] Although maroon societies were eventually discovered, for a time the enslaved were able to defend against recapture.[82] The established maroon societies model covert resistance by the enslaved as they "slipped away" in essence going underground and interacting only with the local enslaved community when necessary.

Continuing to explore the various kinds of resistance Frey notes, "in 1773 a group of Boston slaves presented petitions for freedom to the general court."[83] Other enslaved blacks volunteered to fight for the British. The two previous examples of enslaved persons' resistance are not unusual as the enslaved took a pragmatic approach to their freedom. Some southern enslaved peoples chose to runaway as a family while others deserted their kin fleeing to Native American groups friendly to enslaved peoples such as the Black Seminoles.

Some enslaved people chose a neutral approach, as did some whites.[84] The neutrality of enslaved blacks occurred from different motives as some blacks did not trust either side. Both the British and the colonists were known for their brutality. Thus, enslaved blacks saw neutrality as a survival mechanism.[85] The most pragmatic action taken by enslaved Africans was to decide to fight as a loyalist for the British or a patriot for the New Republic with the promise of freedom.

One could argue enslaved blacks who fought for the British were traitors or that those who fought for colonists were loyal Americans. However, such a simplistic perception of the life of the enslaved, especially as liberty was on the horizon is naive at best and ignorant at worst.

African Americans (whether enslaved or free) kept pragmatism as an anchor when deciding their fate and that of their loved ones just as white colonists did. The American Revolution ended in 1781 creating a triumphant New Republic. The rhetoric of freedom, liberty, inalienable rights, and individualism along with questions of leadership increased among the American populace during the Second Great Awakening. Some would argue the Second Great Awakening was purely a religious event and mostly it was, but it was wrapped in the rhetoric of religious liberty and equality fomenting social change. Nathan Hatch notes the impact of the Revolution when he quotes Sean Wilentz's definition of Americanism, "to be an American citizen was by definition to be a republican, the inheritor of a revolutionary legacy."[86] The legacy of revolution started with a physical war but is kept alive by ordinary American social movements adapting the ideology of liberty and equality to win their cause.

The history of the Great Awakening is one of ordinary people challenging the established pre-revolutionary elite religious hierarchy and its leaders' ability to represent the average American. The educational status of religious leaders was shunned by citizens of the New Republic, and swept in an ideology of anti-intellectualism.[87] Furthermore, religious anti-intellectual ideology was promoted by uneducated dissenter sect religions such as the Baptist and Methodist Evangelicals. Nathan Hatch notes, "the conjunction of evangelical fervor and popular sovereignty . . . as the engine that accelerated Christianization in popular culture, allowing indigenous expressions of faith to take hold among ordinary people, white and black."[88]

Moreover, Hatch argues "Christianity was effectively reshaped by common people who molded it in their own image and threw themselves into expanding its influence."[89] The Black Church is the best example of the process of common people creating their own version of Christianity. After the American Revolution, all that remained of the British was their religious establishments; the Congregationalists, Quakers, and the Anglicans. The new Evangelical Methodists and Baptists also known as dissenter sects during the Second Great Awakening would challenge all the previously mentioned establishment churches. The dissent leaders challenging the established religions were not as educated in schools of theology as their opponents; these leaders were ordinary citizens. The dissenters were described as, "a diverse array of evangelical firebrands building a movement"[90] during America's population, boom. Through evangelicals such as Lorenzo Dow, Bishop Francis Asbury, Alexander Campbell, Richard Allen and many others Christian Protestantism was sold to the masses.

The appeal of the Protestant movement was that its leaders imparted to ordinary people (especially the poor and sick) a sense of "somebodyness."[91] In other words, people often left at the margins of the established religions became the center of attention and divine empowerment. For example, the Methodists and Baptists challenged common people to read the Bible for themselves and trust their own interpretations instead of relying on a central authority.[92] As noted by Hatch, "If nothing else these movements were a collective expression of hope, self-respect, and meaning in thousands of persons whom the dominant culture had defined as marginal."[93] The people that Hatch speaks of were black, white, Native Americans, women and cultural groups of various social statuses that gathered together to worship God.

Some of the pull factors for African Americans to the Evangelical camp meetings were the ability to freely worship God without racial limitations. During camp meetings, reciprocal

cultural exchanges occurred among attendees in forms of music and worship styles.[94] This free expression is juxtaposed to that of established religions that required certain decorum in services that suppressed overt expressions of worship often preferred by black people. For the first time, black musical talent, such as spirituals, were viewed as a gift from God meant to be shared among the family of believers. By large measure the majority of black people would become either Baptist of Methodist according to their location above or below the Dixie line.

Perhaps the greatest pull factor to Methodism was its abolitionist message that evolved over time. The success of the Methodist and Baptist camp meetings between 1790 and 1830 was characterized by the growth of the urban black church. Nevertheless, official church statistics listed only six percent growth rate in black Christian converts between 1790 and 1830.[95] The state of African religious practice and belief before 1800 is relatively unknown to the general public. One of the most influential myths justifying African enslavement was that "it was a means of spreading the gospel"[96] to heathens lost in darkness. The Anglican Church established the religious justification for slavery during the colonial era. Religious conversion was intended for enslaved Africans and their colonial masters. However, both groups created major obstacles for Anglican evangelism.

As a firmly established religious institution in the colonial South, the Anglican Church was responsible for the support and maintenance of social order from 1739 to 1745 during the First Great Awakening.[97] Despite religious justifications for African enslavement and Christianization most colonial planters rejected such ideas for themselves and their slaves. Planter rejection of Christianizing revolved around three primary concerns: economy, equality, and freedom.

For many planters economics was of primary concern not the religious beliefs of the enslaved.[98] In other words, enslaved people were an investment in labor. They were property meant to recoup profits not salvation. Second, planters who did consider conversion began to ponder if the religious conversion of enslaved Africans would force their emancipation.[99] The planters of the Antebellum South were largely English Protestants who often associated Protestantism with freedom not enslavement. Therefore, the question of enslavement of Christians created a sense of theological uncertainty among planters. Lastly, some planters feared religious equality with the enslaved thus prohibiting their conversion.[100] Most planters themselves were not religious and their own Christianization was slow at best.[101] It is probable spirituality equality with slaves could force planters to recognize the humanity of the enslaved. This could trigger any possible guilt planters harbored due to slavery thus upending the social order. To combat planters' fears the Anglican Church addressed the planter issues with slave conversion as follows. First, in terms of economic benefits the church convinced planters that Christian slaves are more obedient and would be to the benefit of the planters, though all planters did not subscribe to such theories.[102] Second, Anglican Church authorities and colonial legislatures passed "acts denying that baptism altered the condition of a slave."[103]

On the issue of spiritual equality, Anglican minister William Fleetwood parsed the issue by declaring, "the humanity of African people"[104] and thus proclaiming the enslaved as, "equally the workmanship of God."[105] Fleetwood also told planters and enslaved Africans that "masters were God's overseers . . . absolute obedience was ordered by God."[106] Various legal acts and the expansion of church doctrine did little to calm planters' fears of slave conversion. Thus, most enslaved Africans were not converted Christians. Further obstacles to slave conversion were

also due in part to the enslaved. To justify slavery, individuals had to dehumanize slaves by claiming them pagan and void of any religious values however this was far from true.

Historians have noted three general reasons early colonial efforts at evangelism failed. First, Silvia Frey notes language and educational barriers between enslaved Africans and religious instructors.[107] For instance, ex-slave John Thompson notes, "we went to the Episcopal church, but always came home as we went, for the preaching was above our comprehension."[108] For Thompson, the language was not for the average person. Perhaps whites had the same issue understanding religious instruction since most people were uneducated.

The enslaved often cite how slavery was used as a weapon by selective reading of Christian texts that mainly benefited the masters. This included the church doctrine of absolute obedience to master as a requirement of God. Often the master's own lack of Christian discipline presented a confusing or perverted view of religion to enslaved Africans interested in conversion.[109] Lastly, and probably the largest obstacle, was the religious worldview retained during the transatlantic slave trade.

Despite various descriptions of African people as "heathens", their religious traditions, practices, and worldview had been practiced for thousands of years within kinship groups.[110] In fact, in a survey of African indigenous religion, John Mbiti asserts, "religion as the strongest element in the traditional African background and it exerts influence in thinking and living."[111] Furthermore, Mbiti notes African religions permeate all departments of life. There is no secular and religious distinctions thus the Africans' religion is where he is whether in the field sowing a crop or at social gatherings.[112] A critical examination of Mbiti's findings on African religion applied to the slave trade provides evidence that Africans transported during the transatlantic slave trade arrived with a shared religious heritage among ethnic groups.

In Africa, religion was not formally structured as everything contained spirit such as streams, trees, and other parts of nature. Also, Africans carry religion within their person regardless of location; whether in a slave ship or plantation field. Historian Jon Butler's notion that a holocaust of the African mind occurred stripping the enslaved of their religion and culture ignores Africans orientations of religion. It is often in times of trauma people look to their religious belief to process their dilemma and gain understanding to grapple with their circumstances. Kidnap and capture is one of those traumatic situations that would turn one toward their religion to alleviate emotional and mental distress.

The largest obstacle for enslaved Africans converting to Christianity was the religion of their home country. There are three major religions that enslaved Africans transported to American shores. Historian Michael Gomez notes, the arrival of an enslaved devout Muslim name Salin Bilali. Bilali prayed daily facing east, fasted on Ramadan and had regular fellowship with other enslaved Muslims.[113] He arrived in 1800 on the Georgia Island of St. Simons.[114] Of particular interest is the fact that Bilali converted others to Islam as well as passed the religious tradition to his children.[115] Additionally, most forms of Islam practiced by Africans infuse African traditional religion in one way or another. Gomez notes the practice of African traditional religions. Vodun, hoodoo or minkisi known as sacred herbal medicines were primarily practiced in west central African societies. The practice of minkisi can be found in, "herbalism, mental healing and funeral traditions among black people of the Old Deep American South."[116] History has noted many white southerners of various social classes utilizing minkisi for relief despite religious ridicule. Historian Gayraud Wilmore notes the practice of Christianity in Egypt, Ethiopia, Nubia and the Congo.[117] Similarly, Gomez notes the practice of Christianity in the Congo, which most Congolese peoples practiced in addition to intermixing African traditional

religion.[118] Moreover, Gomez notes the presence of "Christianity in the Congo since the late fifteenth century, in fact by the eighteenth century Christianity was the source of Congo identity."[119] Needless to say during the later stages of the transatlantic slave trade the majority of enslaved Africans were purchased from the Congo bringing their version of Christianity to the new world, which was a fusion of African traditional religion and Catholicism.

The presentation of the religious origins of some enslaved Africans is not meant to be exhaustive. The African continent has more than two hundred cultural groups and more religions than those mentioned in this research. The three religions discussed are the most known and easily recognizable to religious historical scholars however many other religions are practiced in Africa. The initial question of what barriers prevented African conversion can be interpreted by understanding some of the religious practices transported during the slave trade.

With a basic understanding of African religious beliefs, it is clear to recognize consistency of intermixing new religious beliefs with African religious traditions. Nevertheless, debate has ensued among American history scholars over this issue. The debate often centers on enslaved Africans' religious retentions and cultural legacy (or lack thereof). Melvin Herskovits argues, "the system of slavery did not destroy African culture and a considerable number of Africans continue to define African American culture in the United States."[120] In contrast E. Franklin Frazier argues, "African retentions in the United States were negligible because the African was almost totally stripped of his culture by process of enslavement."[121] However, historian Albert Raboteau has made an intervention in this debate positing himself in the center of both of the previous scholars arguing that, "As the gods of Africa gave way to the God of Christianity, the African heritage of singing, dancing, spirit possession, and magic continued to influence Afro-American spirituals, ring shouts, and folk beliefs."[122] In other terms, black

Christianity is neither white religion, nor purely African but a fusion of both suited to the desires of enslaved Africans for purposes of survival, healing and community formation. Frey examines how Africans found common ground among their ethnic groups, leading to the formation of the black church and community. This section has noted the impact of the American Revolution and its impact on the Second Great Awakening. Both events left a potent rhetoric of liberty, religious rights, and representation all of which led to the disestablishment of the Anglican Church and the fervor for new Evangelical groups thus leading to the democratization of Christianity.

Evangelical itinerate leaders without question acknowledged religious authority, biblical interpretation, and holy visions. Essentially, every man was called to preach regardless of color and all should be converted to Christ. Those ideas faced several barriers to come to fruition such as planter fears of liberation, production decline and spiritual equality with enslaved peoples. Moreover, itinerates faced the additional obstacle of newly enslaved Africans carrying their own religious worldview. Despite those barriers, African conversions to Christianity did occur though in small numbers. Before 1800, most Africans preferred the religious traditions of their homeland. The low number of African conversions increased mainly due to black Methodist and Baptist outreach across the country.

The significance of the Revolution and the Great Awakening is its impact on the lives of Lee and Stewart among others, thus ushering in a new radical vision of freedom. Historian Silvia Fry describes the two previously mentioned historical events as follows:

> [T]he two revolutions produced a great torrent of historical change: the destruction of the old colonial empire and the emergence of a new political order . . . the end of slavery in the North and the transatlantic slave trade . . . the decline of the Anglican church establishment and the emergence of a new religious configuration.[123]

Fry's expression of change is in no way an exaggeration or overly simplistic. These two historic revolutions created a lasting New Republic from a diverse socio-religious spirit of liberty and populism that is uniquely American and remains active. There is a connection in the rhetoric and ideology of liberty espoused in both events. The American Revolution gave voice and language to the Second Great Awakening. The American Revolution began in 1775 but colonial issues with the British government started as early as 1765. Tensions flared for a decade due to a range of issues instigated by British officials. Major conflicts included the Stamp Act, the Tea Act, and special tariffs put on colonial products to raise British revenue. Additional controversies were a lack of colonial representation in British Parliament and equal rights for colonists as British subjects. Colonial protest and various skirmishes with the British colonial army and colonial militiamen led to war in 1775.[124] The cited controversies are the major contributing factors escalating the conflict between the British authorities and colonial subjects leading to the American Revolution. These physical agitations, push-pull factors and American identity formation process, particularly in terms of religion, are important for understanding the American socio-political landscape Jarena Lee and Mariah Stewart operated within.

The colonial list of grievances packaged in an ideology of liberty and resistance for the British crown in 1774 by colonial delegates such as George Washington, Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry, and John Jay.[125] The grievances included no taxation without representation and maintenance of the British Army in the colonies without consent. Yet the most important issues for this research are the declaration of the rights due to every citizen to include life, liberty, property, and trial by jury.[126] The expression of colonial grievances as "rights due to every citizen"[127] or inalienable rights is the rhetoric of resistance. One's right to life, liberty, and

property is the essence of democracy and such language would lend itself in the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in the New American Republic.

Historians Nathan Hatch, Jon Butler, and Silvia Fry note the impact of the American Revolution in the sentiments and ideas of enslaved and free colonial subjects. Hatch argues the lasting impact of the Revolutions on the New Republic in two fundamental ways. First, the "revolution dramatically expanded the circle of people who considered themselves capable of thinking for themselves about issues of freedom, equality, sovereignty, and representation."[128] Second, "respect for authority, tradition, station, and education eroded." Essentially, ordinary people evolved toward a new future based on an ideology of liberty and equality.

The average white American male no longer regarded the elite or educated as representatives for the people. Instead, white, largely male people created personal ideologies of liberty. The evolution of the New Republic's ideology is found in the average citizen's use of a common, "rhetoric of liberty that would not have occurred to them were it not for the Revolution."[129] The verbiage of liberty started with ordinary colonial subjects protesting the British government. This evolved into the known discourse of inalienable rights expressed in the Declaration of Independence. Hatch's previous quote should not lead the reader to think the ideas of liberty were not always present in the colonies. In fact, colonists from all walks of life expressed sentiments of freedom as the next section will reveal.

Historian I.R. Christie notes common sentiments in colonial letters citing the conviction to, "assert our rights or submit to every imposition . . . and use shall make us tame and abject slaves, as the blacks."[130] The previous quote was from George Washington, which elucidates the sentiments of colonial leaders' passion for freedom by rejecting all levels subjugation by British authorities. White colonists defined their ideas of liberty by contrasting their status and ability to

assert their rights with a false binary of black docility and permanent enslavement. Such regular discussions by colonial leaders were not just from elites like George Washington, but were prevalent regardless of one's social status.

Additionally, such comparisons of the black/white binaries of freedom more than likely bolstered support for the revolution. Frey notes white colonists' reaction to the Stamp Act as protesters, "parading around homes of suspected stamp officers shouting liberty, liberty and stamp'd paper."[131] Whether these protesters were elites is unknown and irrelevant because British colonial policies affected all its' citizens, which created a burning desire for independence.

Hatch notes the permanence of the Revolution's effects on America's white citizenry asserting, "The age of the democratic revolutions unfolded with awesome moment for people of every social rank."[132] The previous quote elucidates the authority reclaimed by citizens of the soon to be New Republic as questions beyond British rule led to the question of who will rule after the war. Hatch argues the fervor over American leadership, "brought an accent of reality to the sovereignty of the people."[133]

Though people are sovereign, the founding fathers did not think of governing in such terms until push back came in the form of voluntary social groups, newspapers, and political clubs which reflected popular opinion. The goal of the noted organizations was to aid in governing the politics and policies of the New Republic through civil participation and the expanding ideas of citizenship. The prevalence of liberty rhetoric among colonists was not intended for everyone. For example, after a foiled insurrection plot by blacks enslaved in Boston in 1773 and due to the coming war against British tyranny, plantation masters had to grapple with the question of how to "prevent their slaves from imbibing the heady notions of liberty and

equality."[134] In other terms, liberty or inalienable rights were only intended for Protestant white males. All others would be subject to the New Republic's socioeconomic hierarchy.

Chapter 2: The Process of Cultural Transformation

Cultural change was inevitable although the percent of black conversions to Christianity was relatively low during the Second Great Awakening. African identity was evolving for the purposes of unification on two primary fronts: religious and social community formation. Silvia Frey notes, the first signs of cultural formation during the American Revolution as loose networks of Africans began to associate with one another based on language, values, customs, and kinship groups.[135] Historian Michael Gomez cites the shift from African ethnic identities toward a racial identity starting around 1830, just eight years after the Denmark Vesey Conspiracy of 1822.[136] Nevertheless, both historians agree that the shift from ethnicity to race was a long process filled with unfamiliar obstacles such as race and white supremacists' interpretations of Christianity.

After the revolution, Frey cites three crucial elements leading to community social development among Africans. A common set of African values that were present among most if not all groups.[137] These standards included respect for elders; religious worship traditions, funerary practices as well as courtship and marriage customs. Isolation allowed the implementation of common African values with no competition from other systems. The emergence of a common religious ideology and culture formed around the church, which routinely reinforced the common value set adopted by all Africans.[138] Elements of African community development are the evidence of African acculturation. From an outsiders' perspective, this group shifted to becoming African Americans yet privately they retained a predominantly African identity in religious worship and social customs.

Institutions such as the church and the family unit became an anchor for and guide to group values.[139] The African formation of a common religious culture is a journey from African traditional religion to Afro-Christianity. Common religious ideology centered around three crucial elements. First, a set of complex values that were common to African traditional religion such as the ring shout and water baptism.[140] Second, isolation had a substantial impact because it offered no competing religious views.[141] Lastly, white missionaries whose evangelism introduced Africans to Christianity rarely converted the enslaved. [142] The most successful missionaries among the enslaved were the Africans who converted to Christianity under Methodist and Baptist leadership.

Gomez notes the initial African rejection of Christianity but an eventual acceptance of a reoriented Christian doctrine.[143] One could argue that Africans designed the reorientation of the bible to unveil the message of the exodus found in the Old Testament thus promoting conversion of the enslaved. This theory is supported by the idea that scholars have often noted black preachers "asserting their authority in secret."[144] They preached a secret message of hope and freedom that would appeal to their enslaved brethren despite possible punishment. African efforts to convert their fellow slaves do not preclude the disappearance of African traditional religion among the new converts. Contrary to popular opinion, Africans who converted to Christianity intermixed ideas of African traditional religion with Christian doctrine keeping a spirit of unity but reorienting worship toward Christ. For example, Historian Brenda Stevenson notes, " her advanced age, her obvious knowledge of religious text, and perhaps both the memory and contemporary practice of female leaders in traditional African religions allowed social space for female religious leadership in slave communities.[145] Most African Religions did

not add gender specifications to positions of religious leadership such ideas were purely of western origin, thus adding a different dynamic to religion as practiced among the enslaved.

As Africans gained access to the Christian Bible, their reorientation of biblical text focused its gaze on the Old Testament. Reorientation involves locating where one is and changing direction toward where one wants to be. This description of reorientation perfectly describes how Africans formed their Christian ideology aligning themselves with the God of the exodus who therefore avenged the sins committed against the chosen people. Raboteau notes, "the slaves religious community reached out through space and time to include Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Noah . . . heroes whose faith had been tested of old."[146] Not all Africans converted to Christianity. Most Christian converts continued certain traditional African religious practices such as the ring shout, water baptism, ecstatic worship incorporating dance, spirituals, drumming, and funerary traditions. Two additional external factors aided African community development, the end of the international slave trade in 1807 and the rate of natural increase. The former expressed common socio-religious value set to settle without internal interruptions by newly enslaved Africans. The natural population increases among Africans created the first and second generations of Africans born enslaved in America. Thus, second and third generation Africans have little in common with Africanisms of their grandparents. However, established community and socio-religious ideology continued from generation to generation. Though the majority of Africans did not convert to Christianity until after the Civil War, most early converts found in the new religion a source of healing, wholeness, and otherworldly security helping to dampen the harshness of slavery. Thus, this study will next examine what attracted Africans to the Baptist and Methodist itinerant camp meetings.

Radical Evangelism

The popularity of the Methodist and Baptist styles of evangelism filled camp meetings with a cross section of Americans from diverse cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. The camp meeting style of ecstatic preaching coupled with the message of instant salvation was either life changing or at least a religious awakening. Many did not accept the message and found the emotional tone unbecoming. Yet others absorbed the message and the fervor of the moment by committing their lives to Christ. What was different about the evangelical efforts of these groups and what attracted Africans to these camp meetings?

Historians note several factors that attracted black people to the Methodist and Baptist dissenter sects between 1810 and 1830. While both groups were popular, evangelical preference was influenced by the regional strength of each denomination.[147] Both groups embraced the abolition of slavery and presented the sinfulness of the slave system as evil and anti-Christian. Not only did these evangelists attack slavery, but they also preached sermons declaring every person's inalienable right to freedom. Such sermons presented a direct challenge to the Anglican orthodoxy and its theory of absolute obedience.[148] As one enslaved African stated, "I had recently joined the Methodist church . . . and from the sermon I heard, I felt that God had made all men free and equal, and that I ought not be a slave."[149]

In addition to a message of abolition, Baptist and Methodist leaders treated black people as their Christian brethren creating a message of spiritual equality regardless of race.[150] These itinerant sects, who eventually became established religions, acknowledged the humanity of black people, while simultaneously empowering their sense of value and purpose. Also, the language of the message was simple and clear. Ex-slave Richard Allen claimed, "the unlearned can understand . . . the Methodists were the first people that brought glad tidings to the colored

people . . . all other denominations preached so high-flown that we were not able to comprehend their doctrine."[151] Stated differently, the itinerant preachers understood their audience's education levels and adjusted their language thus making the gospel accessible to all.

Another level of appeal in the itinerant message was the idea of instant salvation accompanied with individual gifts. These notions would appeal to many people regardless of color but was of heightened import for the enslaved and freemen. Freemen and enslaved Africans were not given a choice of their life station. Hence, the ability to make a life-altering decision was a form of resistance…even if unintentional. The Baptist and Methodists' revival style of ecstatic worship was familiar to Africans as some historians note; "the revivals style of religious expression and communal engagement represented a kind Christian mirror-image of a religious heritage that Africans had long known."[152] One could argue that the religious heritage of African group worship continued on American plantations as the Works Progress Administration interviews made record of various occasions when enslaved Africans would steal away to various gatherings for purposes of worship and celebration.

The emergence of black preachers and exhorters was a draw for Methodist and Baptist groups.[153] Baptist and Methodists proved their claims of spiritual brotherhood by empowering black leadership within their church. The implementation of the black preacher was an empowering image for black people, which created a surge in black church membership between the Revolution and 1830.[154] Furthermore, as the popularity of the black preacher rose, so then did their status as representative spokesmen for the black community. Consequently, the black preachers' popularity also led to the formation of black congregations they led. The tools of religious empowerment, equality, and brotherhood given by itinerant preachers produced great

consternation among the planter elite causing and eventual backlash among southern planter groups.[155]

As previously noted, the planter class feared Christian conversion among the enslaved. Yet most planters' concerns were not calmed by Anglican religious teachings nor the additional legal guarantees that conversion did not equal emancipation. However, the teachings of the Baptist and Methodist sects elucidated the egalitarian nature of Christianity a freedom that men could not control. This psychologically empowered the enslaved to envision their community as people aligned with God, juxtaposed to their masters aligning with the evils of the slave system. The dissenter sect doctrines were offensive to southern planters, thus they prohibited their enslaved people from attending camp meetings.

However, what brought evangelism to a halt in the south was the Denmark Vesey Conspiracy of 1822 and the Nat Turner Revolt in 1831, which the assailants claimed religiously justified.[156] The southern response to these uprisings was threefold. Southern planters created laws that prohibiting blacks from congregating together for any purpose without a white male chaperone. Thus, the black preachers' authority was legally stripped and white males led religious instruction for the enslaved. Coincidentally, by 1830 as the Methodist and Baptist itinerants were being locked out of the south, their leaders discontinued their abolitionist doctrine to suit southern preferences, gain more white converts, and thus firmly establish their churches in the south. In contrast, the abolitionists' message remained in the doctrine of their northern counterparts.[157]

Second, church services in the South became segregated and most evangelicals, "thoroughly repudiated a heritage that valued blacks as fellow church members."[158] For example, in 1833 in a Methodist church located in South Carolina two white men removed two free blacks

from service for sitting on the main floor.[159] However, while such extreme segregation may seem purely southern, in 1787 in a Philadelphia Methodist Church, Richard Allen recalled, "We had not been long upon our knees . . . before I heard considerable scuffing . . . I raised my head up and saw one of the trustees . . . having hold of Reverend Absalom Jones, pulling him up off his knees and saying. You must get – up – you must not kneel here."[160] In response Allen notes, "We all went out of the church in a body, and they were no more plagued with us."[161]

Lastly, southern white male ministers not only took over black congregations, but also reformulated religious instruction to simple catechisms such as, "Slaves obey your masters as in the Lord! Cease dark males from striving."[162] In other words, all black ambition must cease and desist, thus surrendering religious instruction to white male authorities. Despite, southern desires to control religious doctrine their efforts had mixed results due to its late start. For example, from 1790 to 1810, coinciding with the popularity of the black preacher the independent black church movement began attracting the vast majority of black Christians.[163] All over the nation black Methodist and Baptist preachers organized congregations that were distinctly African.[164] The independent black churches were located primarily in cities with large concentrations of free blacks, such as Philadelphia, New York, Connecticut, Charleston, Louisiana, and Virginia however the first independent black church was in Georgia.[165]

The southern black reaction to white religious suppression was both passive and overt resistance. Free black Christians located in southern urban centers often chose to attend the local independent black church. The growth of the urban churches was concurrent with the growth of the free black population. By 1860, one third of Virginia's free black population lived in cities or towns and the majority of free blacks were women.[166] The previous description of women being the majority of church membership is true in various regions of the country, as many historians

have noted. Therefore, black women often marginalized in the history of the black church are central to church stability. Southern independent black churches welcomed all visitors regardless of status. Thus, the urban black church was central to black culture.[167]

As the membership of these independent black churches grew, members reorganized and chose leaders for themselves.[168] black church leadership was strategic in two ways. By choosing leaders for themselves, control of the church was always in familiar black hands this ensured the continuum of black common values would be followed. Black Christians, who had a choice, chose their own congregations for various reason, but the most common reason was fellowship, freedom to worship, the black preacher's unique oratory style, freedom to organize, and reconnect with the community. Also, a growing number of black Christians attended biracial churches.[169]

In the rural South passive resistance was the most common response as religious meetings went underground by 1830.[170] The enslaved either held their own services in slave cabins or would, "steal away" to hidden services in a rural space such as "the sticks."[171] These hidden spaces were closed to everyone except trusted insiders therefore ensuring the continuation of worshipful dances like the ring shout that might seem offensive to outsiders. From 1830-1860 the southern takeover of black religion expanded to include a Methodist mission movement on rural plantations with approved Southern Methodist ministers and their absolute doctrine.[172] The primary goal of the planter's elite was to use religion as a method of social control in their doctrines of paternalism and absolute obedience.

Frey notes the new doctrine forced slaveholders to recognize the humanity of the enslaved yet simultaneously bolstered the slave system.[173] The response of the enslaved Africans varied from acceptance to rejection. Even as enslaved blacks attended the mission services they

continued to steal away. Yet many enslaved blacks did convert to Christianity after a personal study of the Bible and a reorientation of the doctrine to meet African needs.[174] The converting of Christians to meet African desires was a part of the secret meetings attended by the enslaved to discover the truth of the new religion.

There were also enslaved blacks who simply rejected Christianity no matter the messenger. For instance, one African labeled Christianity as, "the white man's religion."[175] While another ex-slave declared, "professed Christians in the south didn't treat their slaves any better than other people . . . I'd rather live with a card-player and a drunkard than with a Christian."[176] Both of the previous quotes elucidate the awareness of the enslaved to the hypocrisy emanating from the new Christian doctrine and its messengers, as both are transparently self-serving.

Yet in the northern states the issue of white control is presented in a different context. Northern Methodist churches welcomed black membership, but as the denomination became more popular with whites segregation was implemented. The previously mentioned incident in Philadelphia is a quote by Bishop Richard Allen founder of the first African Methodist Episcopal Church. Allen's response to segregated church seating is typical of northern blacks. In other words, Allen's response like other black preachers was to form their own independent black churches extending membership only to those of African descent.[177] Once again the shrewdness of black leadership is highlighted as Richard Allen ensures the black tradition remains in black hands. That tradition would eventually break along class lines as the black elite splintered from the masses in worship approach and tradition.

Divergent paths began to form in the black church. One path led by urban elite preachers moved toward a discontinuation of African religious traditions such as the ring shout and ecstatic

praise just to name a few. The other group remained in the rural woods continuing to persist in intermixing African traditions in their religious services.[178] Despite attempts at reconciling these differing paths through biblical correction, full agreement was not reached. One Philadelphia urban clergymen who was questioned about why he allowed the ring shout during services he responded, "Sinners won't get converted unless there is a ring."[179] The previous quote stresses the attachment many black Christians had to the ring shout and the perception of its ability to bring people together.

Most Africans converted to Christianity under certain conditions. First, a common religious ideology had to be formed so that the new religion had a practical use that being survival. Second, the new religion had to have an agreed upon familiarity of worship and dance, thus ensuring group unity. Third, the new religion had to bring a sense of present and future hope. The sense of hope found in the Old Testament was projected into the future leading to the independent black church and emancipation. Similarly, as Africans transitioned into African-Americans communities had to form around agreed upon value sets. Central to community values are common ideas of respect and care for the elderly. Common agreement on pivotal life changing events such as courtship, marriage, childbirth, funerary practices, and celebrations all connected to the African worldview. With these common variables in place Africans gradually formed black religion and culture in addition to becoming African American.

Both women were born in the free north in a precarious position of being free without rights or citizenship. They utilized the rhetoric of freedom, liberty, and equality and wrapped it in the morality of a Christian conscience to challenge the state structures of oppression. Both Lee and Stewart operated their ministries in a racist, sexist, and contradicting new republic that while proclaiming the freedom of all on the one hand, issued freedom to a select few on the other. They

boldly challenged society with ideas of freedom; a strange liberty largely unfamiliar to women of the New Republic. Their religious conversions preceded their ideas of liberation, so Lee and Stewart's freedom began in the independent northern Black church communities.

Lee and Stewart took the lead in an opportunity to partake in a black radical tradition through religion. Amplifying their voice while simultaneously empowering women to build upon the humanitarianism that is advertised in their circles of activism.

Chapter 3: Women of Noble Character

> *But In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.*
>
> II Timothy 2:20, 21 (King James Version)

Northern black communities embrace of Afro-Christianity became the foundation of black culture and the black church became the organization hub for community action. By 1820, Afro-Christian leadership consciously created a theology among its members that paralleled that of the Israelites as a "chosen people," whose God would enact revenge on the enemies of the enslaved.[180] Identification with the Israelites elucidates the social justice component in Afro-Christianity that is often marginalized in other protestant denominations. Moreover, that identity was a reminder to northern freemen of the precarious limbo connected to the denial of human rights to blacks regardless of their status or geographic location. Leaving their subjugation and that of their enslaved brethren in the south left their fate forever intertwined.

However, with the creation of independent Afro-Christian churches came internal struggles, as class conflict became a splinter issue eventually creating two distinct styles of black

Christianity; one for urban elite, the other for the rural masses. Despite the progress of Afro-Christianity, its' egalitarian orientation and pulse for social justice by the 1820s gender issues within the black church would soon be confronted through the advocacy of Jarena Lee. Consequently, Lee's advocacy for women would vibrate into the secular world ten years later as Maria W. Stewart bound religious principals with political rhetoric launching her public speaking campaign in 1831 for human rights.

Lee and Stewart may seem opposite. Most contemporary historians categorically separate them based on their sphere of work. Lee is more on the side of religion and Stewart is associated with secular politics. However, such labels by contemporary historians are misleading as their mission was the same. Both women wanted to create a more just society for all people, but especially women and people of color. Although Lee and Stewart's end goal was the same there are stark differences in their approach to their work as religious activists. Lee, the vanguard of the two, challenged the religious sector and Stewart confronted the secular world; two patriarchal structures united their hostility toward minorities and women. Both women agree on the importance and primacy of God's purpose for their lives as motivation to guide, critique and improve the lives of others. Each woman notes their work as neither secular nor religious, but both ascribe to the notion that godliness of the individual leads to a better society for all.[181] This chapter will focus the depth of its analysis on Lee and Stewart's differences while synthesizing their commonalities.

Jarena Lee was born on February 11, 1783 in Cape May, New Jersey one year after the American Revolution and between the First and Second Great Awakening. Lee was not enslaved but was sent by her parents to work as a maidservant at age seven.[182] Maria W. Stewart was born Maria Miller in 1803, in Connecticut, just before the Second Great Awakening and twenty-two

years after the establishment of the New Republic.[183] Similar to Lee, Stewart was born free. The difference is she was orphaned at age five and was bound out for service to a clergyman until the age of fifteen. Black "freedom" in the North came with limitations enforced by law but mostly by white public sentiment.[184] For example, one northerner observer remarked, "Chains of a stronger kind still manacle their limbs, from which no legislative act could free them…tyrant custom has here subjected all the sons and daughters of Africa." The previous description of black subjugation was thoroughly threaded in many areas of black life, fully touching their livelihood in areas such as employment, education, home ownership and religious life. Thus, Lee and Stewart's race and gender confined them to work as maidservants.[185] Both Lee and Stewart note their experience as maidservants. Lee cites the meanness of the wife of the Roman Catholic family she worked for. In her youth, Lee began to have anxiety over her soul's destiny citing, "my anxiety still continued respecting my poor soul on which account I used to watch my opportunity to read the Bible; and this lady observing this, took the Bible from me and hid it, giving me a novel in its stead – which when I perceived, I refused to read."[186] In her lecture delivered at Franklin Hall, Stewart stated, "continual hard labor deadens the energy of the the soul."[187] In the same speech, Stewart clearly expresses that her intent is not derogatory as domestic labor is honorable[188], but black people are capable of more. Although servitude is most often communicated as a lamentable situation there are some clear benefits to Lee and Stewart being employed as maidservants in the North. Both women note their access to the Bible and other literature. Besides, the incident Lee experienced having the Bible taken away and replaced with a novel, Lee notes a separate example of walking to the nearby brook carrying a book to read.[189] Stewart notes, "I have borrowed much of my language from the Holy Bible. During the years of childhood and youth it was the black book that I mostly studied."[190]

Although servitude is most often associated with a lamentable situation there are some clear benefits to Lee and Stewart being domestic servants in the North. As northern free youths, they were privileged in their access to literature and a particular irony. Jarena Lee's employment exposed her to religion a subject that she acknowledges, "My parents being wholly ignorant of the knowledge of God, had not therefore instructed me in any degree in this matter."[191] Stewart's work as the domestic servant of a clergyman exposed her to certain tools of the trade."[192] Lee and Stewart were both in a space that elucidates the irony of them being free, yet still obligatorily having to work at a young age, but their presence in that space led to the beginning of their literacy and education. In other words, their work as domestic servants served ironically as the beginning of their educational freedom. Although their initial access to literacy is at its genesis, such a beginning would prepare them for their future intellectual work as they traversed their way through a black male-oriented and male dominated socio-religious world that assumed the primacy of the male intellect.[193]

Another benefit of their domestic work is that it taught them the discipline of following orders. As domestic servants, their work instilled a self-regulated discipline to accomplish their daily tasks. Historian Tera Hunter notes, "most workers labored from sun up to sun down seven days a week."[194] However, Lee and Stewart were live in domestics thus they were at their employer's beck and call twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. In their work as activists both women may have had a knee jerk reaction to their disciplined service to God, yet their training started in childhood. Their work as children placed them in a position of liberation and empowerment as literate young girls. Consequently, Lee and Stewart were in a perfect position to become servants of God because they were already conditioned to serve.

On the surface the oppressor seemed to be getting over by their acts of oppression. However, often the oppressors are teaching the oppressed how to be more flexible and creative because oppression forces people to create. For instance, Stewart's liberty must have been well felt especially as an orphan. Yet Stewart becomes privy to religious and historic knowledge she may never have had.[195] Stewart could clearly understand her privilege of literacy as a youth, which was in direct contradiction to most young girls. Perhaps her experience helped politicize her as she utilized biblical text to justify her positions. Lee learns from the Bible in her youth the connections between the old and New Testament. Most northern black people were more familiar with the Old Testament, but like Lee knew nothing of Jesus. However, Lee's access allowed her to expose other uninformed black people to the fullness of the bible, the idea of enslavement as sin, and its connection to their path to freedom.[196] Thus, Lee would present the authentic fullness of the Bible potentially changing or at least challenging their worldview. The domestic work of these women though mindless and grueling was a type of training that firms up the spirit to be able to follow God's lead with rigorous discipline. Such discipline and access allowed both women to make a clear distinction between the laws of man and the higher authority of God.

In 1811 at the age of 28, Jarena married Joseph Lee the pastor of Snow Hill Church.[197] After wedding Joseph, she relocated to the Snow Hill community six miles from the city of Philadelphia and her tightly knit AME Church community. Jarena's marriage to Joseph Lee meant she had to take on the role of a church mother and partnered with her husband as she led the church body. However, after one year Lee's impression of Snow Hill created discomfort because, "the manners and customs at this place were somewhat different"[198] prompted her to urge her husband to move. To which Joseph Lee said no. Stated differently, Jarena Lee felt

homesick and wanted the comfort and fellowship of the AME Church community, a community she knew very well. Joseph Lee's response was not because he did not care about his wife's discomfort, but as Lee notes, "this plan did not suit him, as he was the pastor of the society, he could not bring his mind to leave them."[199] It takes time and "divine vision" for Lee to understand her husband's decision as she states, "the Lord showed me in a dream what his will was concerning this matter…there came a man dressed in a white robe, looking at me, said emphatically, 'Joseph Lee must take care of these sheep or the wolf will come and devour them."[200] Although Lee accepted her husband's decision her dream confirmed Snow Hill is where they should remain. Yet Lee also learned full submission to God was not about personal comfort, but God's divine purpose. After this incident, Lee quickly settles into her role as church mother. Lee does not elucidate the details of being a church mother, but she is clear that her husband had no objection to her exercising her gift of exhortation noting, "so effectual was the word of exhortation made through the sprit that I have seen them fall to the floor crying aloud for mercy." [201] Lee's marriage also became a time of spiritual training that allowed her to cultivate her gift while simultaneously understanding the differing roles of her and her spouse. Yet what is also notable is that Lee's husband was not intimidated by her spiritual gifts, but instead partnered with her to build a stable church community. After six years of marriage and ministry the Lees' had two children, but after six years of marriage Joseph Lee died, leaving Jarena a widow and single mother of two.[202] Taking her time to grieve, Jarena Lee remained with the Snow Hill community for about a year after her husband's death. Lee reflects, "he (and) raised me up friends, whose liberality comforted and solaced me in my state of widowhood sorrow."[203]

In Boston, Massachusetts on August 10, 1826 twenty-three year old Maria Miler married James W. Stewart.[204] Sometime after pronouncing their marriage vows before the Reverend

Thomas Paul minister of the African Baptist Church, the Stewart's settled in Boston's black middle class community of Beacon Hill.[205] James Stewart worked as a shipping agent outfitting whaling and fishing vessels.[206] Maria Stewart would not have children of her own, but James Stewart did enter their marriage with two children from a previous relationship.[207] Through their location in the small black community of Beacon Hill, their association with the independent African Baptist Church, and the radical influence of David Walker as the leader of the Massachusetts General Colored Association, Maria W. Stewart became a radical activist. However, Maria's activism started first as a student as the Stewarts were updated on local and world affairs by reading newspapers such as Freedom's Journal in conjunction with other periodicals.[208] However, Maria Stewart's activism became public only after the sudden death of her husband on December 17, 1829 in addition to the sudden death of her political mentor David Walker in 1831. Stewart struggled with her sorrow for several years."[209] It is the anguish of her husband's death that led Stewart to internally reassess her relationship with God and undergo conversion experiencing, "the change…I felt a desire to devote the remainder of my days to piety, virtue."[210] Stewart further asserts, "I made a public profession of my faith in Christ."[211] Stated differently, Stewart's belief became personal and central to her daily life."[212]

Before venturing any further into the lives of Lee and Stewart some thoughts on their lives thus far is in order, as both have lost their spouses, whom they dearly loved and both women have converted to Christ. As previously noted, Lee's conversion occurred at the AME Church under the leadership of Reverend Richard Allen. Her conversion experience as she describes it was dramatic in its imagery and filled with emotion, leaving the spiritual gift of exhortation. Similarly, Stewart observes, "feeling the change"[213] but without all the dramatics presented by Lee. The emotion of the conversion is unimportant, but what is important is the

pivotal impact their choice to follow their divine purpose would have on them as widows and the path they lay for women in the future.

Conversion as Empowerment

Historian Clinton H. Johnson notes the process of conversion, "begins with a sense of sin and realization and terminate with one of cleanliness, certainty, and reintegration."[214] The internal heart, mind, and soul transformation leads to external change, which is evidenced in the daily living. Yet beyond the definition of conversion is what conversion means to the converted. Lee and Stewart have detailed what and how their conversions transformed their lives. Living as free women of the North made conversion a choice. Both women's early access to the full biblical text in conjunction with being literate allowed them to freely inquire and interpret scripture for themselves. This privilege stands in contrast to many southern blacks who at times were force fed a corrupt interpretation of scripture and pressured to convert. Also in areas of internal transformation Jarena Lee cites, her conversion, "saved [her] from the violence of my own hands."[215] Stewart notes the, "continual sorrow"[216] after her husband's death that led her to reassess religion leading to a deepening of her faith. The internal anxiety she felt dissipated with her conversion leading to an assurance of her eternal destiny. It is probable that Stewart's sadness of her husband's death did not instantly disappear but her conversion began the healing process as Stewart was awakened to God's purpose for her life. The process of conversion gave both women a career and purpose that led to a greater freedom, which rejected the social prescriptions of gender roles. Lee and Stewart became itinerants traveling the nation with the message of the cross. Lee spent over twenty years as an itinerant. Like the disciple Paul, she spoke to people of various social economic status and cultures despite society's prohibiting such action by women. Stewart much like Jeremiah the prophet urged repentance and reconciliation to

a nation divided by notions of racial supremacy; such an address was improper. The previous example demonstrates how conversion not only created a career for them but also a transformative confidence and boldness in their character to complete their task. Furthermore, their conversion gave them their defense for those who would attack their work. Lee asserts, "If the man may preach, because the savior died for him, why not the woman . . . as for me, I am fully persuaded that the Lord called me to labor according to what I have received in his vineyard."[217] In defense of her ministry Stewart refuted the most frequently used scripture to silence women, stating, "Did St. Paul but know of our wrongs and deprivations . . .I presume he would make no objection to our pleading in public for our rights."[218] The ministry and the confidence of both women is a direct reflection of their relationship with God as both women verify their communication with God. Lastly, conversion for them women meant a death to self to become God's creation. As Lee notes, "Even the falling of death leaves from the forests, and the dried spires of mown grass, showed me that I too must die in like manner."[219] Richardson notes of Stewart's death and renewal, "she could fulfill her calling only by behaving in a manner almost exactly opposite what she had once considered the ideal of black womanhood."[220] The previous quote is true of Stewart but also of Lee both women understood only spiritual death could resurrect their godly being. Thus, Lee and Stewart were following the biblical parable of Christ found in Matthew 10:39, which notes, "he that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."[221] In their conversion both women gained healing, purpose, authority, empowerment and liberation from God, thus creating a model for other women in their demonstration of how to empower the self. As Foucault noted power is in every individual therefore everyone can give and reclaim power.

Lee and Stewart brilliantly continue the tradition of using their conversion stories as a platform to give voice to a silent group. Also, their writing proclaiming their divine calling reclaims their birthright as daughters of God, righteously chosen for God's purpose. As historian Joan Braxton notes black women's writing served several purposes. First, writing by black women was often an attempt to regain a sense of place in the world.[222] In other instances the purpose is to communicate a shared knowledge to the next generation a knowledge that could be rediscovered due to it being recorded. Lastly, at times the writing of one's narrative is meant to be a blueprint to achieve their liberation, as both racial and gendered opposing forces would create obstacles to their self-empowerment.[223]

Stewart/Walker Concentric Circles Of Connection

The best way to explain the relationship between Maria W. Stewart and David Walker is through the concentric series of circles that connect them. Historians have aligned these two as they both were known in the abolitionist circles of Boston. For example, historian Marilyn Richardson cites Walker as being Stewart's, "political and intellectual mentor."[224] Historian Peter Hinks notes Stewart as part of Walker's "circle" of black activist thinkers.[225] There is no doubt that the ideas of connection posited by the previously mentioned historians are valid, there remains the issue of their direct connection. For instance, one can be a mentor of someone from a distance. Moreover, one can be a part of a political group without personally knowing its leader. However, the circles of connection between Stewart and Walker go beyond circumstance culminating in the highest probability that they indeed had a mentor mentee relationship.

The outermost concentric circle connecting Stewart and Walker is their geographic residence Boston's black enclave known as Beacon Hill on the north slope. The Walkers as newlyweds settled in the segregated community of Beacon Hill in 1826.[226] In 1827 Walker and

his family moved to Belknap Street in the heart of Beacon Hill's north slope.[227] Another outer circle of connection between Stewart and Walker is the African Meeting House and the African Baptist church located in the same building used for socio-religious activism. The African Meeting House is the location where Stewart gave one of her first speeches, but is also the spiritual, intellectual, and political focal point of black community politics.[228] Although Walker professed a Methodist faith most of his political associates attended the African Baptist Church.[229] Despite established outer connections, the strongest connection was segregation, which despite one's class or status forced a sense of commonality and connection for survival purposes. For example, the annual celebrations of the end of international slave trade by Black Bostonians often brought white harassment.[230]

An inside circle of connection for Stewart and Walker is her access to his writings in Freedom's Journal and his public persona as an outspoken member of the Massachusetts General Colored Assembly (MCGA). Both these positions transition Walker to become a central figure in Boston's political circle of thought. Furthermore, Walker's prominence in his writing, speeches, and the proximity of his leadership would have allowed Stewart to observe Walker's style and thus learn the tactics of leadership which she viewed as "fearless."[231] Moreover, as Stewart becomes more emboldened, she gives a scholarly rebuttal to a portion of *Walker's Appeal*. Therefore, the conclusion can be reached that at least on an intellectual level they have met.

The center circle of connection is Walker's influence on Stewart's presentation of her activism. Stewart adopted a similar ideology as she focused on black: education, liberation by any means and collective action. However, the most central connection between Stewart and Walker are the words they wrote about one another. Upon Walker's death, Stewart noted his character as being, "fearless and undaunted."[232] Lastly, Walker writes of Stewart's personal

situation as white men steal her inheritance form her husband's estate.[233] Although Walker does not mention Stewart's name, historian Marilyn Richardson notes the, "uncanny prescience" in which Walker details Stewart's situation.[234] The overlapping circles of connection are convincing of Stewart's connection to Walker. Thus, increasing the probability of their being intellectual friends.

Walker's influence on Stewart's early career is evident as they shared parallel ideas about racial uplift. For instance, like Walker, Stewart addressed herself to black audiences.[235] Like Walker, Stewart pushed for resistance to enslavement by any means even death. Also, like Walker, Stewart aligned herself with white abolitionist who did not her view on militancy.[236] Lastly, Stewart also adopted a similar ideology to Walker in aspects of liberation, education, religion, and racial uplift. While there are other parallels between Stewart and Walker at a certain point Stewart begins to transcend creating an ideology of cultural feminism to empower women and girls. In the realm of the Jeremiad tradition, Stewart differentiates herself from Walker as her Jeremiad rhetoric follows the pattern of calls for repentance, warnings of God's punishment for sin, and on intertwined hope. In contrast, in *Walker's Appeal* David Walker does not call for white repentance but black revolt on behalf of the enslaved and black unity in the process. Stewart has a sense of hope that whites can change and all the races can live together. Some would call her sense of hope naïve, but it is not. Stewart's projected hope is calling whites to live up to the notions of the Christian love they profess but do not live out. Stewart is calling them to become their higher self. This is the same tactic Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. displays in his *I Have a Dream* speech.

In contrast, analysis of *Walker's Appeal* demonstrates Walker has given up on white Christian as he calls them "devils"[237] throughout his writing. Further evidence of Walker's lack

of hope in white repentance is cited in his appeal as Walker asserts, "now suppose God were to give them more sense, what would they do? If it were possible, would they not dethrone Jehovah and seat themselves upon his throne?"[238] So, Walker compares white Christians to the biblical Satan who was kicked out of heaven because he tried to dethrone God. The essence of Walker's analysis is that white Christians are not Christians at all therefore there is no reason to look for them to collectively resist the American slave system, thus greed is their god. Walker recalls:

> A negro driver by the name of Gordon, purchased sixty negroes and was taking them, assisted by an associate named Allen, and the wagoneer, . . . About 8 o'clock in the morning, while proceeding on the state road . . . two of them dropped their shackles and commenced a fight . . . when the wagoneer Petit rushed in with his whip to compel them to desist . . . one of them seizing a club gave Petit a violent blow to the head, and laid him dead . . . Allen came to his assistance, met a similar fate, from the contents of a pistol . . . Gordon was then attacked . . . seized by one of the negroes, whilst another fired twice at him . . . he was beaten with clubs and left for dead . . . Gordon not being materially injured was enabled, by the assistance of one of the women, to mount his horse and flee.[239]

Walker further comments:

> Here my brethren, I want you to notice particularly in the above article, the ignorant and deceitful actions of this coloured woman. I beg you to view it candidly, as for eternity!!! . . . this service woman helped him upon his horse, and he made his escape . . . But I declare, the actions of this black woman are really insupportable. For my own part, I can not think it was any thing but servile deceit combined with the most gross ignorance."[240]

The previous quote demonstrates how Walker undermines his message of black unity in various ways. First the appeal is squarely addressed to black enslaved men. However black women are also a part of the enslaved population, liberation or freedom cannot ensue if only black men revolt. In order for collective action to ensue the whole collective must be awakened. Essentially, Walker only addressing black men strips women of their necessary role in the revolution for freedom. The second mistake Walker makes is his deep condemnation of the black

servile woman labeling her, "deceitful."[241] Further emphasizing her deceitfulness as Walker tells men to, "view it candidly, as for eternity!!!"[242] David Walker is a powerful political leader of the ear, many men follow his writing and this particular writing moves beyond black spaces and into mainstream readership. Perhaps not intentional, but Walker not only strips black women of their role in slave revolt yet he also implores men to remember this deceit for eternity as if there is no redemption for black women, they are not trustworthy. Although Walker is examining the mistake of one woman his pleading for black men to remember it for eternity projects such labeling onto all black women as deceitful, selfish, and impotent to the cause of liberation. Consequently, adding to white stereotypes of black women as jezebels and seducers of men for personal gain. Rather than Walker validating enslaved women and encourage them to take place on the front lines of resistance, he further victimizes the victim for generations. David Walker a powerful black man, writing a document still read by many students today unfortunately participated in a divisive continuum that was created by white patriarchy, then adopted by black men…the silencing of black female voices and overtly withholding power. Similar to Richard Allen, who supported Jarena's itinerant work, yet never made her official via ordination, which would put her on the path to being a reverend over a church. Yet Walker is similar to Cone, whose partial reflection of black oppression produced a liberation theory framed in masculinity, thereby silencing the lived experience of black women. Walker partakes in this continuum of withholding power that echoes for generations.

Yet there are disruptors to this pattern. Jarena Lee being the first disruption as she persisted addressing Bishop Allen once again upon her return after her husband's death. Lee being free with no obligations demonstrated her gift and shortly after defined her ministry according to her vision. Stewart publicly in a maverick way addressed the errors of her mentor

head on. Stewart's speech to the African American female intelligence society flipped the mirror on Walker's condemnation of black women. Stewart affirmed their power as women and mothers elucidating their crucial role as the ones who determine the fate of each generation as she notes, "O' woman your example is powerful, your influence great; it extends over your husband and over your children, and through the circle of your acquaintance . . . for upon your exertions almost entirely depends whether the rising generation shall be anything more than we have been."[243] Stewart's correction and re-empowerment of blacks as revolutionaries is the most pivotal demonstration of her transcendence of Walker and creating a public voice for black women. However, the most defining proclamation of their humanitarian message is presented as both women, with faith, purpose and authority walk confidently into the "masculine sphere" of socio-religious activism as itinerants.

Flag of Purpose

Before the death of their husbands both women were trained by God to live a life of service. Both women fulfilled the requirement of servitude as children, as a wife, and Lee as a mother. They completed their roles as wives along the lines of biblical completion, "till death do we part." At this point their responsibilities are fulfilled thus widowhood has freed them to do God's work, as they see fit. The fear of society's judgment is removed as they enter a new stage of devotion and freedom in their lives, no longer tethered to their spouse. Lee despite widowhood does have some stakes because she has children, however she allows the Allen's to raise her child, as her son needed a spiritual male role model.[244] Stewart having neither children nor other attachments notes the freedom of mobility that she felt as a widower, perhaps further emboldening her purpose.[245] From a biblical perspective if either of these women were married, despite their spiritual purpose their husbands would have the final say if or when they could

perform God's work. Lee and Stewart are officially untethered to man but willingly tethered to God. It is unfortunate that it takes widowhood for these women to begin their work; unfortunately, Bishop Allen in addition to other black religious leaders reinserted the prescriptions of patriarchy within black church culture. Allen made strides to change the status quo racially, but not between genders. Although Lee and Stewart answer to no one except God, they will during the course of their work have to defend their purpose in a society that is oppressive. Yet fortunately for both women they have the privilege of perspective. They have the ability and agency to step away from the table in their choice to only be married to God. As society would question their ministries they would defend their truth intellectually with their words of biblical truth, "God sent me, therefore I am God ordained."[246] Thus their conversion of heart in conjunction with the death of their spouses leads to a moment of empowerment, purpose and liberation regardless of their gender. As their truths are espoused and their life unfolds before public eyes, other women, black women would follow their same path. The path laid bare in their writing reclaiming their birthrights as daughters of God and women of noble character.

The Itinerant – Preacher Woman

Jarena Lee's itinerant ministry began in the mid-1820s, however her training due to being born in the North started in childhood. Jarena Lee like most semi-educated black women is self-taught never having more than three months of formal education.[247] Lee's education began as a youth learning the rudiments of reading and writing from the Bible. Lee gained further religious education from her membership at Bethel Church under the instruction of the Reverend Richard Allen.[248] Yet the most practical education to her future endeavors occurred during her marriage to Reverend Joseph Lee. In partnership with her husband Lee learned firsthand how to shepherd the people of God. As church mother Lee taught Bible study, prayed with the church family,

exercised her gift of exhortation, developed her public preaching voice, and assisted her husband in other administrative areas. Lee learned devotion to God and to her church family. The death of Lee's husband after six years of marriage is essentially the start of her itinerant career.

Upon returning to Bethel Church Jarena Lee shifts the power dynamic in her relationship with Richard Allen as she initiates the beginning of her ministry. Lee's persistence and the demonstration of her spiritual gift could not be denied as Lee notes, "he now as much believed that I was called to that work, as any of the preachers."[249] Further embracing her power Lee sets the parameters of her ministry, "exhorting as I found liberty"[250] to which Allen agrees giving her license as the first female AME Church itinerant.

Jarena Lee's writing of her conversion experience is typical in that it follows the Puritan model. The Puritan model is as follows, first and awakening to sin, second conviction of sin, and repentance.[251] However Lee moves beyond the Puritan model in her writing as she adds on at least three occasions aligns her conversion with the Apostle Paul experience. First, Lee recalls her attempted suicide and notes; "It was the unseen arm of God which saved me from self-murder."[252] Although Paul was not suicidal he was a murderous persecutor of the followers of Christ, in which God intervenes by blinding him in his pursuit of them. The indirect parallel between Lee and Paul are the idea of death, life, and purpose. Both Lee and Paul looked to end lives they perceived as sinful. Yet God personally intervened to saves lives repurposing Lee and Paul to bring life to others through the message of the cross.

The second example occurs after her sanctification Lee paraphrases Paul citing, "now I could adopt the very language of St. Paul . . . nothing could have separated me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus."[253] The last example is the most significant as Lee reflects on returning home after fourteen years, "To this place, where the heaviest cross was to be met with,

the Lord send me, as Saul of Tarsus."[254] Lee's alignment with St. Paul is strategic on two fronts. St. Paul is known as the apostle chosen to bring the gospel to the gentiles making him a Christian hero of sorts. Lee follows Paul in that she works to bring the authentic message of the cross to black people enslaved and free sharing the message of liberation. Second, Paul's writing in 1 Corinthians 14:33 is the scripture used by male religious leaders to silence women of the church. However, Jarena Lee flips the mirror revealing the other side of God's liberation throughout her diary consistently elucidating and relating her itinerant experience with Paul's travels. In essence, Lee is telling the reader I am the female version of Paul therefore the doctrine being used to silence women is being abused for the purposes of patriarchy. Moreover, Lee further asserts her power as she notes the spirit as her guide in her work. The power of the previous statement is Lee connecting her purpose and liberation not in a horizontal direction as connected to man, but instead vertical noting an exclusive empowerment between she and God.

The most universal know itinerant minister is the biblical Apostle Paul. Similar to Paul, Lee traveled many miles to preach the gospel of Christ. Lee's duties included preaching, exhorting, converting new believers, thus expanding the AME Church into the frontier. Initially, crowds came to listen to Lee because the idea of a black woman preaching is a bit of a novelty. For example, Lee notes an atheist slave holding old man, "who came to see her because he believed black people had no souls."[255] After her sermon Lee notes the atheist telling her he now believed I had a soul."[256] Further Lee notes, "he now came into the house and in the most friendly manner shook hands with me."[257] Lee also notes the diversity of the people who came to hear her preach. Although Lee's intention is to bring the gospel primarily to black people perhaps because she thought only blacks would listen to her preaching, she discovers preachers,

magistrates, and a governor among the enslaved."[258] However, Lee quickly discovers the message of the cross is transmitted soul to soul regardless of race, class or gender.

Very quickly Lee gains fame and respect for her preaching leading many to invite her to preach in various communities. As evidenced in her travel diary there is nowhere Lee will not go to preach the gospel of Christ. On several occasions, she travels into slave territory.[259] Often Lee's travels lead her into territories most free people of color would not venture for fear of being enslaved. Even the Bishop Richard Allen refused to travel into the South because as he noted slave territories scare him.[260] However, Lee's faith in God allows her to move beyond fear to spread the gospel wherever the spirit leads. Rather quickly Lee's itinerancy gained her fame and respect. As noted by historian Brenda Stevenson, the transformative power of religion allowed black women to gain respect and an elevated social status.[261] As Lee became more famous in her travels she notes an invitation for lodging and tea with the local women of various protestant denominations, as well as financial support for her continued journeys.[262] The life of an itinerant minister was dangerous and grueling to the body yet Lee persisted. After four years an itinerant Lee notes, "I have traveled sixteen hundred miles and of that walked two hundred and eleven miles, and preached the kingdom of God to the falling sons and daughters of Adam, counting it all joy for the sake of Jesus."[263] Along with Lee's success came fierce opposition to her itinerancy. If categorized today Lee would be considered a cultural feminist. A cultural feminist is one who embraces aspects of prescriptions.[264] The previous prescription neatly adheres to Jarena Lee as a wife, mother, and as a widowed single mother. Yet the most feminist aspects of Lee are her defense of her ministry and the value she placed on her relationship with other women.

There are several instances of opposition to Lee's ministry throughout her writing, however three by her fellow Methodists Christians are most prominent. Lee notes, "I returned to Philadelphia . . . I preached and formed a class, and tried to be useful. The opposition I met with . . . were so numerous . . . that I was tempted to withdraw from the Methodist Church.[265] The second instance also in Philadelphia Lee notes, "The Bishop was pleased to give me an appointment at Bethel Church, but was a spirit of opposition arose among the people against the propriety of female preaching."[266] Lastly, Lee recalls traveling upon invitation to preach in Trenton, New Jersey among the Methodist circuit and the, "elder spoke to me in a cold and informal manner and as though he thought my capacity was not equal to his."[267] These three incidents occur early in Lee's career and are especially hurtful as her itinerancy is expanding the AME Church in membership and funding sources, yet unlike Bishop Allen everyone does not appreciate her work. However, she does not retreat but learns to combat the persecution she faces with biblical intellect and debate as she presents both sides of the argument asserting, "If the man may preach, because the savior died for him why not the woman? Seeing he died for her also, Is he not a whole savior, instead of a half one? As those who hold it wrong for a woman to preach, would make it appear. Did not Mary, a woman preach the Gospel? For she preached the resurrection of the crucified son of God."[268] Lee continues further identifying other sides of the debate such as, female literacy, the gendered hierarchy of religion and refutes these arguments using biblical knowledge to challenging sexist notions of religious leadership. It is important to note most men who refute Lee's preaching, do it not based on errors of doctrinal interpretation, but based purely on gender. Furthermore, this sentiment of women being silenced without rights is prevalent in the nineteenth century. For instance, the famous Reverend Alexander Crummell delivered a sermon on the biblical position of woman as, "inferior to man, second to him with no

right, natural or acquired . . . to govern herself or hold opinions of her own."[269] The previous quote is from a sermon written in 1881 yet it is a representation of the social tide and uphill climbs Lee and other women had to forge in order to attain liberation.

Another example of Lee's feminist leanings is in her response to opposition, which included building a sister network of support and collaborating with other women. For instance, the first incident that tempted Lee to withdraw from the Methodist Church she notes, "while relating the feelings of my mind to a sister who called to see me . . . joy sprang up in my bosom that I was not overcome by the adversary . . . I embraced the sister in my arms, and we had a melting time together."[270] Though persecuted allows a spirit of sisterhood and faith to pull her through. Moreover, Lee notes of her time with the sister as, "comforting"[271] and confirmation of, "God bearing witness with our spirits that we are his children in such dark hours."[272] In a separate encounter Lee builds a sense of sisterhood and liberation while preaching at a church she cites, "the elders of Baltimore with one accord gave me appointments . . . we had a female speaker there who seemed very zealous. I asked permission to take her into the pulpit, which was granted."[273] Jarena Lee did not see other religious women as competition, but as potential fellow itinerants. The lady Lee pulled into the pulpit was young but with great biblical knowledge and zeal that Lee wanted to encourage. In her own way, Lee flips the mirror as the lady brought into the pulpit was married to a preacher who did not believe woman should preach.[274] Another example of Lee's devotion to building up female itinerants is well known as Lee notes, "I took a journey with a sister preacher for about 2-3 weeks, and truly the Lord blessed her labors . . . My heart rejoiced to witness the outpouring of the spirit . . . with a hand-maiden of the Lord."[275] There are other positive encounters Lee has with women wanting to be itinerants and Lee consistently encourages their endeavors. However, the most lasting memory of Jarena Lee's

career is her travel log as she strategically wrote in defense of her ministry she challenged traditional doctrines that characterized black women's racial and gender oppression as part of God's divine racial gender hierarchy.[276] However most important Lee's writing educates potential female itinerants on the obstacles to their pursuits but additionally how to have a successful ministry ordained by God.

The legacy of Jarena Lee is complex but there are at least three parts of her life she would maintain as a lasting tribute to her itinerant work. After Bishop Allen's death the AME Church leadership wrote treatises documenting the official role of women in their ministry. The treatises emphasized the home sphere and childrearing as the proper role for women.[277] However, it was too late Lee's success prompted other female members of the AME Church to pursue itinerancy, women such as Zilpha Elaw, and Julia Foote.[278] Although these women did not come from Bethel AME they were all members of other independent black churches associated with the AME Church in Philadelphia. Early in Lee's conversion story Lee describes her parents as being ignorant of religion, yet her devotion to Christian principles of living and her daily walk helped lead her family to salvation.[279] Like Lee her only son was suicidal yet because of his conversion his life was saved. Jarena Lee is not in the records of church history at Bethel AME Church, yet she is known. However, her being known is because of her diaries giving an account of her life. Although at times forgotten in historical church records her detailed narration of her life resurrects and projects her memory to the present. Jarena Lee used ministry as a ticket towards liberation to address all people in places high and low. As a founding mother Lee helped to set up a great foundation for the future. Lee's radicalism is in line with the black radical tradition as established in the black church for purposes of liberation and social justice. It is worth noting the first woman ordained by the AME Church was Amanda Berry Smith in 1885. However, the

lasting contribution of Jarena Lee is now recognized within the AME Church, as of 2016 Jarena Lee was posthumously ordained.[280]

The Itinerant-Teacher

Early in her life Maria W. Stewart began training as a servant, training that laid the foundations for a career as a feminist scholar. Though her childhood education was only rudimentary it was more than most young black girls received but most of all it planted seeds of piety and virtue with a burning desire to learn. Along the way Sabbath schools allowed her desire for knowledge to continue to grow.[281] Stewart acquired further education after marriage as she and her spouse settled into the activist community of black North Slope.[282] Developing communications with Boston's most prominent activists such as David Walker, Reverend Thomas Paul, and William Lloyd Garrison. Stewart learned to merge abolitionist tactics with those of radical Black Nationalism from her mentor David Walker. The activist tactics employed by Stewart include the Afro-American Jeremiad, both written and oral, calls for slave resistance by any means, and feminist notions of women's empowerment. In her merging of activist traditions Stewart is androgynous because she does not limit herself to the perceived social spheres of women's passive resistance.[283] For example in her Jeremiad address to the African Masonic Hall Stewart presents a kind and loving God who hears the voice of, "the oppression of injured Africa"[284] thus he will give them revenge. Yet in the same speech Stewart explains to whites the violence they will endure at the hands of enslaved Africans because of American slavery and their refusal to free their brethren. Although Stewart is addressing the issue in speech, her speeches were printed for the public. Stewart like Lee steps into the sphere of men in her activism as she merges religion and politics for social change.

Historian Beverly Guy-Sheftall labels Stewart a cultural feminist because she did not altogether reject aspects of the cult of true womanhood.[285] Cultural feminism does fit the early life of Stewart, but the turning point of an intensified feminism begins to surface with the death of her husband in conjunction with her conversion. With conversion Stewart notes two important details that help to unpack her activism. Stewart proclaims her eternal devotion to God and her lover for God's people. In essence Stewart proclaims herself to be a modern Jeremiah for black people and the nation.[286] The biblical Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet because he began to cry due to the misery of Israel. Israel in their freedom turned from God and became materialistic in their pursuits. As historian Marilyn Richardson argues, many of the themes of Stewart's lectures and essay are from the Old Testament book of Jeremiah.[287] Other parallels to Jeremiah include how Stewart pursued her ministry. It should be noted Jeremiah was the biblical prophet of God commissioned to tell his people about their sinfulness, their proclaiming to follow God yet following idols.[288]

Stewart's alignment with Jeremiah begs the question what did Stewart see in the Christians of Boston? Stewart being deeply involved in the religious and political circles of black Boston was an insider, thus in a position of knowing the "goings on" of black and to some extent white Boston. Another parallel to Jeremiah is how Stewart early on acknowledges, "I expect to be hated of all men."[289] Like Jeremiah her purpose was to urge the people to repent, which requires speaking or revealing one's sinfulness. Thus Stewart was convinced the liberation sought by black people would occur, as repentance would build black unity leading to a prosperity that could not be granted by white men.[290] Jeremiah was hated, ignored, and eventually jailed for speaking the truth to the people, what would be Stewart's fate?

Similar to Lee, Stewart carried on a legacy of religious radicalism in her speeches with a similar purpose. Unlike Lee, Stewart's timbre tinged more toward secular politics. It is not that Stewart put religion aside, but over time her connections becoming more refined intersecting themes of righteousness and humanity in a voice of religion intertwined with the political stakes. Stewart's speeches present her as a feminist Jeremiah devoted to religion, liberation, empowerment and social justice. Analyses of these ideas are elucidated in her speeches.

In September of 1832, Maria Stewart became the first woman to deliver a speech before a crowd of diverse race and gender.[291] From the beginning Stewart shows her feminist leanings as she tackles the woman question. She notes, her spiritual call as an interrogation asking her the question, "who shall take off the reproach cast upon the people of color?" Her answer, "If it is they will, be it even so."[292] In other words Stewart casts herself as a vessel of divine will. Stewart's answer was rhetoric of defense and empowerment for women. She defended herself as one calling her into question must take their questions to God. Yet many women wanting to step outside their social sphere utilized the idea of divine providence. Furthermore, the foundations of this speech are repentance and liberation but with Jeremiad overtones. For instance, she warns whites of the prejudice they use to keep northern blacks mentally enslaved and thus moves to call for their repentance, before God moves to punish their sin.[293] Stewart promotes ideas of liberation and empowerment as she gives black parents the charge to raise the next generation to dream beyond the realm of labor that whites have placed them in. Moreover, Stewart lays the responsibility of the family at the feet of the father however she will evolve on that position.[294] Lastly, Stewart delivers another warning to whites that the liberty, rights, and equality they gained in the revolution is the same liberty thriving in the souls of black people. Although not

threatening on the surface subversive undertones that can be recognized. Lastly, Stewart furthers the message of hope as she notes, God hearing the groans of the African people.[295]

In the spring of 1832 Stewart delivered a speech to the African American Female Intelligence Society. It is in this speech that Stewart corrects the analysis of David Walker by empowering women to move to the front lines of the battle for social justice. It is also in this speech that Stewart's feminist impulses begin to expand. Perhaps because Stewart is addressing women her message is wholly feminist and mostly religious with tones of righteous indignation. Yet humble as Stewart noes her speaking to them, "as a dying mortal to dying mortals."[296] Yet further identifying with the women Stewart states, "be not offended because I tell you the truth."[297] It is God who has fired her heart.[298] "I am not your enemy, but a friend both to you and your children."[299] In the previous quotes Stewart designs her speech to connect to her audience on a mental and spiritual level.

Stewart's Jeremiad mission begins to surface as she notes, "religion is held by some in ill repute."[300] Stewart tailors her message for her audience as she knows some free blacks may be turned off from religion because many understand how it has been used a tool for social control. Moreover, religious leader of the independent black churches followed the designs of their white oppressors thus double the oppression felt by black women. Stewart understands that as she notes the mistakes of the minsters of the gospel who did not do their job of cultivating love among the people.[301] Stewart notes, if they had, "faithfully discharged their duty, we should have been a very different people."[302] Stewart understands such error yet directs the women to repent and turn back to God as one who must give an account. Fully acknowledging religious errors of the past, yet urges the women to recognize the role God has for them. Essentially Stewart emphasizes the pivotal role to be played by women in changing the future, as she says, "O'

woman, woman upon you I call; your example is powerful your exertions almost entirely depends upon whether the rising generation shall be anything more."[303] This is Stewart's evolution in the last speech Stewart promotes the value of motherhood. Lastly, Stewart also calls the women to cultivate love among themselves a sisterhood and unity that should have been promoted by religious leaders, but was not. Flipping the mirror again Stewart puts the future of the black community into the hands of black women and mothers.

In February of 1835, Stewart gives a chastising speech to the African Masonic Hall in Boston. The usual themes of liberation, religion and empowerment are present but are tinged negatively. This speech has a feminist tinge but only because Stewart thought herself the equal to men thus able to deliver a scathing rebuke to the black male leaders of Boston. It should also be noted that many with this club objected to Stewart's public speaking because of her gender. Stewart opens the speech speaking to what, "ought to fire the breast of free men of color,"[304] African liberty. Stewart's impulse carries tones of belittlement; she illuminates what "ought"[305] to be suggesting perhaps a different possible reality. Next, Stewart moves to question the manhood of the men stating, "If you are men, convince them that you possess the spirit of men."[306]

Stewart dared to step into the sphere of men to address how these men have become complacent with non-citizenship and thus have become complacent with the "Babylon"[307] known as America. David Walker is known for his harsh rhetoric in his writing and speech. Perhaps Stewart channeled her mentor when addressing these men, after all he was also a part of the Masonic Hall. Lastly, in her 1833 farewell address to her Boston friend's Stewart digs further into her feminist's impulse as the focus of her farewell speech is centered on women. First, Stewart navigates through the conversion experience culminating in her call to be a Jeremiad for

God. It is through her conversion narrative that Stewart most effectively demonstrates justification for her work as she notes, dedicating her heart, mind, and soul for the purposes of God. Next, Stewart notes, "I was commanded to come out from the world and be separate."[308] To be separate is to let go of all the things of the world that could hinder daily devotion to God. Essentially is speaking a command that all Christians are to follow, perhaps she utilized this command for those purposes. Next Stewart notes her spiritual battle of being, "anxious to retain the world in one hand and religion in the other."[309] Stewart replies to such ideas as foolish noting, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon."[310] Stewart then transitions into the subject of the hour, that being Stewart bringing the message of God yet being rejected by the people of Boston for various reasons yet mostly because of her gender.[311] Thus Stewart yet again aligns herself with the biblical Jeremiah.

Focusing on women, Stewart addresses the woman question head on in addition to Paul's feelings on the subject. Stewart aligns herself with the feminine heroes of the Bible, yet transcends beyond by cataloguing the history of important various ancient societies attached to women.[312] Next Stewart pointedly asks the crowd why can't God utilize our women. Lastly, Stewart prepares a special thank you to those who supported her endeavors and offers parting words of advice. Stewart urges her Boston friends to put down politics and seek liberation from God.[313] Stewart notes politics as being divisive and in some ways an idol to black Bostonians as they seek liberation, not from their eternal creator, but from man's fickle laws. Man's law is worthless, promotion cometh neither from the east or the west but from God. In essence, Stewart leaves her friends with a blueprint for liberation destined by God.

Historians are appreciating much of Stewart's legacy yet there is more to understand of her influence of. To accomplish her goals Stewart had to be wholly transformed otherwise she

would care too much about society's impressions of her. Society felt Stewart should be kept in a box of "womanhood" yet that box never fit black women, which is a blessing. Often the boxes created to label a woman are not created to protect but to confine or control. Historian Marilyn Richardson notes, after Stewart left Boston she published, *Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart* almost a year later other women both black and white began to rise to the call of their conscious.[314] Black women as doubly oppressed have always found other creative means to create, justify, and celebrate their liberty. Whether in writing or voice Stewart gave voice to black women's liberation and shared her treasure with the world for generations to experience.

Conclusion

The American Revolution exposed the myth of the happy slave. The false reasoning of whites that enslaved people were happy to be slave, therefore slavery is their ultimate destiny. As blacks helped to win the nation their allegiance was not to any nation but to themselves; as evidenced in some black choosing to fight for the British while others joined the American colonists. After winning the war American leaders had the opportunity to reconcile the contradiction of a "free nation" that possessed slaves. The nation's response was to continue the contradiction because of its benefits.

It is also during the Revolution that enslaved Africans being the process of acculturation. The enslaved Africans merge into a community based on common cultural values among all Africans. Values such as; respect for elders, religious traditions of worship, religious leadership, and marriage traditions. These community values aided the process of Africans becoming African Americans. Yet what made this African American community solidify was its orientation and interpretation of the Christian Bible. Specifically, identification with enslaved Israelites and the alignment with the God of the Old Testament. As African Americans formed so

evolved their black religion. Black religion was a hybrid of African traditional religion and Christianity. The black church regardless of its formal or informal location became the cornerstone of religious radicalism. As blacks believed they were meant to be free.

In concert with the Revolution came the Second Great Awakening. The antislavery message of itinerant preachers confirmed and justified black people's notions of freedom and white religious hypocrisy. Blacks began to convert to Christianity choosing their own preachers many of whom whites also preferred. As blacks gained freedom many traveled to the urban centers creating their own Protestant churches. It is here that the black church begins to divide; one rural faction which clings to and retains many key elements of black religion and the other urban and evolving toward mainstream white notions of Christianity. However, such evolution of religion was halted due to white attitudes of superiority, even in religion. Thus, the independent black churches begin to form in the North and South under the name AME Church or African Baptist churches.

Once again it is at this moment of independence that black religious leaders have a choice. They can allow freedom of religion to all participants or they can follow the white social norms of religion. Bishop Allen along with many other religious leaders chooses the conservative route. It is at this moment that a widowed Jarena Lee enters the picture for the purposes of her ministry but also to challenge black leaders' notions of freedom and religion. Approximately ten years later the young scholarly Maria W. Stewart is made a widow and consecrates herself for God's purposes. Both women start their ministries as the rhetoric and ideas of the American Revolution are fresh in the minds of the populace. Moreover, the Second Great Awakening fosters the idea of religious choice, thus God can utilize everyone. Lee and Stewart begin their ministries at the intersections of faith, revolution, and gender. Both forge a

path of proto-feminism for women of the future as they found their liberation in God's hands. Both women discover what Bishop Allen, David Walker, and James Cone had not that true liberation of body, mind, and soul is at the foot of the cross. Moreover, the cross brings forth the nakedness of humanity transforming individuals from the soul. Therefore, gender distinctions do not apply. Moreover, these men would discover that power or empowerment is within every human being as designed by God.

Appendices

This research contains Christian religious language or references that are defined in this appendix. The language in this appendix is defined in order to add a smooth flow to the reading, thus giving the reader a clear understanding of the content.

1. Exhorter – A religious public speaker, licensed by the church. An exhorter's duties include sermons, praying for the sick, and teaching. Exhorters admonish sinners and plead with them to repent. [315]
2. Itinerant – Traveling preacher or evangelists
3. Conversion- 1) recognition or awakening 2) confession and repentance as a result of the conviction of one's sinfulness. 3) Baptism a rebirth of the soul 4) Devotion to Christ for eternity
4. Justification –Free from guilt to sin by Christ's grace forgiveness.
5. Sanctification – Or "new birth" free from the power of sin by virtue of the indwelling of the holy spirit and grace, a liberation of the soul to follow the indwelling voice of Christ, or the Holy Spirit.[316]
6. Paul doctrine – The scripture most utilized to silence women, preventing their formal leadership. Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience. I Corinthians 14:34 (KJV)
7. The great commission- Jesus' command to all Christians. "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Matthew 28:18-20. (KJV)

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