

# *He Can Work it Out*

*Understanding the Intersection of African American People,  
Spirituality, and Mental Health*

*Jeremiah 29: 1-32*



*Skylor Dunn-Ford, B.S., magna cum laude  
Pepperdine Graduate School of Education and Psychology*

# Abstract

In the case of 79% of African American people, Christianity serves as a component that influences whether we perceive ourselves as people who possess a cursed complexion that justifies our historical enslavement, or as people who are considered equal and beloved creations in the eyes of God. The former perspective stems from egregiously abridged Biblical teachings of Quakers, some Presbyterian ministers, Separatist Baptists, and Methodist societies intended to augment colonization. Such teachings underlie negative religious coping, which can worsen psychological distress and hinder treatment efficacy in therapy. Thus, revealing the importance of inquiring about religiosity in multicultural therapeutic contexts.



# Prologue

If you are reading this, it's probably because your curiosity goes beyond the generic explanations of the meaning of life. You may have grown tired of what has been fed to you. I hope that you continue to have faith in a higher purpose, even when you are presented with an illusion of having to settle for less than what you truly deserve. Sometimes, walking by faith can be a challenge when you're not sure of where you're headed. However, God is always sure of you, and He has faith that you'll let His light guide the way. In times of darkness, allow yourself to be the moon to His sun, and to be a reflection of His grace. Since the birth of this nation, He has awaited the day in which we come to understand our existential purpose. May the knowledge of our past serve as a catalyst for more instances of altruistic, reciprocal, and infectious compassion in the present and future times. God is waiting for us to recognize ourselves as His children. May the truth set us free. Amen.





On August 3, 1492, Christopher Columbus convinced King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain to provide ships, supplies, and a crew to facilitate the discovery of a naval trading route that would cut out the Muslim and Byzantine middle-men of the spice trade, and would facilitate direct access to spices from China and India. Due to a miscalculation of the Earth's circumference by 25%, God led Columbus instead to a Bahamian island in which he decided to "claim" for his royal sponsors. The island was inhabited by beautiful people who wore golden nose jewelry that piqued his interest in the acquisition of such. While still determined to reach Asia, Columbus crashed into another island in which he named Española (Hispaniola), where its inhabitants were willing to trade and share their various golden ornaments, and were willing to show Columbus the way to nearby aquatic sources. Columbus was convinced that this occurrence was a sign from God that it was meant to be, and excitedly wrote a letter to his royal sponsors detailing the aforementioned events. By the end of the 15th century, Columbus' letter was published throughout Europe, which inspired many other European countries to follow suit in the pursuit of gold.





By the 16th century, Hispaniola did not prove to be as bountiful as hoped, which led the Spanish colonizers to transition to the cultivation of sugarcane and tobacco for profit. Such cash crops did not prove to be as profitable either, which led Spanish colonizers to continue their search for silver and gold in Mexico. Their business model consisted of taking over already-established silver and gold mines from Inca and Aztec empires, forcing indigenous people to extract such silver and gold for free, and then overworking, mutilating, or murdering such people in the event that they produced less silver and gold than what was deemed as satisfactory. Portuguese colonizers were the first to go so far as to purchase and exploit African people for the benefit of their expansion. Such a decision proved to be lucrative and beneficial, as Portugal had a monopoly of such practices, leading other aspiring European countries to turn to privateering as a means to steal some of the profit for themselves. Although Europe understood that gold was a sign of God, they misinterpreted the opportunity to learn more about Him as an opportunity to steal His power on Earth.



Of all the European countries that were tempted to follow the serpentine path, England was presented with one of the biggest tests of faith. God wanted England to understand that their purpose was to lead their continent by the example of resisting the serpentine path. Unfortunately, England walked by sight and not by faith. In their eyes, they would be considered the most powerless nation in the world, if they did not rush to stake their claim in the western hemisphere. While they grew impatient with God, God remained patient with them, even when they decided to turn away from Him in the 17th century to join other European countries in following the serpentine path. Unbeknownst to England, they rejected their purpose, which was to teach Europe how to find the silver lining in what only appeared to be a life that was lacking in gold and God. While gold is the primary element of Africa and the Americas, silver is the primary element of Europe. It was, and still is, meant for Europe to discover the importance of the silver cord that maintains their umbilical connection to God. Their lack of respect for their element of silver is what contributes to their insatiable greed for gold.



FIG. 345.<sup>500</sup>



Orang-Outan.

FIG. 346.<sup>501</sup>



Hottentot Wagoner — Caffre War.

FIG. 347.<sup>500</sup>



Chimpanzee.

FIG. 348.<sup>502</sup>



Hottentot from Somerset.

FIG. 349.



Mobile Negro, 1858.

FIG. 350.



Mobile Negro, 1858.

FIG. 351.



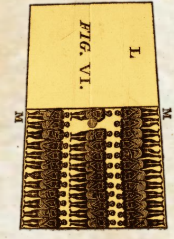
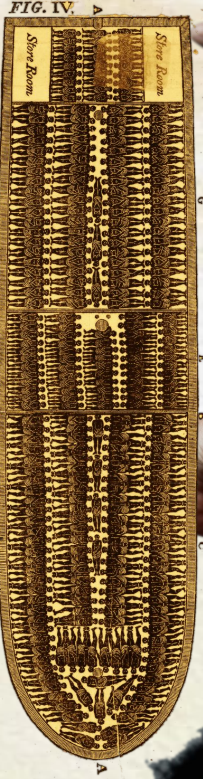
Negro, 3200 years old (supra, pp. 246-251).

FIG. 352.

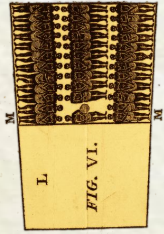
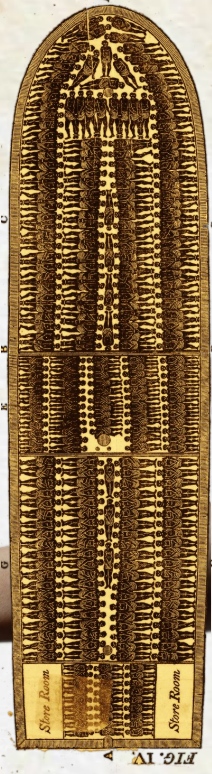


Nubian, 3200 years old.

By the time that England impatiently turned away from God in the 17th century, the serpent had already distorted many of heavenly messages in the time leading up to such an occurrence. In the 16th century, the serpent told England, along with the rest of Europe, that their white skin was aboriginal, that having white skin was only possible via the "ideal" environmental conditions of Europe, that whiteness was the pinnacle of beauty, and that it was safe to assume that people of the Bible, like Adam and Noah, were white. Another lie that the serpent told was that darker-complexioned people had degenerated the furthest from the "ideal", white form of humanity, that darker-complexioned people deviated from such an ideal state by migrating to the "less-desirable" climatic environments of non-European continents, and that darker-complexioned people were no more intelligent than primates. Monogenism permeated European fields of natural history, geology, physical anthropology, and ethnology, which led European colonizers to believe that God favored them most, that darker-complexioned people were inferior, that Europe was entitled to their gold, and that darker-complexioned people were in need of their influence and spiritual guidance.



("Diagram of the Brooks Slave Ship", 2021)



Although monogenism asserted that darker-complexioned people were biologically inferior descendants of Adam, polygenism, which emerged closer to the time in which English colonizers joined the trans-Atlantic slave trade, was a school of thought that asserted the notion that darker-complexioned people were created separately from Adam, were not of the human species, were soulless beings, and that their enslavement would not be considered a sin in the eyes of God. This led England to justify their guiltless participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. By the 17th century, English colonizers had repeated Spain's mistakes, which led them to a similar predicament of not finding much gold in Virginia, in addition to highly resistant indigenous people using their familiar terrain to their advantage. Much like Spain, English colonizers persevered, and transitioned to agriculture instead. Given that indigenous people could escape easily by blending into neighboring indigenous communities, English colonizers sought candidates who were aesthetically unique, who couldn't escape easily, who were highly skilled in mass cultivation, and were conveniently located along established seaports. Thus, the English colonizers concluded that West African people were the perfect candidates for slavery.



9-27-77  
SELECT PARTS\*

\*10% of Old Testament 50% of New Testament

232/1189 Chapters  
OF THE

# HOLY BIBLE,

FOR THE USE OF THE

*They  
ings, wa  
weary  
and sm  
between  
and there  
barefooted  
They  
b*  
**NEGRO SLAVES,**

IN THE

BRITISH WEST-INDIA ISLANDS.



London:

PRINTED BY LAW AND GILBERT,  
St. John's Square, Clerkenwell.

1807.

~~Exodus Galatians Jeremiah~~

~~The Story of Moses~~

By the 18th and 19th centuries, England dominated the trans-Atlantic slave trade. On the African continent, they traded their exported goods for enslaved people, gold, ivory, and spices, then traveled to American colonies where they auctioned enslaved African people in exchange for produce, and finally transported such produce to Europe for consumption. In order to alleviate their guilty consciences, English colonizers distorted the scriptures of the Bible to justify such practices, and weaponized scriptures to convince enslaved African people that they were Canaanites who were cursed with eternal servitude to lighter-complexioned people, and that their darker skin was a result of God smiting one of their common ancestors on Noah's Ark. Unfortunately, such lies were their first encounter with Christianity, as West African people had their own traditional religions prior to forced conversion. The blasphemous teachings of Quakers, some Presbyterian ministers, Separatist Baptists, and Methodist societies resulted in a loss of identity, along with interpersonal difficulties, existential guilt, and an overall feeling of being punished and abandoned by God. In spite of this, many enslaved African people were still able to discern that we are all God's children, and that enslavement was against God.

## -Negative-



**Jasmine** experiences **crises** of hope, expresses **confusion and dissatisfaction** with God, and views stressors as **punishment** from God for their sins.

## +Positive+



**Darius** seeks control through a **partnership with God** in problem solving, redefines stressors through religion as **benevolent and potentially beneficial**, and/or seeks relief from stressors through **focusing** on religion.

In today's United States, physical bondage has been outlawed, however psychological bondage still persists. Many of today's theologians have yet to correct such blasphemous teachings, which has resulted in a dichotomy of positive and negative religious coping mechanisms within the African American community. Residual, negative religious coping mechanisms contribute to psychological distress and can manifest as symptoms of depression and anxiety, increased rumination, reduced self-esteem, negative affect, callousness towards others, an overall perception of the world as threatening, and/or the perception that other people are inherently prejudiced. Furthermore, there exists a population of African American faith leaders who unknowingly echo such harmful rhetoric to their predominately African American congregations, which allows for this intergenerational trauma to continue. What started as an unethical social experiment, led by European colonizers and evangelicals, has spiraled into a trauma that has consistently influenced us to think of the world as malevolent and meaningless, to feel unworthy, to feel as though we are incapable of adapting to systemic oppression, and continues to negatively affect our academic, occupational, and social functioning, daily.



(Baxter, Medlock & Griffith, 2018)

## Steps to Determine Clinical Relevance in a Traditional Therapeutic Setting

1. **Conduct a spiritual screen**
  - a. “Do you identify as spiritual or religious?”
  - b. “What is your spiritual or religious affiliation?”
2. **Engage clients in a spiritual history**
  - a. Have a discussion with clients to uncover their religious or spiritual practices, and to gain a deeper understanding of how their religion or spirituality plays a role in their life and clinical recovery
3. **Conduct a spiritual assessment**
  - a. Used to deepen one's understanding of their client's spiritual journey and to assess areas of spiritual concern

Repairing the collective unconscious of the African American community can only be accomplished by repairing the cord of trust that was severed by the serpent. Along with systemic barriers that prevent access to quality mental health care, there has been historical use of pseudo-scientific and racist propaganda that has resulted in a collective sense of apathy regarding the human rights of enslaved African ancestors and their descendants. Because of this, up to 79% of African American people are more likely to entrust African American faith leaders with their mental health concerns. To reduce the disparity in help-seeking behavior, psychologists must meet us where we are: church. Forming collaborative relationships with clergy, implementing church-based health promotion programs (CBHPPs), constructing more comprehensive and supplementary mental health interventions, and promoting congregational participation in research that informs such interventions may be the key to ensuring that African American people receive quality care within one of the only spaces that are considered both comfortable and affordable. Most importantly, the collaboration of spiritual and psychological knowledge is what will inform our deliverance.

# References

*Adobe Stock Images*

- Almond, P. (2006). Adam, Pre-Adamites, and Extra-Terrestrial Beings in Early Modern Europe. *Journal Of Religious History*, 30(2), 163-174. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9809.2006.00446.x>
- Armitage, D. (1992). Christopher Columbus and the uses of history. *History Today*, 42(5), 50-55. Retrieved 30 August 2022, from [https://lib.pepperdine.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url\\_uid,cookie&db=a9h&AN=9205183677&site=ehost-live&scope=site](https://lib.pepperdine.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url_uid,cookie&db=a9h&AN=9205183677&site=ehost-live&scope=site).
- Baxter, K., Medlock, M., & Griffith, E. (2018). Hope, Resilience, and African-American Spirituality. *Racism And Psychiatry*, 141-156. doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-90197-8\_8
- Burrell, K. (2021). Slavery, the Hebrew Bible and the Development of Racial Theories in the Nineteenth Century. *Religions*, 12(9), 742. doi: 10.3390/rel12090742
- Citino, D. (1992). A Letter of Columbus. *Annali D'italianistica*, 10, 16-27. Retrieved 30 August 2022, from.
- Cook, N. (2002). Sickness, Starvation, and Death in Early Hispaniola. *The Journal Of Interdisciplinary History*, 32(3), 349-386. <https://doi.org/10.1162/002219502753364173>
- Curse of Ham - New World Encyclopedia. [Newworldencyclopedia.org](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Curse_of_Ham). Retrieved 10 November 2021, from [https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Curse\\_of\\_Ham](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Curse_of_Ham).
- Davies, A. (1967). Columbus Divides the World. *The Geographical Journal*, 133(3), 337. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1793544>
- Diagram of the Brooks Slave Ship. *World History Encyclopedia*. (2021). Retrieved 30 August 2022, from <https://www.worldhistory.org/image/13866/diagram-of-the-brooks-slave-ship/>.
- Edmondson, D., Chaudoir, S., Mills, M., Park, C., Holub, J., & Bartkowiak, J. (2011). From Shattered Assumptions to Weakened Worldviews: Trauma Symptoms Signal Anxiety Buffer Disruption. *Journal Of Loss And Trauma*, 16(4), 358-385. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2011.572030>
- Escudero, A. (2014). *Global Goods and the Spanish Empire, 1492-1824* (pp. 216–229). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Halloran, M. (2018). African American Health and Posttraumatic Slave Syndrome: A Terror Management Theory Account. *Journal Of Black Studies*, 50(1), 45-65. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934718803737>
- Hankerson, S. and Weissman, M., 2012. Church-Based Health Programs for Mental Disorders Among African Americans: A Review. *Psychiatric Services*, 63(3), pp.243-249.
- Jones, J., & King, H. (2002). Gold of the Americas. *Metropolitan Museum Of Art Bulletin*, LIX(59). Retrieved 30 August 2022, from.
- Keel, T. (2013). Religion, polygenism and the early science of human origins. *History Of The Human Sciences*, 26(2), 3-32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0952695113482916>
- Kempe, M. (2010). 'Even in the remotest corners of the world': globalized piracy and international law, 1500–1900. *Journal Of Global History*, 5(3), 353-372. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1740022810000185>
- Kim-Cragg, H. (2021). Invisibility of Whiteness: A Homiletical Interrogation. *Homiletic*, 46(1), 28-39. Retrieved 31 August 2022, from <https://ejournals.library.vanderbilt.edu/index.php/homiletic/article/view/5140>.
- Martin, M. (2018). Slave Bible From The 1800s Omitted Key Passages That Could Incite Rebellion. NPR. Retrieved 10 November 2021, from <https://www.npr.org/2018/12/09/674995075/slave-bible-from-the-1800s-omitted-key-passages-that-could-ignite-rebellion>.
- McClary-Gaddy, A., & Miller, C. (2019). Negative religious coping as a mediator between perceived prejudice and psychological distress among African Americans: A structural equation modeling approach. *Psychology Of Religion And Spirituality*, 11(3), 257-265. doi: 10.1037/rel0000228
- McKey, C. (2016). THE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION (Undergraduate). University of Oregon.
- Muhammad, P. (2003). The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Forgotten Crime Against Humanity as Defined by International Law. *American University International Law Review*, 19(4), 883-947. Retrieved 30 August 2022, from.
- Murphy, L. (2000). Down by the Riverside: Readings in African American Religion (Religion, Race, and Ethnicity) (pp. 26-35). New York University Press.
- New International Version. (2011). BibleGateway.com. <http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-International-Version-NIV-Bible/#booklist>
- Pargament, K., Smith, B., Koenig, H., & Perez, L. (1998). Patterns of Positive and Negative Religious Coping with Major Life Stressors. *Journal For The Scientific Study Of Religion*, 37(4), 710. doi: 10.2307/1388152
- Park, C., Holt, C., Le, D., Christie, J., & Williams, B. (2018). Positive and negative religious coping styles as prospective predictors of well-being in African Americans. *Psychology Of Religion And Spirituality*, 10(4), 318-326. doi: 10.1037/rel0000124
- Phipps, R., & Thorne, S. (2019). Utilizing Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy as a Framework for Addressing Cultural Trauma in African American Children and Adolescents: A Proposal. *The Professional Counselor*, 9(1), 35-50. <https://doi.org/10.15241/tp.9.1.35>
- PBS. (2018). The Origin of Race in the USA [Video]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVxAlmAPHe>
- PBS. (2018). Why Did Europeans Enslave Africans? [Video]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=opUDFaqNgXc>
- Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics. Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. (2021). Retrieved 10 November 2021, from <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/racial-and-ethnic-composition/black/>.
- Sanhedrin 108b. Sefaria.org. Retrieved 10 November 2021, from <https://www.sefaria.org/Sanhedrin.108b.6?lang=bi>.
- Schneider, E. (2015). African Slavery and Spanish Empire. *Journal Of Early American History*, 5(1), 3-29. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18770703-00501002>
- Schorsch, J. (2007). The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. *AJS Review*, 31(1), 168-172. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0364009407000281>
- Slavery and the British transatlantic slave trade. Retrieved 7 August 2022, from <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/british-transatlantic-slave-trade-records/>
- Strange, T. (2012). Teaching Christianity in the face of adversity: African American religious leaders in the late antebellum South (Ph. D). The University of Manchester.
- The Story of Africa| BBC World Service. Bbc.co.uk. Retrieved 10 November 2021, from [https://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/index\\_section8.shtml](https://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/index_section8.shtml).
- Top primary silver mines worldwide 2021 | Statista. (2021). Retrieved 4 August 2022, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/253333/leading-primary-silver-mines/>
- Viswanath, M. Black People in Jewish Tradition: Eliminating Racism Requires Honesty - TheTorah.com. Thetorah.com. Retrieved 10 November 2021, from <https://www.thetorah.com/article/black-people-in-jewish-tradition-eliminating-racism-requires-honesty>.
- Willis, H., Sosoo, E., Bernard, D., Neal, A., & Neblett, E. (2021). The Associations Between Internalized Racism, Racial Identity, and Psychological Distress. *Emerging Adulthood*, 9(4), 384-400. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21676968211005598>

**[Full Transcript with In-Text Citations \[Click Here\]](#)**

**[skylor.dunnford@gmail.com](mailto:skylor.dunnford@gmail.com)**