' all my Slaves, whether Negroes, Indians, Mustees, Or Molattoes.'[1]
Towards a Thick Description of 'slave religion'

In the widely read work on the institution of slavery entitled *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South,* the author makes the following assertion, "Because there is only sparse testimony from the colonial period, historians can only speculate about the ways in which slaves during that period interpreted Christianity to fit the world views inherited from their African past."[2] In another popular work *Trabelin On: The Slave Journey to Afro-Baptist Faith*, another author maintains, "The first slaves to come into meaningful contact were probably socialized with a neo-African worldview that had already absorbed many contradictory values."[3] In so doing, these authors do not allow for the possibility of persons with heritage other than African were caught up in the snare of the "peculiar institution." As we have just heard there is a rather large body of evidence that the institution of slavery was quite diverse and multifaceted especially in areas of South Carolina and Virginia, the birthplaces of "slave religion."

However, the good thing [at least for these authors is that they are not alone in closing the canon of the testaments of "slave religion" to the apocryphal witness of the Native American experience. In addition, it is important for me at this point to take the uncomfortable position that Indians themselves are often reluctant to address their historical experience with African Americans because it raises complex questions of identity, their involvement with plantation slavery, and the complicated issues of African entitlements and citizenship with Native American Nations. Fortunately, some of these

---

[1] "Wills and Miscellaneous Records," South Carolina Department of Archives and History, quoted in Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974), 99.
[2] Albert Raboteau, Slave Religion: the "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 127.
[3] Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin On: The Slave Journey to Afro-Baptist Faith,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), xxii.

issues are being addressed in forums such as the historic one at Dartmouth a couple of years and at a more recent National Congress of American Indians annual convention discussion led by Wilma Mankiller. Unfortunately, persons of African descent are still not considered citizens of the Cherokee Nation and even the Seminole have moved to restrict citizenship along bloodlines. It is a complicated and contentious issue. Circe Strum, in her excellent work Blood Politics, has said that the only solution to this problem is through the use of history as an exercise in redemptive genealogy. The historical evidence is most certainly there.

The institution of the African slavery, as it developed in the New World, was based upon the lessons learned in the enslavement of traditional peoples of the Americas. Seeking the gold that had changed the face of the Spanish Empire but finding none, the English settlers quickly seized upon the most abundant and available resource they could attain. The indigenous peoples of the Southeastern United States became, themselves, a commodity on the open market.[4] Applying the same rhetoric that they had used in their holy campaigns against the "heathens" and "barbarians" of Scotland and Ireland,[5] the colonists cited Indian "savagery" and "depredations" as justification for "Indian wars" to dispossess and enslave the Yamasee, the Tuscarora, the Westo and eventually even the

---

[4] See Almon Lauber, *Indian Slavery in Colonial Times within the Present Limits of the United States* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1933); Barbara Olexer, *The Enslavement of the American Indian (*Monroe, N.Y.: Library Research Associates, 1982); J. Leitch Wright, *The Only Land They Knew: The Tragic Story of the American Indian in the Old South* (New York: Free Press, 1981); Jack Weatherford, *Native Roots: How the Indians Enriched America* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1991); Patrick Minges, *Evangelism and Enslavement: Catholic and Protestant Missions to the Native Americans* (Unpublished Manuscript, 1992).

[5] James Wilson, *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1998), 63-64; Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 56-61); Edmund S. Morgan. *American Slavery-American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. (New York: Norton and Co., 1975), 20; Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 46; Ronald Sanders. ***Lost Tribes and Promised Lands: The Origins of American Racism.*** (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1978), 228.

Cherokee and the Creek.[6] However, the slave trade was not just confined to the Southeast.

William Anews, missionary to the Mohawk for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, reported to his superiors that the English were "abusing the Indians with drink and then cheate them in Trading with them and Stealing Even their Children away and carry them off to other places and sell them for slaves."[7] What was, at first, cleverly described in the nuanced language of "indian wars" soon became a commercial enterprise sanctioned by legal authorities throughout the colonies. The Province of Massachusetts Bay established "And it shall be lawful, and is hereby warranted, for him to make sale of such prisoners as their perpetual slaves; or otherwise retain them, as they think meet (they being such as the law allows to be kept."[8] In 1645, John Winthrop wrote

> A war with the Narragansetts is very considerable to this plantation, for I doubt whether it be not in us, having the power in our hands, to suffer them to maintain the worship of the devil, which their powwows often do; secondly, if upon a just war the Lord should deliver them into our hands, we might easily have men, women, and children enough to exchange for the Moors which will be more gainful pillage for us than we conceive, for I do not see how we can thrive until we get a flock of slaves sufficient to do all our business….[9].

In spite of a later tendency in the Southern United States to differentiate the African slave from the Indian, African slavery was in actuality imposed on top of a preexisting system of Indian slavery.[10] In North America, the two never diverged as

---

[6] Booker T. Washington, *The Story of the Negro: The Rise of the Race from Slavery Vol. 1* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1909), 128-130.

[7] William Anews quoted in Barbara Olexer, *The Enslavement of the American Indian (*Monroe, N.Y.: Library Research Associates, 1982), 172.

[8] Ellis Ames, Abner Cheney Goodell, John H Clifford, Alexander S Wheeler, William Cross Williamson, Melville Madison Bigelow, "The Acts And Resolves, Public And Private, Of The Province Of The Massachusetts Bay: To Which Are Prefixed The Charters Of The Province: With Historical And Explanatory Notes, And An Appendix, etc. 17 vols. Boston, 1869-1910," 21 Vols., (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1869-1922), vii, 45.

[9] John Winthrop quoted in John M. Mecklin, "The Evolution of the Slave Status in American Democracy" *Journal of Negro History* 2 (April, 1917), 110.

[10] George Washington Williams, *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880: Negroes as Slaves, as Soldiers, and as Citizens (*New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1882), 123-180.

distinct institutions.[11] Charleston and Savannah quickly became the centers of this North American commercial slavery enterprise. In the latter half of seventeenth century, Native American nations throughout the South were played against each other in an orgy of slave dealing that decimated entire peoples.[12] The Indian slave trade in the Carolinas, with these southern ports as their centers, rapidly took on all of the characteristics of the African slave trade. The Carolinians formed alliances with coastal native groups, armed them, and encouraged them to make war on weaker tribes deeper in the Carolina interior.[13] By the late years of the seventeenth century, caravans of Indian slaves were making their way from the Carolina backcountry to forts on the coast just as caravans of African slaves were doing on the African continent. Once in Charleston, the captives were loaded on ships for the "middle passage" to the West Indies or other colonies such as New Amsterdam or New England.[14]

Throughout the colonies, the traffic in Indian slaves made fine trade.[15] In the Carolinas, the trade in Indian slaves was not only lucrative but served the needs of dispossession, “This traffic was an inhuman method of getting rid of troublesome neighbors, yet the planters pleaded necessity in its vindication. It is certain that the reward for indian prisoners encouraged bold adventurers, and the sale of them made

---

[11] David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 176.
[12] Peter Wood, Black *Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion (*New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1974), 39.
[13] Lauber, 39.
[14] Washington, 129.
[15] Rodney M. Baine, “Indian Slavery In Colonial Georgia” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 1995 79(2): 418-424; Michael L. Fickes, “ ‘They Could Not Endure That Yoke’: The Captivity Of Pequot Women And Children After The War Of 1637” *New England Quarterly* 2000 73(1): 58-81; Donald Grinde, Jr., “Native American Slavery In The Southern Colonies,” Indian History 1977 10(2): 38-42; Zbigniew Mazur, “ ‘Compelled To Servitude And Drudgery’: Indians And The Development Of The Institutions Of Unfree Labor In Early Colonial Virginia” *American Studies* [Poland] 1994 13: 73-83; Claudio Saunt, “ ‘The English Has Now A Mind To Make Slaves Of Them All’: Creeks, Seminoles, And The Problem Of Slavery” *American Indian Quarterly* 1998 22(1-2): 157-180; Stephen Webre, “The Problem Of Indian Slavery In Spanish Louisiana, 1769-1803,” *Louisiana History* 1984 25(2): 117-135.

profitable trade."[16] The Indian slave trade soon eclipsed the trade for furs and skins and became the primary source of commerce between the English and the people of the Carolinas.[17] Many of the Indian slaves were kept at home and worked on the plantations of South Carolina; by 1708, the number of Indian slaves in the Carolinas was nearly half that of African slaves. [18]

Many of the captive slaves were transported not only to the West Indies, but also to Spain, Portugal, Bermuda, and the Azores. However, the West Indies became the crossroads where slaves bound for the Americas from Africa and slaves borne for Europe from the Americas first made contact. It was in the West Indies that the blood of these peoples first came together as one; it was in these "breaking grounds" where first encounters became lasting relationships.[19] Thrown together into a maelstrom not of their own creation, peoples from different places, languages, and cultures grasped for that common thread of humanity that would allow them to persevere the inhumanity that had engulfed them.[20] Together, they formed "a vision of cross-cultural contact where reciprocity and recognition of the primacy of community are affirmed, where the will to conquer and dominate was not seen as the only way to confront the Other who is not ourselves."[21]

---

[16] David Ramsay, *Ramsay's History of South Carolina from its First Settlement in 1670 to the year 1808* (Newberry, S.C.: W.J. Duffie, 1900, 1983), 86.
[17] James Mooney, "Myths of the Cherokees" (Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), 32.
[18] Gary Nash, *Red, White and Black: The Peoples of Early America* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1974), 130.
[19] Kenneth W. Porter, "Relations Between Negroes and Indians Within the Present United States," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. XVII: No 4. (January, 1933), 321.
[20] J. Leitch Wright. *The Only Land They Knew: The Tragic Story of the American Indian in the Old South* (New York: Free Press, 1981), 130.
[21] bell hooks, "Revolutionary Renegades: Native Americans, African Americans, and Black Indians" in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 181.

Not only in the West Indies where these bonds of affinity were established. In the coastlands of the American colonies from New England to Florida, the use of both African and Indian slaves became a common phenomenon. Booker T. Washington in his The *Story of the Negro* notes that, "During all this time, for a hundred years or maybe more, the Indian and the Negro worked side by side as slaves. In all the laws and regulations of the Colonial days, the same rule which applied to the Indian was also applied to the Negro slaves...In all other regulations that were made in the earlier days for the control of the slaves, mention is invariably made of the Indian as well as the Negro."[22] As coordinator of the studies for American Indians at Hampton Institute in Virginia, Booker T. Washington was well aware of the historical links between these two oppressed communities. In his own personal relationships with the young people in his charge, he found these ties to have roots much deeper than mere historical coincidence. There were sacred bonds of community that lie at the deepest levels of human consciousness.[23]

---

[22] Washington, 130.

[23] Washington described these links in the essay "Black Race and Red Race" in his autobiography *Up From Slavery:*

> On going to Hampton, I took up my residence in a building with about seventy-five Indian youths. I was the only person in the building who was not a member of their race. At first I had a good deal of doubt about my ability to succeed. I knew that the average Indian felt himself above the white man, and, of course, he felt himself far above the Negro, largely on account of the fact of the Negro having submitted to slavery—a thing which the Indian would never do. The Indians, in the Indian Territory, owned a large number of slaves during the days of slavery. Aside from this, there was a general feeling that the attempt to educate and civilize the red men at Hampton would be a failure. All this made me proceed very cautiously, for I felt keenly the great responsibility. But I was determined to succeed. It was not long before I had the complete confidence of the Indians, and not only this, but I think I am safe in saying that I had their love and respect. I found that they were about like any other human beings; that they responded to kind treatment and resented ill-treatment. They were continually planning to do something that would add to my happiness and comfort. The things that they disliked most, I think, were to have their long hair cut, to give up wearing their blankets, and to cease smoking; but no white American ever thinks that any other race is wholly civilized until he wears the white man's clothes, eats the white man's food, speaks the white man's language, and professes the white man's religion. [Booker T. Washington, "Black Race and Red Race" *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography*, http://www.bartleby.com/1004/6.html, August 26, 2000]

In areas such as Southeastern Virginia, the "Low Country" of the Carolinas, and around Galphintown[24] near Savannah, Georgia, communities of Afro-Indians began to arise. The term "mustee" came to distinguish between those who shared African and Native American ancestry from those who were a mixture of European and African. Even after 1720, black and red Carolinians continued to share slave quarters and intimate lives; many wills continued to refer to "all my Slaves, whether Negroes, Indians, Mustees, Or Molattoes."[25] The depth and complexity of this intermixture are revealed in a 1740 slave code in South Carolina that ruled:

> ...all negroes and Indians, (free Indians in amity with this government, and negroes, mulattoes, and mustezoes, who are now free, excepted) mulattoes or mustezoes who are now, or shall hereafter be in this province, and all their issue and offspring...shall be and they are hereby declared to be, and remain hereafter absolute slaves.[26]

As early as the latter years of the nineteenth century, ethnologists began to note the deep relationship between African Americans and Native Americans. James Mooney in 1897 noted: "It is not commonly known that in all southern colonies Indian slaves were bought and sold and kept in servitude and worked in the fields side by side with negroes up to the time of the revolution... Furthermore, as the coast tribes dwindled they were compelled to associate and intermarry with the negroes until they finally lost their identity and were classified with that race, so that a considerable proportion of the blood

---

[24] Galphintown was named for George Galphin, an Irishman who was a prominent Indian trader in the Mvskoke Nation and Indian Agent for the First Continental Congress.Galphin extensively utilized African Americans as scouts, translators and laborers in his trade with the Five Nations of the Southeastern United States. Galphin at one point or another in his life had a number of African American and Native American wives and a number of his children were of mixed blood. For further information, see J. Leitch Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986); James Melvin Washington, *Frustrated Fellowship, the Black Baptist Quest for Social Power* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1986); Joel W. Martin*, Sacred Revolt: the Muskogees' Struggle for a New World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991); Angie Debo, *The Road to Disapearance* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941); William R. Denslow, *Freemasonry and the American Indian* (St Louis: Missouri Lodge of Research, 1956).

[25] "Wills and Miscellaneous Records," South Carolina Department of Archives and History, quoted in Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974), 99.

[26] John Curdman Hurd, *The Law of Freedom and Bondage in the United States* (Boston, 1858-1862, Vol. 1), 303.

of the southern negroes is unquestionably Indian."[27] In his 1937 doctoral dissertation, James Hugo Johnston asserted, "The end of Indian slavery came with the final absorption of the blood of the Indian by the more numerous Negro slave. But the blood of the Indian did not become extinct in the slave states, for it continued to flow in the veins of the Negro."[28]

These slaves presented a unique challenge to religious and ecclesiastical authorities as well as to the rulers of "Christian" states. In 1660, Charles II urged the Council for Foreign Plantations to take upon the task of bringing these various slaves to Christianity:

> And you are to consider how such of the Natives or such as are purchased by you from other parts to be servants or slaves may best be invited to the Christian Faith, and be made capable of being baptized thereunto, it being honor to the crowne and of the Protestant Religion that all persons in any of our Dominions shall be taught the Knowledge of God, and be made acquainted with the misteries of Salvation.[29]

The governors of the colonies were instructed to bring their slaves to Christianity: Governor Dongan of New York was instructed in 1686, "You are alsoe with the assistance of Our Council to find out the best means to facilitate and encourage the Conversion of Negros and Indians to the Christian Religion."[30] A similar communication by the governor to the council of Maryland in 1698 urged the council to pay heed to his orders regarding the conversion of blacks and indians.

In 1680 Morgan Godwyn, an Anglican rector from York County, Virginia, published a treatise entitled *The Negro's and Indians Advocate* in which he decried the

---

[27] James Mooney, "Myths of the Cherokees" (Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), 233.
[28] James Hugo Johnston, *Race Relations in Virginia and Miscegenation in the South* 1776-1860 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 171-2.
[29] Marcus Jernegan, "Slavery and Conversion in the American Colonies," American Historical Review, Vol. 21, No. 3 (April 1916), 508.
[30] Ibid.

unconverted status of slaves and rebuked those who held them in such status. In the dedication of the book, he lamented "for those Myriads of hungry and distressed Souls abroad….our Peoples Slaves and Vassals, but from whom the bread of life is most sacrilegiously detained."[31] Indicative of their pagan idolatry was their incessant dancing:

> ….nothing is more barbarous and contrary to Christianity than their…Idolatrous Dances; and Revels; in which they usually spend their Sunday…And here that I may not be thought too rashly to impute Idolatry to their Dances, my conjecture is raised upon this ground…for that they use their dances to procure rain.[32]

Godwyn's plea did not fall upon deaf ears. In 1689, Reverend James Blair, the newly appointed commissary for Virginia, exhorted the House of Burgesses to act upon a proposition "for the encouragement of the Christian Education of our Negro and Indian Children."[33] Rev. Thomas Bray of Maryland put forward a plan for a missionary society dedicated to work "amongst the Poorer sort of people, as also amongst the Blacks and Native Indians."[34]

That plan would become the Society of the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. In 1701, the S.P.G. was founded as the missionary arm of the Church of England to minister to the colonists of America and to instruct the Indians and Negroes. The Society published tracts and sermons, sent out missionaries and catechists, and even ran a plantation in Barbados with over 300 slaves.[35] Records from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in South Carolina repeatedly mention the membership of its early missions and churches as being equally mixed with "negro and indian slaves." The records also state that the S.P.G. had no qualms about baptizing "the heathen slaves also

---

[31] Morgan Godwyn, The Negro's and Indians Advocate
[32] Ibid.
[33] Jernegan, 508.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Raboteau, 115.

(Indians and negroes)."[36] However, many of their owners had some problems with that thought, "If the masters were but good Christians themselves and would concure with the Ministers, we should have good hopes of the conversion and salvation at least of some of their Negro and Indian slaves. But too many of them rather oppose than concure with us and are angry with us." [37]

One of the missionaries of the S.P.G. was Francis LeJau, missionary to Goose Creek, South Carolina a small parish just outside of Charleston. LeJau worked among the "Negro and Indian slaves" and attempted to stress religious instruction:

> Since it has pleased Almighty God to bless me with health I have upon Sundays after our divine service, invited the Negro and Indian slaves to stay for half and hour…we begin and end our particular assembly with the Collect Prevent us O Lord etc. I teach them the Creed, the Lord's prayer, and the Commandments. I explain some portion of the catechism. I give them entire liberty to ask questions. I endeavor to proportion my answers and all my instructions to their want and capacity. [38]

However, LeJau ran into problems with the owners of the slaves who resisted his efforts and showed little confidence "in their want and capacity," "Many Masters cant be persuaded that Negroes and Indians are otherwise than Beasts, and use them such," but "I endeavor to let them know better things."[39]

The needs for persons such as LeJau were great according to colonial authorities. In 1701, the report on South Carolina stated that "more than one-half of the 7,000 colonists (to say nothing of the negroes and Indians) were themselves living regardless of any religion." [40] In 1724, Hugh Jones reported that North Carolina needed missionaries "not only for the conversion of the Indians and Baptisms of the Negroes there, but for the

---

[36] Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, *Classified Digest of the Records of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts 1701-1892* (London: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1893), 12.
[37] Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 16-17.
[38] Le Jau to the Secretary of the S.P.G., June 13, 1710, *The Carolina Chronicle of Francis Le Jau, 1706-1717,* edited by Frank Klingberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), 76.
[39] Le Jau to the Secretary of the S.P.G., March 22, 1708, *The Carolina Chronicle*, 55.
[40] Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 30.

Christening and Recovery to the Practical Profession of the Gospel great Numbers of the English."[41] In the same year, the colony of Virginia put forward a "Proposition for Encouraging the Christian Education of Indians, Negroes, and Mulatto Children:"

> It being the duty of Christianity…to endeavor the good instruction and Education of their Heathen Slaves in the Christian faith, the said duty being likewise earnestly recommended by his Majesty's Instructions for the facilitating thereof amongst the young slaves that are born among us…It is therefore humbly proposed that every Indian, negro, or mulatto child that shall be baptised and afterwards brought to the church and publicly catechised by the minister and in the church before the 14th year of his or her age, shall give a distinct account of the Creed, Lord's Prayer and Ten Commandments and whose master or mistress shall receive a certificate from the minister that he or she hath done so, such Indian, negro, or mullato child shall be exempted from paying all levies until the age of 18 years.[42]

In Lousiana, logistical issues of transportation as well as the general impropriety of the residents led to minimal success for the Indian and Negro mission that had been established in 1722 by the Capuchins; there were hardly enough missionaries to care for the French let alone the Indians and Negroes.[43]

In the middle of the eighteenth century, a peculiar missionary set forth from Charleston to work among the Indians of the Southeastern United States; his name was John Marrant and he was a free black converted by evangelist George Whitfield. Though it hadn't necessarily occurred upon him to attempt to convert the Indians to Christianity, when threatened with death by the Cherokee, he began to pray and "the Lord appeared most lovely and glorious; the king himself was awakened, and the others set at liberty. A great change took place among the people; the King's house became God's house." [44] The Cherokee adopted Marrant and for the next three months, he worked as a missionary among the Cherokee, Mvskoke, Catawba, and Housa so that "the multitudes of hard

---

[41] Hugh Jones quoted in Edgard LeGare Pennington, *Thomas Bray's Associates and the Their Work among the Negroes,* (Worcester, MA: The American Antiquarian Society, 1939), 32.
[42] William S. Perry, ed., *Historical Collections Relating to the American Colonial Church,* (Hartford, CT, n.p.: 1870), V. 1, 344.
[43] Raboteau, 113.
[44] John Marrant, *A Narrative of the Life of John Marrant, of New York, in North America With [an] account of the conversion of the king of the Cherokees and his daughter* (London: C.J. Farncombe, n.d), 18.

tongues and of strange speech may learn the language of Canaan, and sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb."[45] Marrant was, as Arthur Schomburg correctly notes, "A Negro in America [like] the Jesuits of old, who spread the seed of Christianity among the American Indians before the birth of the American Republic."[46]

Shortly after leaving the Cherokee, John Marrant settled upon another mission. Being a "free carpenter," he contracted to work on a plantation just outside of Charleston. As with the Cherokee, Marrant sought to bring to the slaves on the plantation the word of the holy gospel; however, the mistress of the plantations was less than pleased at Marrant's efforts. Being shocked to find her slaves at prayer, she had her husband round up a posse and raid the prayer meeting. "As the poor creatures came out they caught them, and tied them together with cords," Marrant reported, "till the next morning, when all they caught, men, women, and children, were strip'd naked and tied, their feet to a stake, their hands to the arm of a tree, and so severely flogged that the blood ran from their backs and sides to the floor, to make them promise they would leave off praying."[47] Marrant warned the slaveowners "that the blood of these poor negroes that he had spilt that morning would be required by God at his hands."[48]

Many years later, John Marrant would deliver the sermon for St. John's Day at Prince Hall African Lodge #459 in the city of Boston where he was the Chaplain of the mother lodge of African American Freemasonry. On that day, he beseeched them to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God…let love be without

---

[45] Marrant, 24.
[46] Arthur Schomburg, "Two Negro Missionaries to the American Indians, John Marrant and John Stewart" *The Journal of Negro History 21 (No.* 1, January, 1936): 400.
[47] John Marrant, quoted in John Saillant, "'Wipe Away All Tears from Their Eyes': John Marrant's Theology in the Black Atlantic, 1785-1808" *Journal Of Millennial Studies* Volume I, Issue 2 [online] http://www.mille.org/publications/winter98/saillant.PDF, [December 28, 2001).
[48] ibid.

dissimulation, abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good. These and many other duties are required of us as Christians, every one of which are like so many links of a chain." [49] He spoke strongest his strongest words against those that would "despise their fellow men, as tho' they were not of the same species with themselves, and would in their power deprive them of the blessings and comforts of life which God in his bountiful goodness hath freely given to all his creatures to improve and enjoy. Surely such monsters never came out of the hand of God in such a forlorn condition."[50]

As Marrant was traveling among the Mvskoke Confederation, he may have happened upon another black missionary whose story resembled his own. David George was born of African parents on the plantation in Essex County, Virginia around the year 1742 and attended the "English Church" in Nottoway, Virginia.[51] When his owner became too cruel, David George ran away from his plantation and lived among the Creek and Natchez Indians where he became, according to Michel Sobel, a "well-treated chattel servant." David George eventually left the Creek Nation and settled on the plantation of George Galphin, an Indian Agent for South Carolina (and eventually the Continental Congress), near Silver Bluff, South Carolina. "Galphintown," as it was called, was throughout the eighteenth century a center for trade between the colonists and the Five

---

[49] John Marrant, *A Sermon Preached on the 24th Day of June 1789, Being the Festival of St. John the Baptist, At the Request of the Right Worshipful the Grand Master Prince Hall, and the Rest of the Brethren of the African Lodge of the Honourable Society of Free & Accepted Masons in Boston* (Boston: The Bible & Heart, 1789), [microfilm] Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, N.Y., 5.

[50] Marrant, *A Sermon Preached on the 24th Day of June 1789*,7.

[51] Among the Native Americans of Southeastern Virginia from whence David George fled, there was a very strong Aframerindian community. Thomas Jefferson noted that among the Mattaponies, there was "more negro than Indian blood in them." The Gingaskin, Nottoway, and Pamunkeys were often asserted to be more Black than Indian. [Porter, *Relations,* 314]. In a later period, many of the Powhatans were suspected of being in league with Nat Turner and supporting his runaways following the insurrection of 1831. John Swanton reports that the Powhatans "were driven away in 1831 during the excitement occasioned by the slave rising under Nat Turner." [John Swanton*, The Indians of the Southeastern United States*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1946), 175] Many of the Powhatan Indians served the Union forces of the Civil War during guerilla activities in Southeastern Virginia. [Lawrence Hauptmann, *Between Two Fires: American Indians in the Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 66-73].

Nations of the Southeastern United States; the traffic in both slaves and deer brought large numbers of Africans and Indians to his plantation.[52]

In their study entitled *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya studied the history of the black church in the United States. In their work, they made the following notation, "The oldest church in the study was the Silver Bluff Baptist Church of Beech Island, South Carolina, which on its cornerstone claimed a founding date of 1750. It is generally regarded as the first known black church."[53] In *Slave Religion,* the author makes the following assertion: "The distinction of being the first separate black church in the South (and North), however, belonged to the Baptist church founded between 1773 and 1775 in Silver Bluff, S.C. across the Savannah River from Georgia. The importance of the Silver Bluff Church lies not only in its chronological priority but in its role as mother church of several far-flung Baptist missions."[54] Silver Bluff Baptist Church was organized and pastored by David George.

When the British threatened the Galphin plantation, Pastor Jesse Galphin fled across the river from Silver Bluff to Augusta where he and some forty-eight other members of the Silver Bluff Baptist Church formed First African Baptist Church.[55] Among the first ministers of the First African Baptist Church of Savannah was a former slave by the name of Henry Francis, a minister ordained at Silver Bluff Baptist Church. Though a slave and considered a "black pastor" of the Third African Baptist Church,

---

[52] Edward Freeman, *The Epoch of Negro Baptists and The Foreign Missions Boards [National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc] (*Kansas City: The National Seminary Press, 1953), 29.
[53] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1990), 102.
[54] Albert Raboteau, 139.
[55] Sobel, 189; James Melvin Washington, *Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press), 10; Raboteau, 139.

Henry Francis had no known African ancestry. Andrew Bryan, pioneer Black Baptist, spoke of the importance of Henry Francis to his church:

> Henry Francis, lately a slave to the widow of the late Colonel Leroy Hammond, of Augusta, has been purchased by a few humane gentlemen of this place, and liberated to exercise the handsome ministerial gifts he possesses amongst us, and teach our youth to read and write. He is a strong man about forty-nine years of age, whose mother was white and whose father was an Indian. His wife and only son are slaves. Brother Francis has been in the ministry fifteen years, and will soon receive ordination, and will probably become the pastor of a branch of my large church...it will take the rank and title of the 3rd Baptist Church of Savannah.[56]

Thus, we have to we see that throughout the South whenever slaves gathered to worship within the folds of the "invisible institution" that there was indeed a much more diverse and multicultural constitution to "slave religion" than that which is often expressed within the historical record. We can no longer refer solely to the slave's "African past" or their "neo-African worldview" as a collective expression for the totality of the slave experience. Native Americans made their contribution both to the social world of the slave and to the psyche of the African-American; our neatly categorized and empirical constructions of the slave community must be reframed and refocused to reflect the impact of indian slavery upon the "peculiar institution."

If I may, I would like to take a few moments to at least plant some seeds for thought if not to provide an impetus for further research. There are certain elements of "slave religion" perceived to be essential components of African American culture and that lay the foundations for the liturgical practices of the black church. Among these are the brush harbor, the "ring-shout" or "danced religion," baptism by immersion, the rhythmic chant of antiphonic ("call and response") singing, and conjuring. Now, before

---

[56] Letter of Andrew Bryan to Reverend Doctor Rippon in Milton Sernett, ed., *Afro-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 49.

anybody gets all upset with me, I am talking about the possibilities of cultural interaction and religious syncretism and not that blacks or indians copied one another's practices.

Perhaps the quintessential component of the "invisible institution" was the brush arbor, or "hush harbor," in which plantation slaves would "steal away" to practice their religion and to hear the gospel from his or her own mouths and with their own interpretation. The "hush harbors" or brush arbors, which were hastily constructed "churches" made of a lean-to of tree limbs and branches, had been a prominent part of the Southeastern traditional religion. The brush arbor architecture that became a critical part of the "camp-meetings" of the religious revivals of the Second Great Awakening was borrowed from the architecture of the "stomp ground" of Southeastern traditional religious practices.[57] By the nineteenth century as slavery had spread even among the formerly enslaved Indians, Native American slave owners supported the invisible institution: "Master Frank wasn't no Christian but he would help build brush arbors fer us to have church under and we sho would have big meetings I'll tell you."[58]

With respect to the "ring shout" or "running sperichils," folklorists John and Alan Lomax described the common ingredients:

> (1)the song is "danced" with the whole body, with hands, feet, belly, and hips; (2) the worship is, basically, a dancing and singing phenomenon (3) the dancers always move counterclockwise around the ring (4) the song has the leader-chorus form with the focus upon rhythm rather than melody, that is, with a form that invites and ultimately enforces cooperative group activity (5)the song continues to be repeated from sometimes more than an hour...[59]

Listen to this description of the "stomp dance" from the Mvskoke tradition:

---

[57] J. Daniel Pezzoni, "Brush Arbors In The American South" *Pioneer America Society Transactions* (1997) 20: 25-34.

[58] Kiziah Love in Works Progress Administration: Oklahoma Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932).

[59] John Lomax and Alan Lomax, *Folk Song U.S.A.* (New York: Duell, Sloan, & Pierce, 1947), 335.

> At the beginning of the dance male and female line up facing each other – male and female – and chant the iyabi, the call to the one great spirit Ibofanga. Then male and female, though different, unite together equally to honor the spirit and energize the community in the first dance which is the friendship dance in which everyone holds hands and circles the fire in an unbroken chain without a beginning or end. The dance path is counterclockwise, paralleling the Sun's journey from east to west. A person points to the rising sun with the right hand while facing north, also moving counterclockwise.[60]

Setting aside the controversy regarding Melville Herskovits' contention that baptism by immersion was an African retention linked to water cults in Nigeria and Dahomey, we have to acknowledge that baptism by immersion was a critical aspect of "slave religion." A black slave from Georgia remembered his mother's baptism:

> When I got to be a big boy, my Ma got religion at de camp meeting at El_Bethel. She shouted and sang for three days, going all over the plantation and de neighboring ones, inviting her friends to come see her baptized and shouting and praying for dem. She went around to all de people dat she had done wrong and begged dere forgiveness. She sent for dem dat had wronged her, and told dem dat she was born again and a new woman, and dat she would forgive dem.[61]

In the Green Corn festival of Southeastern traditional religion, we see a very similar practice. The Green Corn Ceremony was a ritual of propitiation that featured the ritual cleansing of the community by getting rid of all old and useless things, including grievances and feuds that were to be forgiven and settled. All of these old and useless things, "they cast together in one common heap, and consume it with fire."[62] There followed three days of fasting and then a ritual baptism:

> In this manner, the procession moves along, singing Aleluiah to YO He WaH, &c, till they get to the water, which is generally contiguous, when the Archi magus jumps into it and all the holy train follow him...Having purified themselves, or washed away their sins, they come out with joyful hearts, believing themselves out of the reach of temporal evil, for their past vicious conduct; and they return in the same religious cheerful manner, into the middle of the holy ground, where having made a few circles, singing and dancing round the altar, they thus finish their annual great festival, and depart in joy and peace.[63]

---

[60] Jean Chaudhuri and Joyotpaul Chaudhuri, *A Sacred Path: The Way of the Muskogee Creeks,* (Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2001), 54.

[61] Isaiah Jeffries in Works Progress Administration: Georgia Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932).

[62] William Bartram, *The Travels of William Bartram*, edited with commentary and an annotated index by Francis Harper. Naturalist's ed. Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1998, 323.

[63] Adair, 117. In 1828, Baptists missionary Evan Jones witnessed a similar process:

Though the drums that were so much a part of African traditional religion were by and large limited in their use by the vicissitudes of the slave experience, the rhythmic nature of their singing was not:

> The colored people have a peculiar music of their own, which is largely a process of rhythm, rather than written music. Their music is largely, or was….a sort of rhythmical chant. It had to do largely with religion and the words adopted to their quaint melodies were largely of a religious nature.[64]

For the musically trained, it was difficult to even convey the music of the slave's religion:

> It is difficult to express the entire character of these negro ballads by mere musical notes and signs. The odd turns made in the throat, and the curious rhythmic effect produced by single voices chiming in at different irregular intervals, seem as impossible to place on the score as the singing of birds or the tones of an Aeolian harp.[65]

Again, we find a similar style within the Mvskoke Nation of the American Southeast:

> The deep seated musical sounds of Creek singing were developed in the town square so that all in the square could hear every syllable and every tone. Contemporary communal church singing by Christian Creeks exhibit incredibly deep tones that seem to come from the center of the earth. The foundation of that deep singing goes beyond the normal style of the Anglo Baptist and Methodist singing and is rooted in the communal singing styles of the *talwas*.[66]

James Adair describes

> Went to a Town Meeting for the early Spring Ablutions. The Adoneeskee, or priest, allowed me to accompany them, but when we came near the water, he directed me to take another path, and coming to the place a stool was set down with a deerskin on it and some beads on the skin. The Adoneeskee, or priest, muttered something which nobody could hear for about 20 minutes, the people standing with their faces towards the water. Then, with great solemnity, he walked into the water and scattered the sacred beads into the stream in all directions. The women then commenced plunging their children into the water; those who were large enough plunged in themselves. The men went a little distance and dipped themselves and the women went to a separate place and did likewise. This done all retired to the home of the Adoneeskee and after listening to a long speech from the old man, commenced eating cold venison which was prepared for the occasion.

Evan Jones, Journals, February 29, 1828, "Correspondence of Missionaries to Native Americans, [microform], 1825-1865," American Baptist Historical Society, Rochester, N.Y.

[64] Robert Anderson, *From Slavery to Affluence: Memoirs of Robert Anderson, Ex-slave*, edited by Daisy Anderson Leonard (Steamboat Springs, Colorado: The Steamboat Pilot, 1927), 24.

[65] William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, Lucy McKim Garrison, eds. *Slave Songs of the United States*, Published 1867 (New York: Peter Smith, 1951), xxi.

[66] Chaudhuri, 89.

> He begins to dance around the holy fire by invoking YAH after the usual manner, on a bass key, and with a short accent….then HE in like manner, and WAH WAH….Then the awful drums join the sacred choir, which incite the old female singers to chant forth their pious notes….What with the manly strong voices on the one, and the shrill voices on the other, in concert with the bead shells, and the two sounding, drum like earthen vessels, with the voices of the musicians who beat them, the reputed holy ground echoes with the praises of Yo HE WAH. [67]

I would like to conclude this essay by jumping forward from the colonial period a couple of hundred years and delve into the ex-slave narratives from the from the Federal Writer's Project of the Works Progress Administration to try to accentuate my point about the nature of slave religion. These narratives consist of some twenty-two hundred interviews conducted in the mid-nineteen thirties with former slaves from some seventeen southern and border States. In a survey of these narratives conducted for her article "African and Cherokee by Choice," historian Laura Lovett determined that of the 2,193 narratives, nearly twelve percent of the narratives contained some reference to the interviewee being related to or descended from a Native American.[68] Though many of the interviewees were elderly and their memory of those times had faded, their reflections were often vividly prosaic and bore testimony to multiethnic nature of slave society.

Here are the stories of just a few of these ex-slaves:

> He also stated that his father was a full-blooded Indian who was sold to his master by Joe Crews, the biggest slave trader in the country. His father was stolen somewhere in Mississippi, along with other Indians, and sold into slavery with the "niggers." [69]

> My grandparents were Gillespie's. My grandma was an Indian woman. She was stolen off the reservation-her and her daughter. The daughter was about twelve years old and big enough to wait table. Both of them were full-blooded Cherokee Indians.... When they were stolen, they were made slaves.... [70]

---

[67] Adair, 102.

[68] Laura Lovett, "African and Cherokee by Choice," *American Indian Quarterly* Vol. 22 (Winter/Spring 1988): 205.

[69] Interview with George Patterson in Works Progress Administration: South Carolina Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932).

[70] Interview with J.N. Gillespie in Works Progress Administration: Arkansas Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932). J.N. Gillespie was of Cherokee heritage.

> De nigger stealers done stole me and my mammy out'n de Choctaw Nation, up in de Indian Territory, when I was 'bout three years old. De nigger stealers drive up in a big carriage and mammy jus' thought nothin', Den de man haller, 'Git de ole one and let's git from here.' With dat de two big men grab mammy and she fought and screeched and bit and cry, but dey hit her on de head with something and drug her in, and threwed her on de floor…. Down in Leuisan us was put on what dey call de 'block' and sol' to de highes' bidder…[71]

> My mammy was owned by John Williams in Petersburg, in Virginia, and I come born to her on dat plantation. Den my father set 'bout to git me free, 'cause he a full-blooded Indian and done some big favor for a big man high up in de courts, and he gits me set free, and den Marster Williams laughs and calls me 'free boy.' Then, one day along come a Friday and that a unlucky star day and I playin' round de house and Marster Williams come up and say, 'Delia, will you 'low Jim walk down de street with me?' My mammy say, 'All right, Jim, you be a good boy,' and dat de las' time I ever heared her speak, or ever see her. We walks down whar de houses grows close together and pretty soon comes to de slave market. I ain't seed it 'fore, but when Marster Williams says, 'Git up on de block,' I got a funny feelin', and I knows what has happened. [72]

In these ex-slave narratives, they vividly describe their religious practices:

> In this early day the Choctaws had what they called the Indian Ball Games. These were pretty rough to play and a man had to be a mighty good man or he could not get in on this ball game. In many cases one county would play another and of course they had what they called their best men in their team and on many occasions these best men would get out on the field and have a great fight over the game and of course the man that gave the other a whipping was considered the greatest man. I was an Indian doctor when I was grown and when an Indian would get sick he would send for me. I would always go and see the sick Indian, if this sick Indian was a real sick fellow. The Choctaw tribe in those days called their sick spells after some of the animals that roamed the woods and some of the fowls.[73]

> When de big battle come at our place at Honey Springs dey jest git through having de green corn "busk." De green corn was just ripened enough to eat. It must of been along in July. Dat busk was jest a little busk. Dey wasn't enough men around to have a good one. But I seen lots of big ones. Ones whar dey had all de different kinds of "banga." Dey call all de dances some kind of banga. De chicken dance is de "Tolosabanga", and de "Istifanibanga" is de one whar dey make lak dey is skeletons and raw heads coming to git you. De "Hadjobanga" is de crazy dance, and dat is a funny one. Dey all dance crazy and make up funny songs to go wid de dance. Everybody think up funny songs to sing and everybody whoop and laugh all de time. Sometime de bad ones leave and go to de woods, too! Dem Upper Creek took de marrying kind of light anyways. Iffen de younguns wanted to be man and wife and de old ones didn't care dey jest went ahead and dat was about all, 'cepting some presents maybe.[74]

---

[71] Interview with Spence Johnson, Works Progress Administration: Texas Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932). Spence Johnson was of Choctaw heritage.

[72] Interview with James Green, Works Progress Administration: Texas Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932).

[73] Interview with Jack Campbell, Works Progress Administration: Oklahoma Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932).

[74] Interview with Lucinda Davis, Works Progress Administration: Oklahoma Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932). Lucinda Davis was of Mvskokean/ African heritage.

Masta would say, "Now Git ready to Jump de Broom." De Old Masta would hold de broom. Dey would hold hands and jump dis way and den back again. Den Old Masta would say: "You is Married." Dat de way the cullud folks got married but de Indians was different, and dis is de way dey done:
"De Chief would marry dem. He was always standing, and dey would stand before him and hold hands. The Chief would say:
"He is black; she is yaller;
Made out of beeswax, and no taller,
Salute your bride, you ugly feller!" (or devil)
Dat was how my mother say de Indians married when she was a little girl in Tennessee. When my mother got to thinking about her folks sometime, she'd sit down and sing: "Swing Low Sweet Chariot, Comin' to Carry Me Back Home." Den we'd all gether round her cause we'd know she was thinkin' bout her folks back dere. She would cry and we would all cry together.[75]

[75] Interview with Chaney Mack in Works Progress Administration: Oklahoma Writers Project, *Slave Narratives* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932). Chaney Mack was of African/Choctaw heritage.