

*“The Genesis of Liberation” in the
“Reading Between the Lines : Alternative Readings of Scripture” Series*

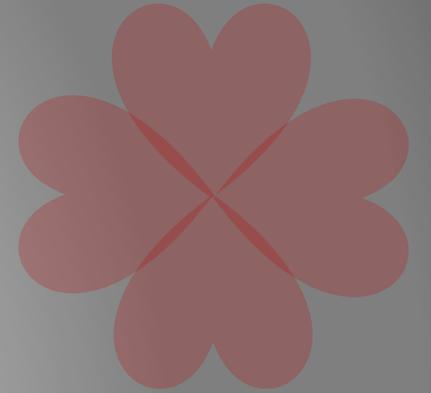
*by
Abraham Smith*

*Alfred St. Baptist Church
Alexandria, Virginia
Dr. Howard-John Wesley, Pastor*

January 13, 2018

**“I, too, live in the time of slavery,
which mean[s] I am living in the future by it”**

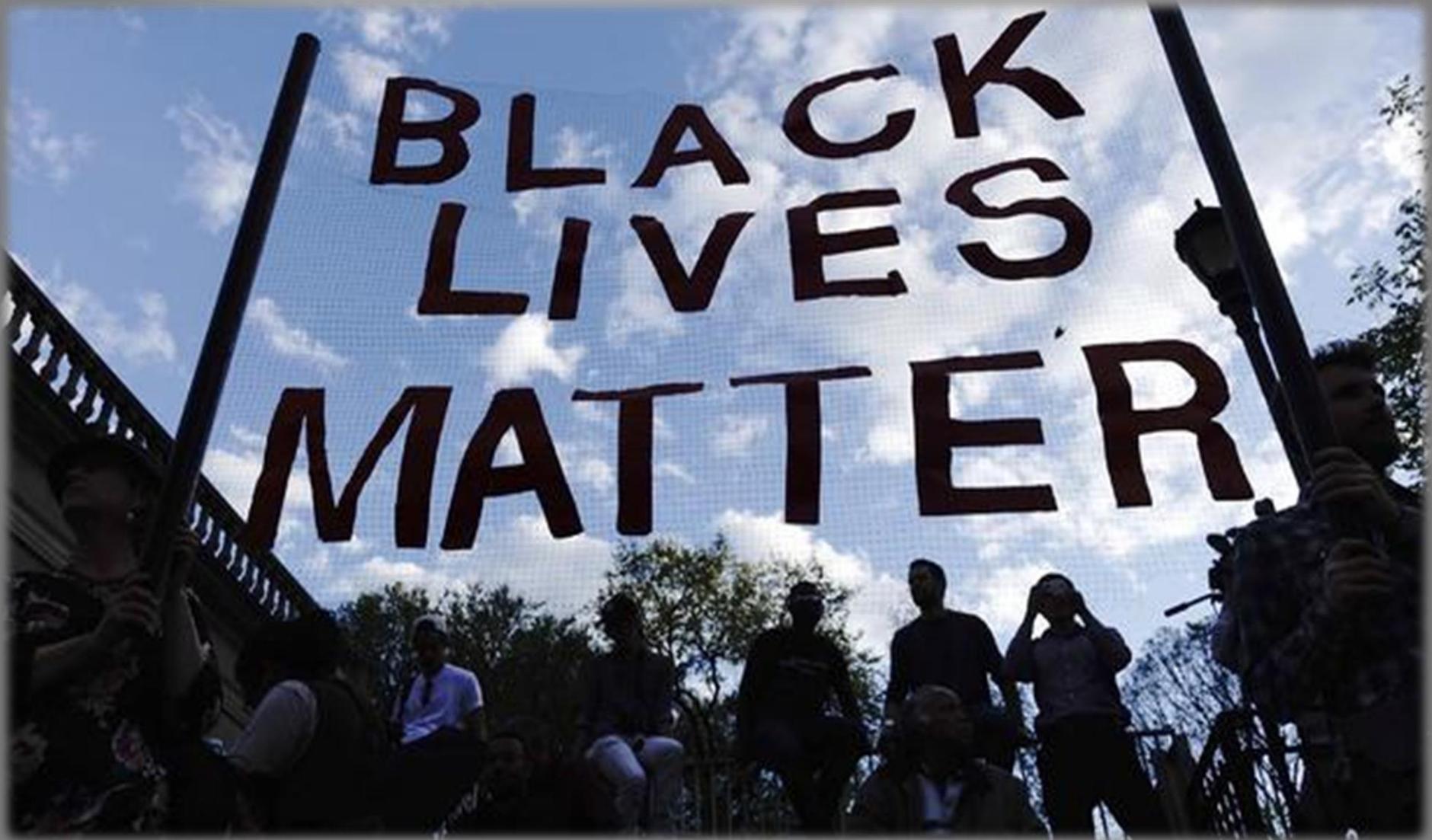
by Saidiya Hartman



**“For the vulnerable, it is the violence of the ordinary,
The terrorism of the quotidian, the injustice of the everybody,
That produces the most profound and intractable social
misery.”**

by Marc Lamont Hill

Black Lives Matter



Birmingham Police Using Fire Hoses against Demonstrators



Selma's Bloody Sunday



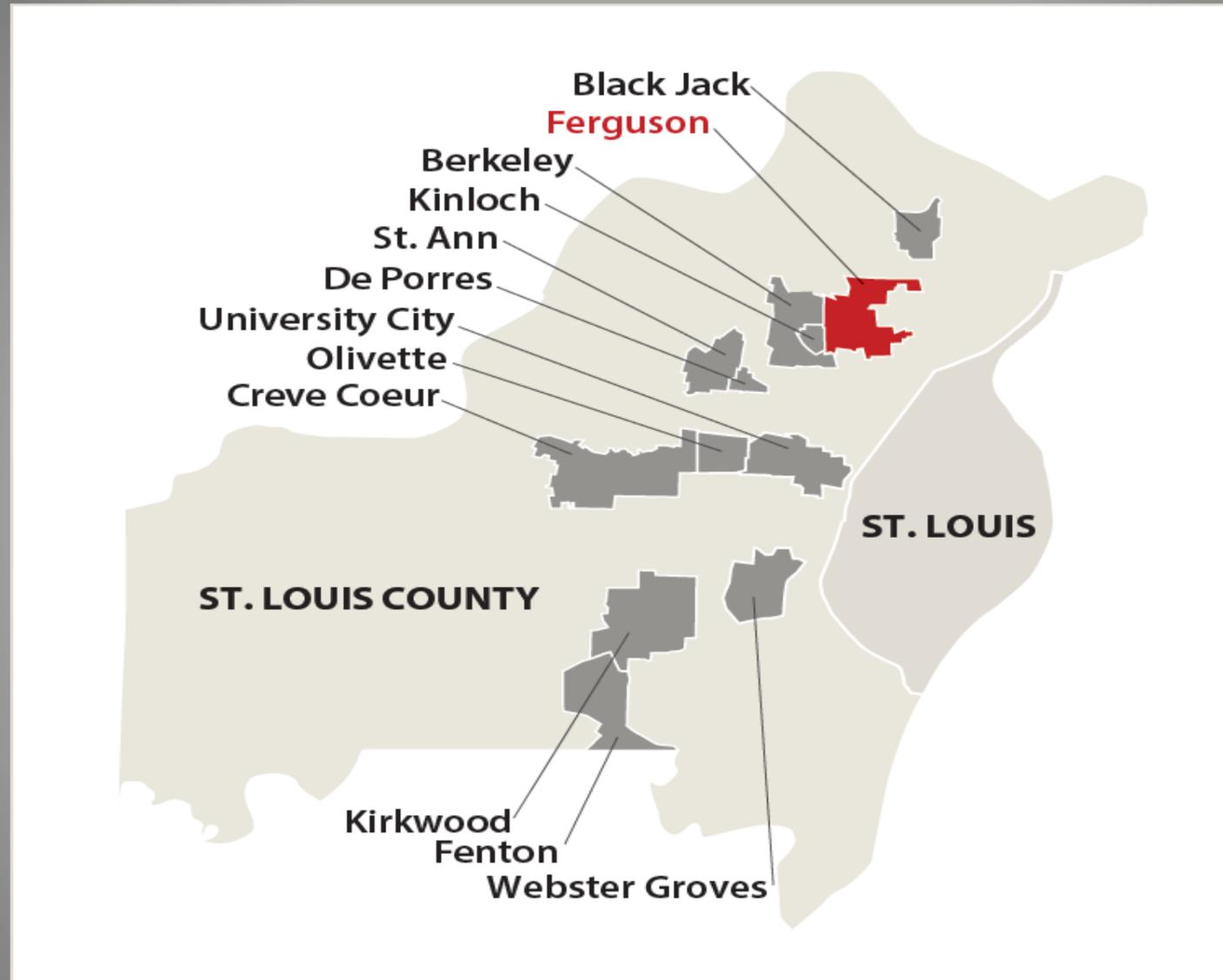
Eric Garner's Funeral



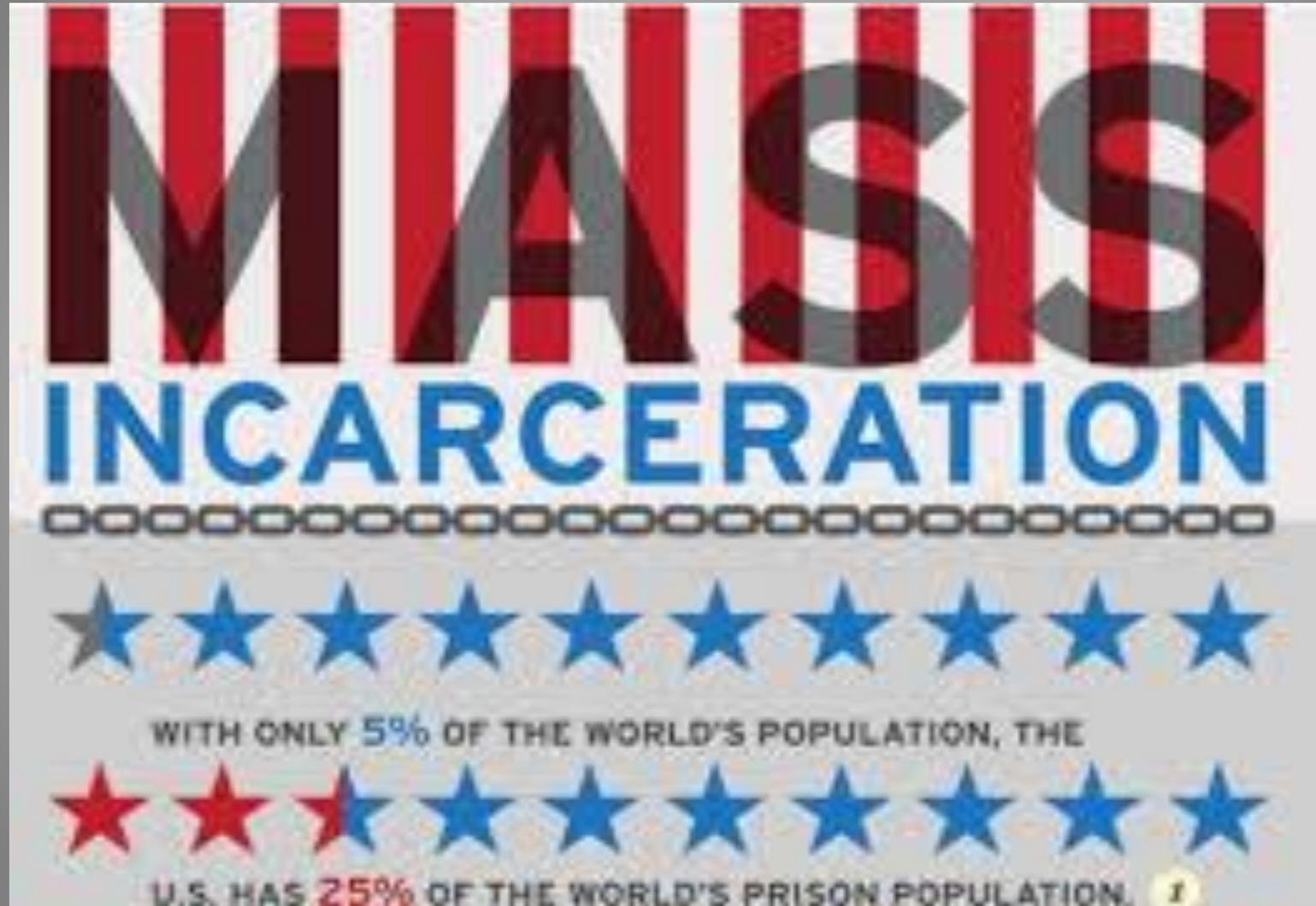
The Polluted Water in Flint, Michigan



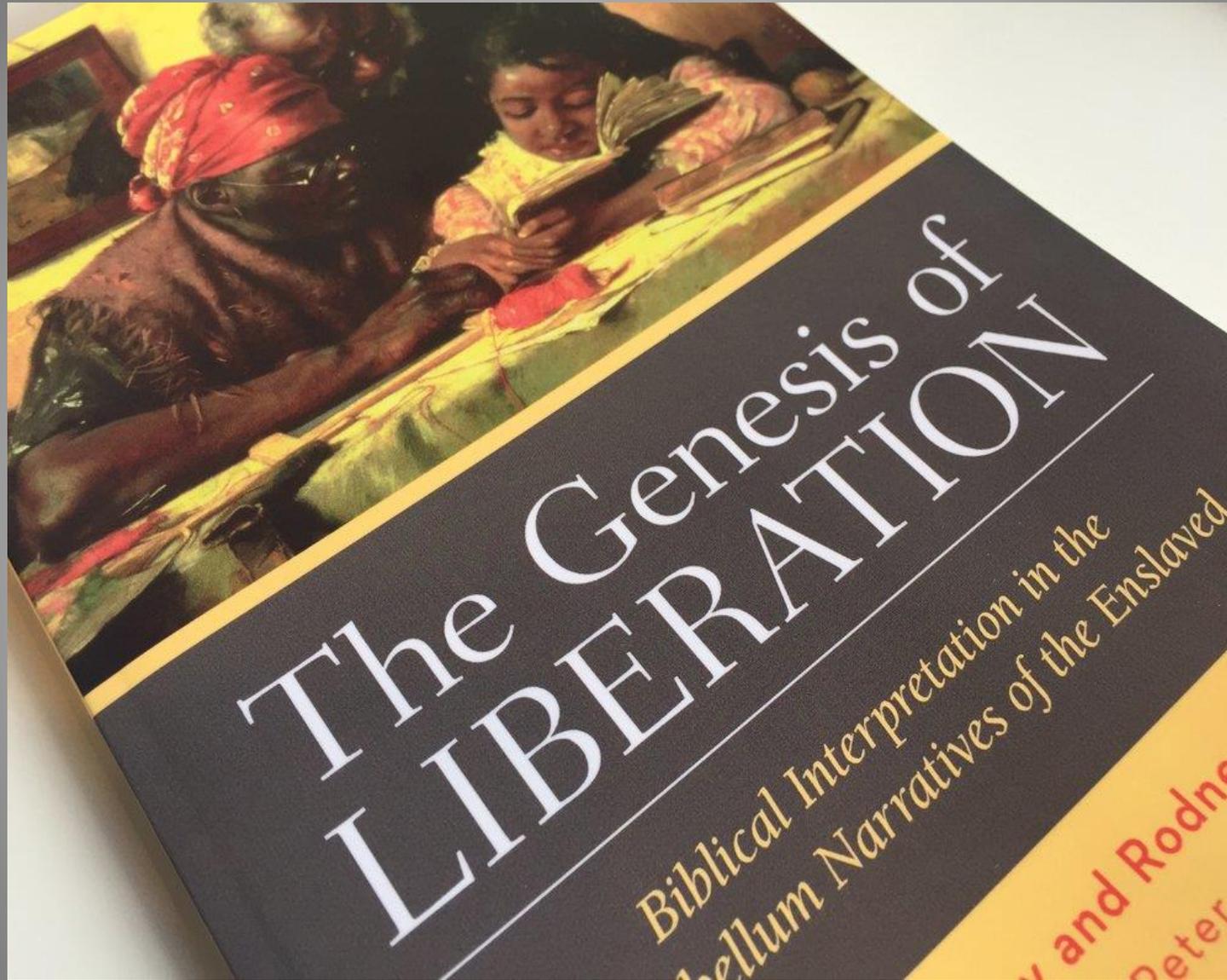
Ferguson and Other Suburbs in St. Louis County, Missouri



Mass Incarceration Emblem



Powery and Sadler's *The Genesis of Liberation*



Slaveholders' Views of Blacks as Soulless Bodies or Bodiless Souls

The Naturalist View: The Enslaved do not have souls.

The Christian Master View: The Enslaved have souls but enslaved bodies lack worth. [by Riggins Earl, Jr.]

Either View allows the slaver to mistreat the enslaved and to see the enslaved as less than human.

Two Types of Hermeneutical Approaches Used to commit Cultural Violence against Black Lives

1) A Hermeneutics of Sanctioning a Doctrine or a Political Position through Proof-Texts

Gen 4:1-14 (the so-called Curse of Cain)

Gen 9:25-27 (the so-called Curse of Canaan/Curse of Ham)

Philemon (a letter by Paul to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus)

Household Codes in Colossians and Ephesians

2) A Hermeneutics of Silence (Jesus Never Condemned Slavery)

Prooftext Hermeneutics (1a): Gen 4:1-14 (the so-called Curse of Cain)

1 Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have produced[a] a man with the help of the Lord.” 2 Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. 3 In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering,

Prooftext Hermeneutics(1b): Gen 4:1-14 (the so-called Curse of Cain)

5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. 6 The Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

Prooftext Hermeneutics(1c): Gen 4:1-14 (the so-called Curse of Cain)

8 Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let us go out to the field.”[b] And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. 9 Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” 10 And the Lord said, “What have you done? Listen; your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground!

Prooftext Hermeneutics(1d): Gen 4:1-14 (the so-called Curse of Cain)

11 And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12 When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." 13 Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! 14 Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me."

Prooftext Hermeneutics(2): Gen 9:25-27 (the so-called Curse of Ham)

25 He [Noah] said,
“Cursed be Canaan;
lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers.”

26 He also said,
“Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave.

27 May God make space for[a] Japheth,
and let him live in the tents of Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave.”

Excerpt from “Letter from the Right Reverend John H. Hopkins, D.D”

“The slavery of the Negro race, as maintained in the Southern States, appears to me fully authorized both in the Old and the New Testament which, as the written Word of God, afford the only infallible standard of moral rights and obligations. That very slavery, in my humble judgment, has raised the Negro incomparably higher in the scale of humanity, and seems, in fact, to be the only instrumentality through which the heathen posterity of Canaan have been raised at all.”

Prooftext Hermeneutics(3a): Philemon (a letter by Paul to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus)

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, 2 to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God 5 because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. 6 I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ

Prooftext Hermeneutics(3b): Philemon (a letter by Paul to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus)

7 I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother. 8 For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, 9 yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. 10 I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. 11 Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me.

Prooftext Hermeneutics(3c): Philemon (a letter by Paul to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus)

12 I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. 13 I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; 14 but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. 15 Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, 16 no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Prooftext Hermeneutics(3d): Philemon (a letter by Paul to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus)

17 So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. 18 If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. 20 Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. 21 Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

Prooftext Hermeneutics(3e): Philemon (a letter by Paul to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus)

22 One thing more—prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you.

23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, 24 and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. 25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Prooftext Hermeneutics(4a): Household Codes in Colossians 3:18-4:1 and Ephesians 5:21-6:9

Colossians 3:18-4:1

3:18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
19 Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly. 20
Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your
acceptable duty in the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your
children, or they may lose heart. 22 Slaves, obey your earthly
masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order
to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord.]

Prooftext Hermeneutics(4b): Household Codes in Colossians 3:18-4:1 and Ephesians 5:21-6:9

23 Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, 24 since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality. 4:1 Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

Prooftext Hermeneutics(4c): Household Codes in Colossians 3:18-4:1and Ephesians 5:21-6:9

Ephesians 5:21-6:9

5:21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. 24 Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

Prooftext Hermeneutics(4d): Household Codes in Colossians 3:18-4:1 and Ephesians 5:21-6:9

26 in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, 27 so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, 30 because we are members of his body.

Prooftext Hermeneutics(4e): Household Codes in Colossians 3:18-4:1 and Ephesians 5:21-6:9

31 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” 32 This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. 33 Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband. 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother”—this is the first commandment with a promise: 3 “so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth

Prooftext Hermeneutics(4f): Household Codes in Colossians 3:18-4:1and Ephesians 5:21-6:9

3 “so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” 4 And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. 5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; 6 not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.

Prooftext Hermeneutics(4g): Household Codes in Colossians 3:18-4:1and Ephesians 5:21-6:9

7 Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, 8 knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free. 9 And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality.

The Petition of the New Bedford Third Christian Church

“Resolved, That we neither recognize nor respect any laws for slavery, whether from Moses, Paul, or Taney [the Supreme Court chief justice in the Dred Scott case]. We spurn and trample them all under our feet as in violation of the laws of God and the rights of men.”

Black Mutiny in 1833 (1)

I was preaching to a large congregation on the Epistle of Philemon: and when I insisted upon fidelity and obedience as Christian virtues in servants and upon the authority of Paul, condemned the practice of running away, one half of my audience deliberately rose up and walked off with themselves, and those that remained looked anything but satisfied, either with the preacher or his doctrine.

Black Mutiny in 1833(2)

After dismissal, there was no small stir among them; some solemnly declared “that there was no such an Epistle in the Bible”; others, “that they did not care if they ever heard me preach again.” . . . There were some too, who had strong objections against me as a Preacher, because I was a master, and said, “his people have to work as well as we.”

List of Four Strategies of Biblical Interpretation Deployed by African Americans (part 1)

1) Counter-hegemonic Proof-texting Approach

2) Core Principle Approach

- a. Golden Rule
- b. Great Commandments
- c. Gospel of Truth (“Gospel Rightly Understood,” aka “Truth Religion”)
- d. Gospel of Luke’s Nazareth Synagogue Programmatic Sermon (Luke 4)

(aka the “immutable principles” approach, one looks for a

List of Three Strategies of Biblical Interpretation Deployed by African Americans (parts 2 and 3)

3) Characterological Approach (aka the Typological Approach)

4) Coded Messages Approach (in-group double-talk to talk-back or plot escapes clandestinely)

Excerpt from Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*

“for I always remembered the old adage; and I trust it has ever been my ruling principle, that honesty is the best policy; and likewise that other golden precept—to do unto all men as I would they should do unto me.

Peter Randolph comments on two core principles in *Sketches of Slave Life*

This is the great commandment of the New Testament—‘Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself.’ ‘Do unto others as ye would that they should do to you,’ is the golden rule for all men to follow. By this rule shall all men be judged.”

James 3:17 and Douglass' Description of True Religion

James 3:17 KJV

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”

Douglass' True Religion

“I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ: I therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land.”

Peter Randolph on Luke 4:18-19 in his *Sketches of a Slave's Life*

“The slaveholders say we have not a true knowledge of religion; but the great Teacher said, when he came on his mission, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted; to preach deliverance to the captive, and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised, and to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.’ This ought to be the work of the ministers and the churches. Anything short of this is not the true religion of Jesus.”

**Quotation from Charles Long on the Adaptation of the Bible
by Enslaved Blacks**

“[The Bible] was adapted to and
invested with the experience of the
slave.”

Frederick Douglass on Coded Messages (1a)

“We were, at times, remarkably buoyant, singing hymns and making joyous exclamations, almost as triumphant in their tone as if we reached a land of freedom and safety. A keen observer might have detected in our repeated singing of

‘O Canaan, sweet Canaan,

I am bound for the land of Canaan,’

something more than a hope of reaching heaven. We meant to reach the north—and the north was our Canaan.

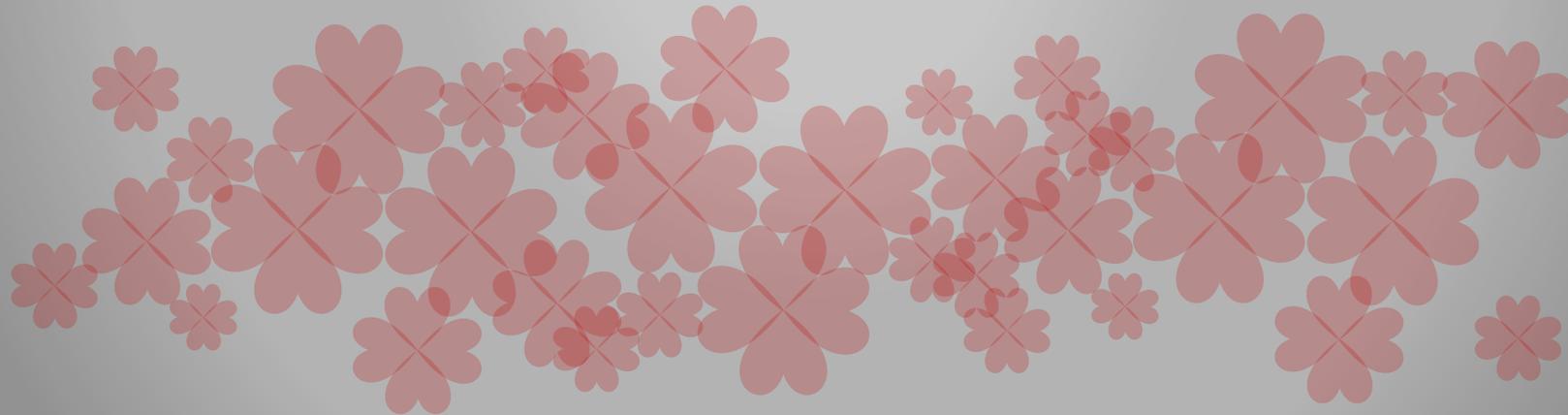
Frederick Douglass on Coded Messages(1b)

‘I thought I heard them say,
There were lions in the way,
I don’t expect to Star [stay?]
Much longer here.
Run to Jesus—shun the danger—
I don’t expect to stay
Much longer here.’

was a favorite air, and had a double meaning. In the lips of some, it meant the expectation of a speedy summons to a world of

Frederick Douglass on Coded Messages(1c)

spirits; but, in the lips of our company, it simply meant, a speedy pilgrimage toward a free state, and deliverance from all the evils and dangers of slavery.”



A stylized illustration of a person in a suit, shown from the chest up. The person has a large, open mouth with a red tongue and a purple throat. A large, white speech bubble with a thick black border is positioned in front of the person's chest. The background is a dark green color.

Do you
have any
questions?

**Thank you
for your attention.**