

# Introduction and a Proposal

## *Culture, Power, and Identity in White New Testament Studies*

Greg Carey

As the Great Depression set in, labor unrest ignited throughout the southern United States.<sup>1</sup> Earning two dollars for a sixteen-hour shift, coal miners in East Tennessee paid for their own picks, shovels, and blasting powder. The coal with which they heated their homes cost three times as much as they received for extracting it. Miners grimly joked that they paid the company for the privilege of working. The mine workers organized with the United Mine Workers of America and went on strike. In short order the mining company evicted them from company-owned homes and hired professional killers. Eventually the Tennessee National Guard came out to protect the mines from the workers who had resorted to violence themselves. Sharecroppers in Arkansas likewise began to organize, as planters still used both black and white workers to provide cheap labor in the absence of slavery.<sup>2</sup> The same pattern emerged: farmers applied force and intimidation to break their strike, labor organizers were beaten and killed, and the National Guard mobilized to establish order as violence erupted on all sides. The Arkansas conflict saw white and black workers banding together, with law enforcement officers monitoring the churches where laborers gathered. Similar scenes featured millworkers and other labor groups who found themselves dependent upon exploitative employers. The forces of law and order sided with the employers in every case.

Christian activists, especially clergy and theology students, played important roles on both sides of the conflict. Prominent theological institutions such as Union Theological Seminary in New York and Vanderbilt University's School of Religion supplied white pro-labor leaders such as Myles Horton, Howard Kester (whose wife Alice did not attend seminary but was highly active in the movement), Claude Williams, and James Dombrowski. These radicals had studied with and continued to rely upon support from teachers at both institutions, notably Union's Reinhold Neibuhr, the great theologian whose fundraising clout energized movements and individuals throughout the South,

and Vanderbilt's Harry Ward and Alva Wilmot Taylor. Black ministers, often without advanced theological degrees, also emerged locally and as national organizers. On the other hand, prominent local clergy like J. Abner Sage of Marked Tree, Arkansas, supported the industrialists and plantation owners. For his part, Sage publicly accused the labor organizers as communists while organizing support for white sharecroppers who abandoned the labor movement. White churches rejected the ministries of people like Kester and Williams, indicating that few churchgoing whites shared their views.

In significant ways the Southern labor movement provided a foundation for the Civil Rights Movement. Popular imagination identifies the Civil Rights Movement with the 1950s and 1960s, marked by crucial moments such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the leadership of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. in the Montgomery Bus Boycotts (1955–1956). However, African Americans had been mobilizing toward racial justice for decades, and the labor conflicts provided crucial opportunities for white and black organizers to collaborate. As one dramatic example, the white Presbyterian pastor and Vanderbilt alumnus Claude Williams found it difficult to swallow food during his first common meals with black colleagues (a common motif in the recollections of white radicals of that era) but later woke up to find the black YMCA organizer Ned Pope sleeping beside him in the same bed. The experience of shared hospitality, shared facilities, and a common struggle led to relationships and institutions that would nourish the Civil Rights Movement for decades. Myles Horton's Highlander Folk School (now Highlander Research and Education Center) hosted training sessions attended by Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. while the Baptist preacher Clarence Jordan established the racially integrated Koinonia Farm (now Koinonia Partners) in Americus, Georgia in 1942.

A white native Alabamian, I elect the white folks involved in those labor struggles as “my people,” fictional ancestors in the faith and predecessors in my work as a biblical interpreter. Myles Horton grew up an hour's drive from my hometown, while Clarence Jordan graduated from my alma mater, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. However, I flatter myself by identifying with Horton, Jordan, and the like, as “my people” also include the preachers who sided with exploitative employers and defended segregation. “My people” certainly include poor laborers and segregationists, categories that are far from mutually exclusive. Most of “my people” cared about the Bible and how it is interpreted, and most applied the Bible to the struggles of their day. I remember my grandmother admonishing me to avoid law school since Jesus had pronounced, “Woe to the lawyers” (Luke 11:52, KJV). How does

such a heritage of culture, power, and identity bear upon the work of biblical interpretation?

*CULTURE, POWER, AND IDENTITY IN NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION*

The question of real readers pushed its way into biblical studies in the early 1990s with a splash of significant publications, collectively bearing the promise—or threat—of transforming the field in profound ways. Several major multi-author works appeared in a brief span of time, each of them introducing fresh perspectives on biblical interpretation. Today we might say that these works raised the question of how biblical interpretation relates to culture, power, and identity. How do culture, power, and identity—the things that constitute real, “flesh-and-blood” readers—shape and nourish the process of interpretation?<sup>3</sup>

In 1991 R. S. Sugirtharajah’s edited volume *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* presented to public view interpreters who could name how their *identity* influenced how they interpreted the Bible. Introducing a volume that included Caribbean, South and Central American, African, East and South Asian, and Palestinian authors—as well as African American and Native American scholars—Sugirtharajah challenged what he called “the ahistorical, objective, abstract, universal reading discourse” that dominated professional biblical interpretation.<sup>4</sup> More simply, Sugirtharajah intended to undermine the then-conventional goal of “objectivity” in interpretation, the idea that an interpreter’s relationship to culture and power—her or his identity—should not shape interpretation.

Sugirtharajah presented his anthology as the result of about two decades of global biblical scholarship from locations previously excluded from academic biblical studies; however, for many readers in Europe and North America, *Voices from the Margin* represented a revolutionary introduction to new questions in biblical interpretation. How do the identities of interpreters and interpretive communities shape and nourish the process of interpretation?<sup>5</sup>

*Voices from the Margin* represented just one key example among many works devoted to the question of identity (or social location) and biblical interpretation. That same year *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* presented the work of African American interpreters who had met together over a five-year period in the 1980s.<sup>6</sup> Feminist biblical scholarship had already produced similar projects,<sup>7</sup> but two major anthologies shared feminist interpretation with a much broader audience, the *Women’s Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe) and the two-volume project,

*Searching the Scriptures* (ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza).<sup>8</sup> *Searching the Scriptures* intentionally foregrounded feminist interpretation as a global project. With an emphasis upon socio-political liberation, *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (ed. Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsley) in 1993 likewise represented a global perspective. Justo L. González introduced Hispanic American interpretation to a broad audience in 1996.<sup>9</sup>

The conversation moved ahead significantly with Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert's 1995 publication of a two-volume anthology, *Reading from This Place*.<sup>10</sup> These volumes stood apart for two reasons. First, funding from the Lilly Foundation allowed authors who represented truly global constituencies to share their work in face-to-face contexts—a format somewhat similar to the *Stony the Road We Trod* project. And second, the conversations and essays all focused upon a common theme: attention to social location as a factor in biblical interpretation. This programmatic level of reflection set the path for an outburst of publications related to global, liberationist, postcolonial, minority, feminist, womanist, and queer interpretation that has continued for decades.

These major projects not only introduced broad popular audiences to culture, power, and identity as factors in interpretation, they continue to influence scholars as well. Significantly, almost all of these publications are multiauthor works. That is, no single author is qualified to represent the diverse possibilities that present themselves when interpreters consider how real, flesh-and-blood readers (and groups of readers) interact with the Bible.

In 1995 it looked as if the discipline of biblical studies was about to experience a seismic shift both in the composition of its practitioners and in the modes of interpretation that would reach the public. At that time a certain triumphalist tone insinuated itself into Fernando Segovia's writing, as he employed the past tense to trace a trajectory from "objectivist" historical criticism through literary criticism and into the sort of cultural analysis to which he pointed.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, since 1995 the public has enjoyed access to an emerging and diverse array of resources devoted to interpretation from particular social locations and ideological commitments, including commentary resources and major collaborative research projects.

#### HOW THINGS STAND

Unfortunately, the promise of 1995 remains substantially unfulfilled. Thankfully, some scholars still pursue how culture, power, and identity inform interpretation in specific contexts. These studies range from technical works with scholarly audiences to resources that support general readers and religious

communities. Specialized journals, notably *Biblical Interpretation* and *The Bible and Critical Theory*, host emerging conversations. Professional organizations such as the Society of Biblical Literature now include over a dozen program units that could not have existed just a few decades ago: African Biblical Hermeneutics, African-American Biblical Hermeneutics, Asian and Asian-American Hermeneutics, Bible and American Popular Culture, Bible and Film, Contextual Biblical Interpretation, and the like. And certainly the raw number of scholars from underrepresented populations has exploded.

But in significant ways nothing has changed. Culture, power, and identity scarcely surface in the major introductory textbooks assigned to undergraduate and theology students—as if these questions have no place in the conversation.<sup>12</sup> New Testament scholars occasionally author non-fiction bestsellers. Almost every author of such books is white, and though these books usually debunk popular misconceptions of the Bible, they almost never address real readers in terms of race, ethnicity, class, or sexual identity. Major works in the field continue to ignore such questions. Large meetings of scholars, such as the five thousand or so who attend Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meetings, confirm this impression. It is as if some special sessions feature culture, power, and identity, while the rest of the discipline moves along as if nothing has changed.<sup>13</sup> Major sessions include a few women but scarcely any persons of color. One might interpret these developments in terms of whiteness: the field has managed to assimilate new voices and perspectives, but without divesting its white center of its privilege. Today Sugirtharajah could reproduce a title like *Voices from the Margin*, and the title would remain as appropriate as ever.

One factor counters the field's apparent segregation: in their attempt to foster diversity, many educational and religious institutions go out of their way to foreground the voices of racial and ethnic minorities. (This is not yet the case with sexual minorities, and feminist interpretation often receives little discussion as if its accomplishments could be taken for granted.) However, few resources (a) speak to culture, power, and identity in biblical interpretation (b) from diverse global contexts (c) for introductory and general audiences (d) in a format that covers a representative range of New Testament books and "traditional" interpretive questions. This volume aims to address that deficit.

While the past few decades have witnessed the proliferation of voices previously excluded from public biblical interpretation, the discipline's center remains largely intact and in some ways unexamined. Whiteness constitutes one fundamental constituent of that center among others. While persons of color have reflected upon whiteness, few white people have proposed strategies for acknowledging how whiteness shapes biblical interpretation or what

whiteness-sensitive interpretation might look like.<sup>14</sup> Thus we find the remarkable situation in which “minority” criticism is performed almost exclusively by minorities, while the analysis of white interpreters is performed, well, almost exclusively by minorities.<sup>15</sup> Contributions from persons of color are absolutely necessary, but the discipline cannot move far unless white interpreters also invest themselves in the conversation. Here I will venture one proposal as part of what I hope to contribute to a broader conversation.<sup>16</sup>

What exactly do we mean by whiteness? Aside from the observation that some people identify themselves as “white”—or do not self-identify as persons of color—can we name critical factors that constitute whiteness, particularly in the context of the United States? Shall we turn to pop culture, which often examines whiteness as a point of humor? *White Men Can't Jump*, proclaimed the title of a 1992 movie, the comedian Dave Chappelle remarks that white people do weird things when they get high, and [stuffwhitepeoplelike.com](http://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com) features essays on TED Conferences and “Being the Only White Person Around.” Do we want to add that white people can’t dance, can’t integrate their minds with their bodies and emotions, display peculiar affinities for the products of “minority” and “global” cultures, and so forth? In a word, no.

Speaking confessionally, I raise the question of whiteness because I have often found myself frustrated by accounts of “white” biblical interpretation, “white” pedagogy, and so forth, in which the adjective “white” lacks content. All too briefly, let us survey some of the ways in which people analyze whiteness, using these as resources for a particularly focused account of white biblical interpretation.

Many identify whiteness with an unspoken privilege. Gale A. Yee, an Asian American scholar, recalls job interviews in which she was asked to identify how her race and ethnicity “made any difference” in her scholarly work. White colleagues could regard her identity as an Asian American, specifically Chinese American, as “different”—but different from what? Presumably, an unspoken white norm.<sup>17</sup> In part, then, whiteness entails the privilege of being “normal”—of needing no reflection, definition, or analysis. But Yee refuses to stop there. She also calls Asian American scholars to “make whiteness transparent as a culturally constructed and racialized category,” to tease out what a difference *whiteness* makes.<sup>18</sup>

We must not too quickly move beyond that unspoken privilege, for it stands as one basic component of whiteness—a characteristic confirmed by its own negation. That is to say, whiteness often comes with a measure of denial and minimization. Denise Kimber Buell remarks that white liberal Christians in the United States avoid thinking of Christian identity in racial or ethnic terms

despite the racial logic that we encounter within the New Testament itself (see Rom. 9:25; 1 Pet. 2:9-10).<sup>19</sup> Often the last thing white people want to do is acknowledge race as a factor in our own experience.<sup>20</sup>

The privilege that accompanies whiteness relates intimately with the traditional norm of biblical scholarship: “exegesis.” In my first undergraduate biblical studies course, our textbook (widely adopted at the time) advanced the distinction between “exegesis” and “eisegesis,” the error of allowing one’s own theological tradition to determine interpretation without “letting the text speak afresh and on its own.”<sup>21</sup> The authors recognized the legitimacy of reading the Bible in conversation with one’s own heritage, they affirmed that responsible interpretations might be diverse, but they also encouraged reading “out of” the text rather than “into” it. The classic notion of exegesis assumes a fixed, rational, and universal process of interpretation. It also promotes a certain kind of detachment, as if the interpreter were a disembodied mind, free from the constraints of context and daily life.

Privilege shapes knowledge. At least, it shapes our perceptions and values, even in academic contexts. In my own reflections on Matthew’s story of the Canaanite woman (15:21-28), I found myself wondering whether to assess the woman as a victim or a hero. Is she a victim because she declines from an assertive voice to accepting Jesus’ designation of her as a dog? Or is she a hero for persuading Jesus to free her daughter from demonic possession? Encounters with womanist ethics, a theological movement largely among African American women, has called to my attention the degree to which my privilege limits my own range of vision. A privileged person thinks in terms of free moral choices. Women of color, writes Katie Geneva Cannon, necessarily make their choices in contexts defined by multiple systems of oppression. “Black women live out a moral wisdom in their real-lived context that does not appeal to the fixed rules or absolute principles of the white-oriented, male-structured society. Black women’s analysis and appraisal of what is right or wrong and good or bad develops out of the various coping mechanisms related to the conditions of their own cultural circumstances. Black women have justly regarded survival against tyrannical systems of triple oppression as a true sphere of moral life.”<sup>22</sup> Informed by womanist ethics, we may move beyond reductionist assessments of the Canaanite as simply a hero or a victim to a more nuanced appreciation for how she endures humiliation in order to win her daughter’s liberation.

If whiteness relates not only to privilege but also to how one interprets the world and establishes values, then whiteness also involves the ability to define not only content, what *counts* as biblical interpretation, but also the questions and interpretive strategies that form legitimate interpretation. With whiteness

as an unspoken norm, white interpreters cannot recognize that their questions and categories are limited. The integration of public schools led to black students studying with white students—but without the pedagogical strategies that had been effective in the segregated black schools.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, a color-blind biblical scholarship invites non-white interpreters into a conversation that does not acknowledge—or benefit from—sources of wisdom with which the discipline’s white center is unfamiliar.

Fundamentally, whiteness is at once a creation of white culture and its closely guarded secret. If I understand J. Kameron Carter’s highly sophisticated account, the invention of whiteness has roots in an ancient Christian theological project, the attempt by Christian theology to transcend its Jewish roots and to claim a universal identity.<sup>24</sup> Ironically, Christians created race as a functional category when they circumscribed Judaism in racial terms. According to Carter, white theology fails to work “pentecostally”; that is, rather than overcoming nationalism as the (Jewish) church did on Pentecost, white theology seeks to establish a stable, non-Jewish, identity.<sup>25</sup> When Christian “mission” accompanied Western imperialism, it applied racialized discourse to other societies, thus legitimating their subjugation and conversion. Thus, “race” applied to non-European and non-Christian peoples but not to European Christians themselves. White theology emerged from the Christian invention of race, but without investigating or defining what it means to be white. “White” comes to mean “human,” while other racial groups are both distinctive and inferior.

For the purposes of this essay, then, “whiteness” functions as the attempt to define *other* groups as non-white without subjecting white identity itself to critical reflection.<sup>26</sup> But what about whiteness in biblical interpretation? Biblical scholarship in its modern configuration came to the United States, largely from Germany, not long before the Civil War.<sup>27</sup> That same period witnessed the emergence of the distinctively American tradition of common sense biblicism.<sup>28</sup> Largely ignoring critical biblical scholarship, and without regard to church tradition or to the passages’ historical and literary contexts, common sense biblicism seeks to resolve theological and ethical questions by lining up biblical passages for and against certain propositions.

Could it be that this biblicist mode of interpretation coalesced in the United States during the antebellum debates concerning slavery? During roughly the same period, “no creed but the Bible” biblicism shaped sectarian movements eventuating in the Disciples of Christ, Christian Church, and the Churches of Christ.<sup>29</sup> As for slavery debates, the three largest streams of white American Protestantism—the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians—all split

over the issue prior to the Civil War, with white Methodists and Presbyterians reuniting only after the heyday of the civil rights movement. Biblical arguments for and against slavery in the antebellum period, like those regarding segregation well into the twentieth century, often pitted the favored passages of one side aligned against those of the other.<sup>30</sup> Even highly educated clergy, educated in biblical interpretation and the history of doctrine, resorted to biblicist arguments during the period. New Orleans' Benjamin Palmer, "father" of the Southern Presbyterian church, (in)famously defended slavery on the basis of the so-called "curse of Ham" from Gen. 9:25–27. This common interpretation predates Palmer perhaps by a century. In this framework, Noah's curse that Ham's son Canaan and his descendants would fall into servitude applied to the people of Africa. Thus, the slavery of Africans amounted to God's will. Palmer's interpretation relied upon rich elements of continental philosophy and other intellectual resources, but his basic argument for slavery—and later, for segregation—turned upon this widely accepted reading of Genesis.<sup>31</sup>

Whites used the Bible to defend slavery to one another, having already employed biblicist arguments to audiences of their own slaves. African American cultural historians and biblical scholars have uncovered diverse and sophisticated strategies by which slaves resisted the dehumanizing interpretations imposed by their masters' appointed preachers.<sup>32</sup> The direct application of biblical passages to the work of social control marks both the beginnings of African American hermeneutics and American biblicism.

Similar arguments, often grounded in Ezra's condemnation of foreign wives among the holy people, have been applied to defend segregation and to oppose interracial marriage. With respect to the curse of Ham, slavery advocates saw European whites as the descendants of Shem and Africans as Canaan's descendants. Reading Ezra, segregationists identified whites with Israel and blacks with the people of the land. One still encounters this argument in racist circles. (As a point of reference, Alabama did not remove a constitutional prohibition of interracial marriages until 2000, while a 2011 poll finds that 46 percent of Mississippi Republicans believe interracial marriage should be illegal.)<sup>33</sup> Remarkably, however, prominent white advocates of racial reconciliation—like many antebellum abolitionists—have also adopted biblicist approaches to the Bible. In other words, biblicist interpretation can serve either oppressive or liberating ends.

Clarence Jordan, a white Georgia Baptist with a college degree in agriculture and a Ph.D. in Greek New Testament, founded the Koinonia Farm as a racially integrated community in Americus, Georgia in 1942. While Koinonia Partners exists today as his legacy, Jordan is better known for two

other associations. Habitat for Humanity emerged from persons associated with Koinonia, and Jordan's translation of much of the New Testament into "Southern" provided the script for the popular musical, *Cotton Patch Gospel*.<sup>34</sup> Though radically progressive on race and other social issues, Jordan often employed biblicist interpretation despite his advanced theological training. One biographer describes Jordan's approach to the Bible as "literal."<sup>35</sup> Jordan's translation of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) has charmed audiences of the musical: Jordan translates the Samaritan, traditional enemy to Jews in Jesus' day, as "a black man." Where Jesus' parable has a Samaritan assisting a victim where Jewish figures did not, Jordan has a black man assisting a victim where white religious leaders likewise did not extend assistance.

This translation does not represent Jordan's original insight. Black and white preachers alike had suggested the Good Samaritan as a model for overcoming racial animosity for decades; Jordan merely incorporated this tradition into his translation. Moreover, Jordan basically copies the structure of pro-slavery and segregationist arguments—but he turns that biblicist model to dramatically different purposes. If Shem (Genesis) and the Israelites (Ezra) relate to white people, so does the victim in Jesus' parable. And if Ham/Canaan and the people of the land indicate African Americans, so does the Samaritan. It just so happens that the Samaritan is a hero, rather than a victim, of the story.

Biblicism's real significance does not lie in the interpretations it authorizes, as a biblicist approach does not control the results of interpretation. Instead, biblicism proposes boundaries for significant conversations: arguments must ground themselves in plausible interpretations of biblical texts, but certain kinds of interpretation are ruled out. One may not acknowledge diverse points of view in Scripture, appeal to the process of editing and selection that has created the canon as we now have it, consult the history of interpretation, or emphasize the cultural gaps between the biblical worlds and contemporary interpretation. As "common sense" interpretation that establishes apparently clear boundaries for interpretation, biblicism fails to transform the conversation. Benjamin Palmer and Clarence Jordan alike turned to the Bible to articulate their views of race. Palmer and Jordan found what they were looking for as well: white people and black people in stories that do not name characters in that way. Informed by white anxiety to define identity in terms of the Bible and practicing a biblicist hermeneutic, Palmer and Jordan could not escape the categories they inherited from America's race history.

Common sense biblicism blossomed at the same time that Americans debated the Bible's teaching on slavery—and at the same time that European biblical scholarship emerged in North American colleges and seminaries.

Biblicism met the perceived white need to locate ideas, and persons, within neatly constructed categories. When people today invoke the Bible to resolve pressing questions, asking “What does the Bible say?” about thorny issues like sexuality, finance, and war, they follow the biblicist framework. This is no less true when the resources of academic biblical scholarship lend sophistication to their discussions. Major church bodies have enlisted biblical scholars to assess “what the Bible says” about sexual minorities, but scholarly “expertise” has failed to generate consensus. Greater analysis is required, including the consideration of how culture, power, and identity—the forces that shape individuals and communities—empower and constrain, shape and bind the work of interpretation.

## Notes

1. The following narrative largely follows from Anthony P. Dunbar’s classic study, *Against the Grain: Southern Radicals and Prophets 1929–1959* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981).
2. Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Anchor, 2008).
3. Fernando F. Segovia emphasized the “flesh-and-blood reader” in “Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora: A Hermeneutics of Otherness and Engagement,” in *Reading from This Place*, vol. 1: *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*, edited by Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 57–59.
4. “Introduction: The Margin as a Site of Creative Re-visioning,” in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, edited by R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 4.
5. I apologize that space does not allow a fuller discussion of the work that prepared the way for the volumes discussed here, nor does it allow engagement with similar volumes that I have chosen to omit.
6. Cain Hope Felder, ed., *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).
7. See Adela Yarbro Collins, ed., *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, SBLBSNA 10 (Chico: Society of Biblical Literature, 1985).
8. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, ed., *Women’s Bible Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 1: *A Feminist Introduction* (New York: Crossroad, 1993); and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 2: *A Feminist Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1994).
9. *Santa Biblia: The Bible through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).
10. *Reading from This Place*, vol. 1: *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); and *Reading from This Place*, vol. 2: *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). A third volume emphasized the implications of emerging discourses in biblical interpretation for pedagogy in biblical studies: Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds., *Teaching the Bible: The Discourses and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998).
11. See “And They Began to Speak in Other Tongues”: Competing Modes of Discourse in Contemporary Biblical Criticism,” in *Reading from This Place*, vol. 1, 1–32.

12. See the essay by Francisco Lozada Jr., “Teaching the New Testament: Toward an Expanded Contextual Approach,” in this volume.

13. For a technically sophisticated account of this phenomenon, but with a different focus, see the essay by Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, “Biblical Studies ‘after’ Theory: Onward toward the Past,” in three parts: “Part One: After ‘after Theory’, and Other Apocalyptic Conceits,” *BibInt* 18 (2010): 1–27; “Part Two: The Secret Vices of the Biblical God,” *BibInt* 18 (2010): 87–113; and “Part Three: Theory in the First and Second Waves,” *BibInt* 18 (2010): 191–225.

14. Notable exceptions include Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology, and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (London: Routledge, 2006); and Jeffrey S. Siker, “Historicizing a Racialized Jesus: Case Studies in the ‘Black Christ,’ the ‘Mestizo Christ,’ and White Critique,” *Biblical Interpretation* 15:1 (2007): 26–53.

15. The term “minority” criticism, as employed by “minority” scholars (see Randall C. Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia, eds., *They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*, SBLSS 57 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), emerges from a specific location in the United States.

16. Thanks to Fernando F. Segovia, who challenged me to take on this project in a personal conversation several years ago. This strategic exploration of white interpretation corresponds to several strategies articulated by Segovia in “Poetics of Minority Biblical Criticism: Identification and Theorization,” in *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies*, edited by Laura Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 279–311.

17. “Yin/Yang Is Not Me: An Exploration into Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics,” in *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Mary Fokkett and Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan (Saint Louis: Chalice, 2006), 152–53.

18. “Ying/Yang Is Not Me,” 162.

19. “God’s Own People: Specters of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in Early Christian Studies,” in *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings*, edited by Laura Nasrallah and Schüssler Fiorenza, 160.

20. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Equality in the United States* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006); Alice McIntyre, *Making Meaning of Whiteness: Exploring Racial Identity with White Teachers* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 45–47; Zeus Leonardo, “The Souls of White Folk: Critical Pedagogy, Whiteness Studies, and Globalization Discourse,” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 5 (2002): 32.

21. John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner’s Handbook*, rev. ed. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), 17.

22. *Black Womanist Ethics*, AAR Academy Series 60 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), 4.

23. Kate Willink, *Bringing Desegregation Home: Memories of the Struggle toward School Integration in Rural North Carolina*, Palgrave Studies in Oral History (New York: Macmillan, 2009), 30–31.

24. *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). Gay L. Byron points out that early Christians, like many of their pagan counterparts, associated blackness (along with Egyptian or Ethiopian identity) with various forms of wickedness and whiteness with purity and penitence (*Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2002), and Denise Kimber Buell surveys the importance of racialized discourse in the emergence of modern religious and theological studies, particularly by identifying Christianity as “universal” in opposition to “particularistic” Judaism, see *Why This New Race? Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), esp. 21–29.

25. *Race*, 311.

26. Cheryl B. Anderson, “Reflections in an Interethnic/racial Era on Interethnic/racial Marriage in Ezra,” in *They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*, edited

by Randall C. Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia, *SBLSS 57* (Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 52.

27. Others have traced the influence of racialized discourse in Germany, as represented in the historiography of Johann Herder. Herder argued that the characteristics of a human people (*Volk*) emerged organically from their material climate—Kelley, *Racializing Jesus*, 35–37; Jonathan M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 7–8). This legacy surfaces at key moments in the history of biblical scholarship, as in Albert Schweitzer’s notorious claim that only the “German temperament” could produce excellent scholarship on the life of Jesus (*The Quest of the Historical Jesus* [ed. John Bowden; Fortress Classics in Biblical Studies; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001], 3–4).

28. I use “American” here as an adjective to describe phenomena characteristic of the United States. While “American” is inaccurate, this usage is far more concise than available alternatives.

29. On white biblicism in the antebellum period, see Randall Balmer, “Casting Aside the Ballast of History and Tradition: White Protestants and the Bible in the Antebellum Period,” in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, edited by Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Continuum, 2001), 193–200.

30. Baptist historian Bill J. Leonard characterizes antebellum pro-slavery arguments as “literalist,” in contrast to abolitionist arguments that generalized from broad spiritual principles (“Biblicists, but not Always Biblical? Revisiting Baptist Hermeneutics,” in *The Challenge of Being Baptist: Owning a Scandalous Past and an Uncertain Future* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 53–74. I would argue for a biblicist streak in abolitionist hermeneutics as well.

31. For an intellectual biography of Palmer, see Christopher M. Duncan, *Benjamin Morgan Palmer: Southern Presbyterian Divine* (Ph.D. diss., Auburn University, 2008). On the curse of Ham and Palmer’s appropriation of it, see Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah’s Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), esp. 125–74.

32. For example, John Saillant, “Origins of African American Biblical Hermeneutics in Eighteenth-Century Black Opposition to the Slave Trade and Slavery,” in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, edited by Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Continuum, 2001), 236–50; Sterling Stuckey, “My Burden Lightened’: Frederick Douglass, the Bible, and Slave Culture,” in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, edited by Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Continuum, 2001), 251–65; Vincent L. Wimbush, *The Bible and African Americans, Facets* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); Clarice J. Martin, “Somebody Done Hoodoo’d the Hoodoo Man’: Language, Power, Resistance, and the Effective History of Pauline Texts in American Slavery,” *Semeia* 83/84 (1998): 203–33; Allen Dwight Callahan, “‘Brother Saul’: An Ambivalent Witness to Freedom,” *Semeia* 83/84 (1998): 235–50; Abraham Smith, “Putting ‘Paul’ Back Together Again: William Wells Brown’s *Clotel* and Black Abolitionist Approaches to Paul,” *Semeia* 83/84 (1998): 251–62; Allen Dwight Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

33. On Ezra, interracial marriage, and Alabama, see Cheryl B. Anderson, “Reflections in an Interethnic/racial Era on Interethnic/racial Marriage in Ezra”, 50. The Mississippi poll was conducted by Public Policy Polling and reported on April 7, 2011. Online: <http://publicpolicypolling.blogspot.com/2011/04/barbour-bryant-lead-in-mississippi.html>, accessed June 21, 2011.

34. Jordan’s translations: *The Cotton Patch Version of Luke and Acts: Jesus’ Doings and the Happenings* (New York: Association, 1969); *The Cotton Patch Version of Matthew and John* (New York: Association, 1970); *The Cotton Patch Version of Paul’s Epistles* (New York: Association, 1968); *The Cotton Patch Version of Hebrews and the General Epistles* (New York: Association, 1973). The musical: Tom Key, Russell Treyz, and Harry Chapin, *Cotton Patch Gospel: A Toe-Tapping Full-Length Musical* (Woodstock: Dramatic, 1983).

35. Ann Louis Coble, *Cotton Patch for the Kingdom: Clarence Jordan’s Demonstration Plot at Koinonia Farm* (Scottsdale: Herald, 2001), 39–41.