

“Black Religion in the Atlantic World during the Age of Revolution: Excavating the Sublime”

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I. Introduction

In some ways this topic “Black Religion in the Atlantic World during the Age of Revolution: Excavating the Sublime” grows out of my effort to understand how to situate the black presence within the grand scheme of things called “modernity.” In *The Geographic Imagination of Modernity: Geography, Literature, and Philosophy in German Romanticism*, Chenxi Tang points out that every society is undergirded by a spatial order-- I would add, a temporal order as well. Relying upon the work of Carl Schmitt he writes:

From the sixteenth to the end of the nineteenth century...the world as a whole was predicated upon the *jus publicum Europaeum*, a Europe-centered spatial order with two prominent features: the distinction between Europe and the rest of the world, which Europe regarded as a vast free space up for grabs; and the division of the soil of Europe into sovereign territorial states...the geographic imagination was essentially a European imagination, asserting discursive authority over the earth in parallel to the asymmetrical power relations between Europe and the rest of the planet...“It is no exaggeration,” as Carl Schmitt argued, “to claim that all spheres of life, all forms of existence, all kinds of the human creative power, art, science, and technology had their share in the new concept of space” that underlay this asymmetrical spatial differentiation of humanity. [Tang, pp. 14-15]

Aesthetics is a part of this imagination of space. Although no full history of aesthetics has been written, according to Ashfield and de Bolla, “modern scholarship has elevated the eighteenth-century tradition of the sublime to the principle event in this long history...it fell upon this period ...to articulate the complexities of affective experience...in the context of an emerging new understanding of the construction of the subject.” They go on to state: This tradition of the sublime was a part of multiple discursive networks that amounted to “a redrawing of the map upon which we chart our senses of self” (*The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-century Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 1-2). The eighteenth-century falls within the Age of Revolution which takes place largely within the Atlantic World. The black presence and black religion are integral components of this world. They are a party of the Atlantic World's political economy signified in eighteenth century theorization of the sublime. As Europeans expanded into the rest of the world their encounter with the non-European Other's religions, cultures, and physiognomies, challenged the stability of their own sense of normativity within an imagined order shorn of a religious framework. The West's theorists groped at finding new determinants for the good, the true and the beautiful upon which individual ethical behavior and political existence could be adjudicated. However, the glaring contradiction between the West's universal ideals and the

particularity of its global encounters frustrated all theorizing efforts and created the basic disjuncture in its aesthetic which is articulated in terms of the sublime. In this lecture I am, therefore, talking about the colonial and racial sublime whose key characteristic is **TERROR**. Why should there be an aesthetic of terror during the Age of Revolution? What terrifies us during this era? Before we consult such immanent authorities as Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, and Frederick Hegel allow me to present the testimony of an African American former slave.

In 1910, Mary White Ovington (1865-1951), a white woman and one of the founders of the NAACP, traveled to Alabama where she interviewed an elderly African American woman who had lived through the brutality of slavery in that state. In the interview, the woman related the story of being sold as a child away from her family on a plantation in North Carolina to a new owner in Alabama, unrelenting daily toil, constant physical abuse by her mistress and regular sexual abuse by her master from which a number of children ensued. The story was so horrendous that Ovington asked her if she had ever considered running away. The African American woman replied:

“I was afraid, Miss. Heaps o’ folks ‘ud tell me to run away, but I was ‘fraid I’d be caught by de dogs an’ den dey’d about kill me. I saw a boy bro’t back once. Dey put a piece o’ iron in his mouth dat run back o’ his head. He couldn’t eat or speak or spit. Den dey works him in de field till he mos’ dead. No. I didn’t run away. I was too ‘fraid. I was ‘fraid all de time. An when I was free’d I was afraid, too. Didn’t do to say you was free. When de war was over if a nigger say he was free, dey shot him down. I didn’t say anything...”

“Granny,” I said, “how did you bear it all, how did you live?”

“I couldn’t ‘er done it, dear, widout Master Jesus. He held me up. I’d’er died long ago without him.” [Blassingame, pp. 540-41]

Let us juxtapose the constant fear and terror that characterized the life of the former female slave interviewed by Mary Wright Ovington with the terror unleashed on the white community on Southampton, Va. in 1831 by Nat Turner which was clearly inspired by the numerous mystical visions he experienced through his meditation on the biblical text ‘Seek ye the kingdom of God and all else will be granted unto you.’ And let us add to this image a passage from a speech delivered in 1843 at the National Convention of Colored Citizens by the African American Presbyterian minister, Henry Highland Garnet, who had escaped from slavery with his family as a young boy. Garnet framed his argument theologically at the beginning of his speech by stating that “liberty is a spirit sent by God.” At the end of the speech he admonished:

Rather die freemen than live as slaves. Remember that you are four millions! It is in your power so to torment the God-cursed slaveholders that they will be glad to let you go free. If the scale were turned, and black men were the masters and white men the slaves, every destructive agent and element would be employed to lay the oppressor low. Danger would hang over their heads day and night. Yes, the tyrants would meet with plagues more terrible than those of Pharaoh...let your motto be

resistance! Resistance! RESISTANCE! No oppressed people ever secured their liberty without resistance.

Garnet speech, “An Address to the slaves of the United States of America,” was delivered in Buffalo, NY where none of those he was directly addressing would have heard him. But in examining the spirituals sung on plantations, there is warrant for our assuming that his addressed articulated a religious undercurrent beneath the fear and terror of slave life such as ‘Go Down Moses,” and “O Freedom,” etc.

Most of the people in attendance at the convention in 1843 were former slaves. One was Frederick Douglass. In 1852, he was invited to give a speech at an Independence Day celebration in Rochester, NY in which he queried:

Fellow citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here today? What have I, or those I represent, have to do with your national independence? Have the great principles of political freedom and natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? ...Fellow citizens, above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions! Whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are today, rendered all the more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them. If I do forget, if I do not faithfully remember those bleeding children of sorrow this day, ‘May my right hand forget her cunning, and may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth!’ ...I shall see this day and its popular characteristics from the slave’s point of view. [Foner, pp. 188-9]

The question before us is whether it is possible to view the sublime from the slave’s point of view? From the point of view of the African American slave or former slave referred to as “Grannie”— who was beaten by her mistress and rapped by her master with impunity. Notice the theme of terror in collage of slave and former slave testimonies I have invoked. There is the terror of brutality imposed upon the slave mind and body by the slave master and there is the terror that is visited upon the master through God’s judgment that was sometimes acted out in rebellion and there is an implied terror lurking in the consciousness of whites over the ever present danger of black reprisal. This still very much characterizes the structure of American social psychology. In the words of Langston Hughes: “I am the rock upon which freedom stubbed its toe...the great mistake Jamestown made long ago.”

II. The Triangular Trade & the Demographics of Slavery

[illustration: map of triangular Trade]

[illustration: demographics chart]

[Illustration: painting: “The Ambassadors”]

From its onset, the Atlantic World was one wherein all the major players appreciated the importance Africa as the supplier of the labor necessary for the profitability of their colonies. For

example: In 1645 George Downing stated that Negroes were the “life” of the Caribbean. The Company of Royal Adventures concurred when it stated to Charles II in 1663 that the “very being” of the plantations depended upon the supply of Negroes. On August 26, 1670, Louis XIV of France said unambiguously: “There is nothing which contributes more to the development of the colonies and the cultivation of its soil than the laborious toil of Negroes.” In 1685 the Spanish Council of the Indies stated that without Negroes the food needed for support of the Spanish kingdom would cease being produced. [Williams, p. 136] It is interesting that when Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, Savoy, and the Dutch Republic gathered in 1714 at Utrecht to negotiate the treaty that would end the war of Spanish Succession one of the principles that guided those sessions was the concept of a “balance of power.” The issues decided through these negotiations were not only the ceding of certain colonies to the various parties, the redrawing of boundaries within Europe, and the reciprocal renunciation of claims to the thrones of Spain and France, respectively, by the royalties of France and Spain but, also, trade with the Spanish colonies. France had been granted the contract or *asiento* to import 48, 000 slaves per year into the Spanish colonies. Britain’s victory in the war meant that it now received the *asiento* and, in Britain, this was one of the most popular aspects of the treaty of Utrecht. [W. p. 91-2]. Despite Edmund Burk’s observation that Europeans experience a natural and inherent abhorrence upon their encounter of people with black skin; everyone wanted Negroes. They were in very high demand. The British, French, Dutch (Dutch West India Company), Sweeds (Guinea Company), Danes (Danish West India Company) and Brandenburg (Brandenburg African Company) were all involved with forts along the West African coast. No one could get enough Negroes! Slaves were referred to as “black ivory” and “a piece of the Indies.” They were purchased by the ton. In 1676 Spain contracted with Portugal to supply 10, 000 tons of slaves and stipulated that three Negroes was equivalent to one ton. [W. p. 139]

Approximately 15-20 million Africans were transported to various parts of the Americas beginning in the sixteenth century and extending into the nineteenth century. Approximately 40 percent of the total went to Latin America [primarily Brazil]; 45 percent went to the Caribbean; and approximately 5 percent went to North America [the US]. —**“up to the middle of the nineteenth century, three times as many people had arrived in the Americas from Africa as from Europe”**.² It is hard for us to imagine this is North America or the US because it received only 4.5 percent of the total number or about 275, 000 in the eighteenth century. Approximately 9.5 million or 42 percent of the Africans brought to the Americas wound up in the Caribbean. South America received 49 percent of this population [Norton, p 34]. At the time of American Independence the percentage of African slaves to the white population was at about 85 percent in the British and French Caribbean and about 35 percent in the American South but only about 3 percent in the northern states (Cany, p.228). Slave labor was employed on sugar, tobacco, coffee, tobacco, rice, and cotton plantations.

The profitability of slave labor is evident in Hobsbawm’s assessment the importance of cotton to the Industrial Revolution. He wrote: “Colonial trade had created the cotton industry, and continued to nourish it...The plantations of the West Indies, where the bulk of the slaves were taken provided the bulk of the raw cotton for the British industry” (p.34). Those familiar with Atlantic World scholarship

² Jose C. Moya, ‘Modernization, Modernity, and the Transformation of the Atlantic World in the Nineteenth Century,’ in *The Atlantic in Global History*, edited by Jorge Canizares-Esguerra, p. 180.

might now be thinking of the Trinidadian scholar Eric Williams' book *Capitalism and Slavery* wherein he posited the thesis that profits accrued to the British Empire from slavery provided the necessary capital investments for the infrastructure that made the Industrial Revolution possible. Hobsbawm does not reference Williams' thesis but is in line with his general argument when he writes: "The traditional view which has seen the history of the British Industrial Revolution primarily in terms of cotton is thus correct" (p.37). "Cotton therefore provided prospects sufficiently astronomical to tempt private entrepreneurs into the adventure of industrial revolution, and an expansion sufficiently sudden to require it." (p. 35-36).

The profitability of the commodities slaves grew meant they could literally be worked to death and replaced after seven years or so. Their mortality rate was astounding. The Caribbean received 5 million African slaves from the beginning of the slave trade up until 1886 when it was abolished in Puerto Rico. But by that time the total African or black population was only 2.2 million. Let us take the example of Jamaica which had received 600, 000 African slaves in the eighteenth century but had an African or black population of only 350, 000 in 1838 when slavery was abolished. Saint-Dominique received over 8000, 000 African slaves in the eighteenth century but had a black population of only 480, 000 on the eve of the Haitian Revolution in 1790. [Harris, p. 766] Sir Eric Williams calculated that "for every additional slave in its population Jamaica had to import three." And he also calculated that during their importation—on the Middle passage "three out of every ten slaves perished." And thus he commented sadly: "Economic development has never been purchased at so high a price...the slave trade thus represented a wear and tear, a depreciation which no other trade equaled" (Williams, p. 139, 146-7). These statistics speak to the horror of the slave's existence and the locus of the sublime during the Age of Revolution.³

The story of the "triangular trade" is not only about blacks being exchanged but also about blacks engaged in exchanges. The blacks who participated in these exchanges enjoyed the status of being what was called "freed blacks." They had obtained their freedom through self-purchase, manumission or escape. Some were sailors. Blacks comprised about 18 percent of all sailors on Anglo-American ships by 1803. They were responsible for the first six autobiographies written by blacks in English. The first voyage account published by an African American was Briton Hammon's, *Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man—Servant to General Winslow, of Marshfield in New England*. In 1747, he obtained permission from his master to hire himself as a sailor bound for Jamaica with most of his salary going to his master. Hammon's narrative recounts his twelve-year odyssey to every part of the Atlantic World during which he was to experience "shipwreck, Indian captivity in Florida, imprisonment and enslavement in Cuba...Royal Navy service ...during the Seven Years War...dock work in London, and a near voyage to Africa as a cook aboard a slaver" (Bolster, p. 9). As exemplars and conduits of information about pertinent events in the broader Atlantic World, these sailors played an integral part in defining and articulating the aspirations of an

³ Notwithstanding what we can infer from such data, we need to remember the observation one eminent scholar made: "regardless of academic discipline or methodological approach, few observers, present or past, have been able to answer the fundamental and clearly horrific, question of what it was like to live one's life as a slave...no one except a slave, of any race or sex regardless of sensitivity or empathy, could possibly answer this query" (Bergad, p. 64).

emergent diasporic African identity that was in flux. Among his Indian captors, Hammon referred to himself as “civilized;” on board a slave ship, he referred to himself as a “free seaman on wages” or a “Briton;” in Cuba he referred to himself as a “slave” seeking escape; and back in New England he described himself as a “Negro Man.”[Bolster, p. 35] In *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail*, W. Jeffrey Bolster asked us to imagine a map of the Caribbean in which there are lines that connect ports in Africa, the Americas and Europe which describes not only the route of commodities but the route of black sailors.

Instead of charting an exchange of commodities, we have mapped currents of black people in motion carrying and exchanging ideas, information, and style. If mercantilists’ cartographic vision of the “triangular trade” speaks to one aspect of eighteenth-century maritime activity, this dynamic graphic of black seafaring speaks to the evolution of diasporic consciousness and blacks’ cultural hybridity, and so to the spread of blacks’ news—subversive and otherwise (p. 21).

To appreciate the dynamism of the “black Atlantic” we need to remember that freed black were migrating all over the Atlantic. Thousands of black loyalist migrated to both Nova Scotia and London after Britain was defeated in the War of Independence. The joined the British during the conflict because they were promised freedom for doing so. Later several thousand black Maroons were deported to Nova Scotia from Jamaica. Some black loyalists from the US migrated to Jamaica among which was George Lisle who founded one of the early black Baptist congregations in South Carolina and then in Jamaica. This initiated an independent black church tradition on the island that resulted in a major rebellion called the Baptist Wars which was pivotal in Britain’s abolition of slavery. The petition of Blacks from Nova Scotia to be repatriated to Africa was integral in the founding of Sierra Leon. Similarly, black missionaries from both the US and Jamaica were prominent in the founding of Liberia. Thousands of Haitian blacks wound up in Louisiana when their masters fled that island during the Haitian Revolution. One of Haiti’s Presidents settled several thousand free blacks in a town in the Dominican Republic during the period when Haiti controlled the whole island. Simon Bolivar took refuge in Haiti after initial defeat during the wars for Latin American Independence. He was re-provisioned with arms and a printing press after promising to end slavery if he was victorious. The involvement of black in that struggle is complicated but well documented. We also have documentation of Hausas returning to Nigeria from Brazil and operating as middle men in the trans-Atlantic trade.

Let us focus on one very mobile black in particular. His name is Oludah Equiano.

In his autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of Oludah Equiano or Gustavas Vassa, the African Written by Himself* published in 1789 he provides us with a description of the bodily sensations of the voyage as these relate very directly to our discussion of the sublime:

[illustration: Portrait of Equiano]

The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time, and some of us had been permitted

to stay on the deck for the fresh air; but now that the whole ship's cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died, thus falling victims to the improvident avarice, as I may call it, of their purchasers. This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable.

One day, when we had a smooth sea and moderate wind, two of my wearied countrymen who were chained together (I was near them at the time), preferring death to such a life of misery, somehow made through the nettings and jumped into the sea: immediately another quite dejected fellow, who, on account of his illness, was suffered to be out of irons, also followed their example; and I believe many more would very soon have done the same if they had not been prevented by the ship's crew, who were instantly alarmed. Those of us that were the most active were in a moment put down under the deck, and there was such a noise and confusion amongst the people of the ship as I never heard before, to stop her, and get the boat out to go after the slaves. However two of the wretches were drowned, but they got the other, and afterwards flogged him unmercifully for thus attempting to prefer death to slavery. In this manner we continued to undergo more hardships than I can now relate, hardships which are inseparable from this accursed trade. Many a time we were near suffocation from the want of fresh air, which we were often without for whole days together. This, and the stench of the necessary tubs, carried off many.

III. The Sublime

Equiano's narrative fits the aesthetic category Edmund Burke called the *sublime*.

But what is the *sublime*?

At the very beginning of this Age of Revolution, 1756 to be exact, Edmund Burke-- a staunch apologist for British colonization and empire—published *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful*. In the following year Burk and his cousin William also published, in two volumes, *An Account of the European Settlement in America*. He, therefore, was intimately acquainted with slavery, the slave trade and its connection with profitability of Britain's Caribbean colonies. He did not invent the notion of the sublime. It had been around since antiquity. But Burk elaborated in great detail upon the various conditions that provoke an aesthetic experience of the sublime in a subject.

Most people think of aesthetics as having to do with what we judge to be beautiful in nature and art. But, according to Burk, if what we encounter through the senses produces the sensation of

pleasure in the subject, it is judged to be beautiful. This conforms to our common sense recollection of what happens when we perceive something as beautiful. But Burk also observed that the experience of something un-pleasurable can also be the source of pleasure and produce a sensation in the subject of beauty. He sought to account for this oddity in his enquiry. According to Burk, *terror* is the basic passion that produces the sublime and terror arises ultimately out of our fear of death. We imagine death to result if we are unable to escape the thing provoking terror in us. And he enumerates different things in nature that produce terror and various kinds of sublime. When encountering something *tremendous* the subject may experience *astonishment* “which is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of *horror*” (II.I.). The *obscure* is another source of the sublime. This is what intensifies the terrible because if the subject is able to fully comprehend the magnitude of the object of terror, it becomes somewhat abated (II.III). *Power* was another source. Milton was Burk’s main exemplar of an artist whose poetry evoked the sublime—especially his portrayal of Death and Satan in *Paradise Lost* (pp. 102-3). In Milton’s depictions of Death and Satan we have images of obscurity, immensity, and power combined in such a way as to evoke astonishment and terror in the reader. “His description of death,” says Burk, “...is astonishing with what a gloomy pomp, with what a significant and expressive uncertainty of strokes and coloring he has finished the portrait of the king of terrors...In this description, all is dark, uncertain, confused, terrible, and sublime to the last degree” (p. 103).

[illustration: Goya’s painting, “The Giant,” 1808-12]

Burk wrote, “I know of nothing sublime that is not some modification of power...and this branch rises as naturally as the other two branches, from terror, the common stock of everything that is sublime” (II.IV). Having considered *terror* as producing an unnatural tension and certain violent emotions of the nerves; it easily follows...that whatever is fitted to produce such a tension, must be productive of a passion similar to terror, and consequently must be the source of the sublime...But if the sublime is built on terror, or some passion like it, which has pain for its object; it is previously proper to enquire how any species of delight can be derived from a cause so apparently contrary to it. I say *delight* Burk’s description of how color and the lack of color—darkness—produces the sublime is clearly another instance where we see circumstances connected with slavery and colonialism refracted in his aesthetic. *pleasure* (IV.V.). *Distance* is a factor that enables the subject to derive delight from the sublime. The subject, in other words, derives delight from the sublime, when the subject encounters it at a safe distance. A number of artists and their patrons drew inspiration from Burk in shaping their aesthetic practices and sensibilities—such artists as: Wright, Fuseli, Barry, Mortimer, De Louthenburg, Flaxman, and Blake (p. Boime, p. 215).

[illustration: Fuseli’s painting, “Nightmare,” 1791; Goya’s “Capricho 43, ‘The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters,’ 1797/8]:

Burke also elaborated upon the role of light and darkness in producing the sensation of the sublime. After explaining how *light* by itself cannot produce the sublime, Burke explains that the sudden appearance of light after its absence can produce this experience due to its velocity as with lightning. In discussing darkness he goes about refuting John Locke who was of the opinion that there is nothing inherent in *darkness* or *blackness* to produce the sublime. Locke accounted for the feeling of terror

people have of the dark with the mental association people make between darkness and ghost and goblins. Burk argued that there is something inherent in darkness and blackness to produce this effect and offers as proof the case of a boy who was born blind and remained so until he had cataract surgery at the age of fourteen.

Among many remarkable particulars that attended his first perceptions, and judgments on visual objects, Chesterson tells us, that the first time the boy saw a black object, it gave him great uneasiness; and that sometime after, upon accidentally seeing a negro woman, he was struck at great horror at the sight. The horror, in this case, can scarcely be supposed to arise from any association...there was no time for such a habit; and these is no reason to think, that the ill effects of black on his imagination were more owing to its connection with any disagreeable ideas, than that good effects of more cheerful colors were derived from their connection with pleasing ones. They had both probably their effects from their natural operation (IV.XV).

I suppose the poor “negro woman” whose color assaulted the boy’s ocular senses, as well as all the other blacks residing in London, lived in a constant state of terror and refrained not only from looking in a mirror but, as well, each other’s company. In that account the racial dimension of the sublime in the European psyche is obvious. The African or black is posited by Burk as one of the objects in nature that provokes the sensation of fright in the subject. Even though Burke does not elaborate, it follows that the sublime can be experience—as distinct from beauty--if the subject is situated at a proper distance from this object.

The sublime’s racialization is made more explicit in Immanuel Kant’s essay, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* published in 1764 prior to his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), *Practical Reason* (1788) and, finally, his *Critique of Judgment* (1790) in which he attempts to resolve the impasse created in the first two critiques through aesthetics.⁴ [I learned from Claude Welsch’s *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Centur* (1972) to regard Kant not only as the father of modern philosophy but of modern theology as well via Schleiermacher and the other Romantics.] For Kant, different people had distinct aesthetic dispositions. Since aesthetics was related to ethics, one could discern a people’s ‘mental characteristics...by whatever in them is moral...their different feelings in respect to the sublime and beautiful...’ (pp. 99-100). He observed that the morality of the Italians and French is governed by the beautiful and the morality of the Spanish, English and Germans by the sublime. The Germans have the best balance because while having less feeling for beauty than the French and less feeling for the sublime than the English, “instances where they appear in combination will be more suitable to his feeling, as he will fortunately escape the faults into which excessive strength of either of these sorts of feelings could fall (PP. 98). What about Africans? Kant has more to say about them than Burke.

⁴ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (1991): “The task assigned to *the Critique of Judgment*, as its Introduction makes explicit, is to restore unity to philosophy in the wake of the severe ‘division’ inflicted upon it by the first two *Critiques*” (p. 1).see also: pp 212-13.

The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality...So fundamental is the difference between these two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color. The religion of fetishes so widespread among them is perhaps a sort of idolatry that sinks as deeply into the trifling as appears to be possible to human nature (pp. 110-11).⁵

Hegel was in disagreement with much of Kant's philosophy but when it came to the Negroes of Africa they were of one accord. We can conclude that Hegel would not have regarded them as having anything to teach him about the sublime from this quote from his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*.

It must be said in general that, in the interior of Africa, the consciousness of the inhabitants has not yet reached an awareness of any substantial and objective existence. Under the heading of substantial objectivity, we must include God, the eternal, justice, nature, and all natural things. When the spirit enters into relations with substantial things such as these, it knows that it is dependent upon them; but it realizes at the same time that it is a value in itself...But the Africans have not yet attained this recognition of the universal; their nature is compressed within itself; and what we call religion, the state, that exists in and for itself and possesses absolute validity—all this is not yet present to them...

The characteristic feature of the Negroes is that their consciousness has not yet reached an awareness of any substantial objectivity...The African, in his undifferentiated and concentrated unity, has not yet succeeded in making this distinction between himself as an individual and his essential universality, so that he knows nothing of an absolute being which is other and higher than his own self. Thus, man as we find him in Africa has not progressed beyond his immediate existence. As soon as man emerges as a human being, he stands in opposition to nature and it is this alone which makes him a human being...

Thus, in Africa as a whole, we encounter what has been called the *state of innocence*, in which man supposedly lives in unity with God and nature. For in this state, man is as yet unconscious of himself [Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (1822-8)] [Eze, pp. 128-9]

⁵ Kant's lectures on physical geography were not edited and published during his lifetime. In one essay he wrote: "The tallest and most beautiful people on dry land are on the parallel and the degrees which run through Germany...In the northern parts of Mongolia, Kashmir, Georgia, Mingrelien, and the Circassien as far as the British-American colonies" [Eze, p. 38]

So according to Kant and Hegel,--for different reasons--I should not even be discussing the sublime in relation to Africans and blacks since their religion and their feelings never rise above the trifling. He mentions the slave trade when talking about the “hundreds of thousands transported elsewhere from their countries” without evidencing any ability to empathize the sublime in their experience. Since they are incapable of experiencing or creating anything of beauty or sublime, they are also incapable of feeling, morality or moral indignation over their enslavement. Can be dismiss as trifling the feelings of Oladuah Equiano whom we encountered earlier? **[illustration: Portrait of Equiano]**

The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast, was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror, when I was carried on board. I was immediately handled, and tossed up to see if I were sound, by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions, too, differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke (which was very different from any I had ever heard), united to confirm me in this belief. Indeed, such were the horrors of my views and fears at the moment, that, if ten thousand worlds had been my own, I would have freely parted with them all to have exchanged my condition with that of the meanest slave in my own country. When I looked round the ship too, and saw a large furnace of copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted. ..

[illustration; painting of William Turner’s “slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying; Typhoon Coming On” or “The Slave Ship”, 1840]

Six years prior to the publication of Equiano’s autobiography another African publicized his terrifying account of his experience upon a slave ship on March 19, 1783. He approached the famous British Abolitionist, Granville Sharp, with his story of what transpired on the Zong when it became lost in route to Jamaica. The ship was low on food and water and sixty slaves and seven crew members had expired from an epidemic. There was not enough food and water to sustain the remaining some one hundred and thirty some odd slaves and the crew. Many more slaves were likely to die before the ship reached its destination and those that survived would have been in such ill condition that their value would have been greatly depreciated. The captain decided, therefore, the expedient thing to do was to throw the slaves overboard so as to redeem their value from the ship’s insurer. If the slaves were thrown overboard to protect the ship’s safety the insurer would have to pay for the loss; otherwise the owner would have had to incur the cost. The crew thus began casting the slaves overboard in three groups. The last group realizing its fate resisted but most were overpowered and thrown over anyway. Then who broke free tossed themselves into the ocean. There was only one slave who survived. He managed to grab hold of a rope hanging from back of the ship and pull himself back onboard. It was he who related these events to Granville Sharp. Thomas Foxwell Buxton published an account of this incident in *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (1839/40). The publicizing of such horrors and

another slave uprising in Jamaica in 1833 contributed to Buxton's being able to get Parliament to abolish slavery throughout the British colonies in 1833. [Boime, pp. 67-68]

So by the time Turner exhibited his painting in 1840, slavery had already been abolished and was not the most contested issue in Britain. The issue that now came to the forefront was labor—more particularly organized labor. Certain Abolitionists such as Wilberforce opposed organized labor. He approved suspension of the habeus corpus in 1818 and supported the Suspension Bill. Although many Abolitionists could not see any similarity between the condition of the slave and the working class in their own society, it did not go unnoticed by Frederick Engels who pointed it out in his *Conditions of the Working Class in England* four years after Turner exhibited his painting. Turner's painting was not really about the slave trade.

[illustration: painting of William Turner, "Rain, Steel & Speed" 1844]

Albert Boime recommends we view Turner's *Slave Ship* with at least two of his other paintings—*Snow Storm—Steamboat off a Harbour's Mouth* and *Rain, Storm and Speed—The Great Western Railway*. He wrote: "Turner's blazing sunset, like the motif of *The Fighting Temeraire*, is meant to symbolize the passing of an outmoded institution in the context of the new industrialized state. The *Slave Ship* belongs to the period of Turner's close examination of industrialization that included such productions as *Snow Storm—Steamboat off a Harbour's Mouth* and *rain, Storm and Speed—The Great Western Railway*. Thus Turner could afford to attack the institution then receding in the distance for British commerce; but rather than point out the abuses still perpetuated in the West Indian colonies, Turner focused on an incident that had occurred in the previous century and was familiar to all. As a result, his image reduced to melodrama the tragic circumstances of the Zong and allowed the theme to be almost totally lost amid the artifices of pigment (Boime, pp. 69-70). [my emphasis]"

IV. *Black Religion, Adaptation, Resistance & rebellion in the Atlantic World*

[illustration of Trans-saharan routes, in Gen. Hist of Af. Vol. 5, p. 302]

Organized rebellion against oppressive systems by social groups in Africa and its Diaspora seeking freedom from dehumanization and exploitation did not depend upon inspiration from the American Revolution or French Revolution. Rebellions against slavery occurred on the African continent itself, and this is well documented--on board those ships along the route of the Middle Passage, and all over the Americas from New York throughout the Caribbean to Peru. And black religions played a significant role in all these rebellions not only in terms of the fact that they were lead by religious leaders but, more importantly, they were inspired by a religious conceptualization of freedom and the source of freedom. We are all familiar with the Spiritual "O Freedom" which exclaims: 'And before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave and go home to my Lord and be free."

Prior to European contact with West Africa, its exchanges with the outside world occurred through trans-Sahara trade routes originating in both Timbuktu the controlled Kanem and terminating in Marakesh, Fez, Cueta, and Cairo. The religions of Africa—Indigenous religions, Christianity, and Islam—have always been implicated in its economic exchanges.

Islam first entered Senegambia as it did in the Sudan through Muslim traders who were marginal elements in the broader culture. They were, however, important in the courts of the Sudanic states in providing linkages to the networks that connected them to the wealthy Islamic cities of Cairo, Fez, etc. The literacy of Muslim scholars was very beneficial to the necessities of statecraft. Kanem and Bornu's rulers converted to Islam in the eleventh century. The Almoravid movement also brought Islam into contact with Ghana and Songhai in 1076 and 1083, respectively. Mali's rulers had converted to Islam certainly by the 13th century. Beginning in the late eighteenth century there was a mass conversion of the peasant population to Islam. Aristocratic Muslims, however, did not necessarily implement policies that benefited their peasant co-religionist. Islam, in other words, did not erase the basic class stratifications in Senegambian societies. Indeed, it was tempting for those who had armies to put them in use in the procurement of slaves and in exacting tribute in the name of Islam. But when the marginalized segment of the population became Islamized they also were able to use its principles on their own behalf. D'jihad leaders were able to appeal to the grievances of this segment through Islam. For example, in 1830 "the blacksmith, Diile of Kayor, became head of the Muslim opposition to the aristocracy...he conquered the whole country in the name of an equalitarian Islam..."⁶ Shaykh Ahmadu proclaimed during his d'jihad: "All you *machube* [slaves] who came to me today are liberated. All the *machube* will find paradise with me."⁷ He made this appeal at Sebera—a region that was heavily populated with slaves and other caste groups—against the Bambara and Dikko aristocracy. What this statement or appeal indicates is that d'jihads can be understood not only as an effort to reform and spread Islam in Senegambia but, also, as protests against the effect of the Atlantic slave trade which was to intensify the severity and increase the incidence slavery in Senegambia. These two objectives were not mutually exclusive but complimentary. What is common of many of the d'jihads is the social inequality that instigated them. The enormous pool of slaves that had existed in the Western Sudan increased greatly on the eve of the *d'jihad* as a result of the availability of firearms, and the dramatic expansion in the export of slaves to the European merchants on the coast. The aristocracy in the region preyed on peasants and pastoralists, and on Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The fear of loss of freedom, and the violence that accompanied slave-raiding drove scores of would-be victims to seek refuge with the *shaykhs*. Muslim and non-Muslim slaves likewise sought redemption by joining the *djihad* and becoming members of a new society. Consequently, slaves constituted a considerable proportion of the *mudjahidun* and the flock of students and initiates that had gathered around the reformers.⁸

Thus, it was the development of domestic slavery, closely correlated with the Atlantic slave trade that was a major feature of the evolution of the societies of Senegambia during the eighteenth century. The concentration of slaves into *runde* in Futa Jallon and in the Southern Rivers was on such a scale that at the end of the eighteenth century there were a series of slave revolts.⁹ This is the context of the mystical visions that instigated West African Islamic leaders to conduct *d'jihads*.

⁶ Person, p. 639.

⁷ Batran, p. 549.

⁸ Batran, A. "The Nineteenth-Century Islamic revolutions in West Africa," *UNESCO General History of Africa*, volume VI, P. 549

⁹ Barry, *UNESCO General History of Africa*, volume V p. 294.

In 1794 Shiek Uthman da Fodio had the following vision ten years before he actually conducted his d'jihad:

When I reached forty years...God drew me to Him, and I found the Lord of djinns and men, our Lord Muhammad...with him were the Companions, and the prophets, and the saints. Then they welcomed me, and sat me down in their midst. Then ...our Lord Abdal-kadir al-Djilani brought a green robe...and a turban...sat me down and clothed me and enturbaned me. Then he addressed me as "imam of the saints" and ...girded me with the Sword of truth to unsheathe against the enemies of God.

Al-Hadjdj Umar reported his mystical vision as follows:

Previously I had only been authorized by Muhammad and shaykh al-Tidjani to summon the unbelievers to Islam and to guide them down the correct path...then I was instructed to execute the *d'jihad*...I received this permission through a Divine voice which said to me: "You are now permitted to conduct *d'ijhad*. [September 6, 1852][Batan, p. 540]

In 1849 Al-Hadjdj Umar was joined by the *Hubbu rassul allah* or Those who Love God. They were members of the Qadira school who had turned against the Fulani aristocracy and then joined the Tijaniya school led by al-Hadjdj Umar. They were comprised of the marginal elements of the Fulani that had not benefited from the property redistribution that occurred when the Fulani- came to power and established their theocracies. The Hubbu were also comprised of Jallonke serfs and recently imported slaves. The movement was suppressed by not defeated. "The rebels took refuge in the outlying areas, in the coastal zone or towards the upper Niger...Despite their small number they attracted marginal elements from all quarters and created in their fortress, Boketto, an atmosphere of feverish mysticism."¹⁰

These West African d'jihads were occurring around the same time [1835] as their New World counterparts—African born Hausa Muslim slaves, known as "Males", were leading a rebellion in Bahia, Brazil [Bergad, p. 230]and Nat Turner was leading the insurrection his visions inspired in Southampton County, Virginia.

Monica Schuler has shown in a very important study that African born slaves were much more likely to rebel against enslavement than American born slaves; specific ethnic groups dominated slave rebellions in different parts of the Caribbean and South America; and the religious practices of these ethnic groups were significant in their rebellions. The Fon and neighboring groups were prominent in at the beginning of the Haitian Revolution. We already pointed out that the Hausa were prominent in a number of rebellions in Bahia and surrounding areas. The Bantu-speaking group was prominent in rebellions on the island of Montserrat and second in prominence in Berbice after the Akan. The most rebellious group in rebellions ranging from the Virgin Islands to Suriname were the Akan. According to Schuler; "The role of the obeah man in the Akan slave rebellions...is very like the role of the priests and

¹⁰ Person, p. 648.

magicians in Ashanti military campaigns...The priests (esamankwafa)...accompanied the soldiers on their military campaigns and provided them with protective charms and amulets...Oaths were administered by these priests at the outset of war." [Schuler, pp. 373-4; 378]

In Central West Africa we encounter something similar but the leader of the movement is a woman and Christian. A prophetess arose in the *Ki-Kongo* Kingdom in 1704 named Dona Beatrice Kimpa Vita who claimed to have been possessed by Jesus' disciple Anthony who spoke through her. Hence her followers were also known as Antonians. She started her movement in the wake of civil war which rent the Kongo Kingdom into several entities and forced the nobility to flee the sacred capital city of Mbanza Kongo between 1666 and 1678. Without a center to hold its political and social life together, the Kongo Kingdom disintegrated. She was of noble stock in a society that had been Christianized since the early-sixteenth century and was comprised of three classes: nobles, commoners, and slaves. Slaves were divided into those who were saleable and domestic slaves attached to noble houses. Christianity spread from the nobility to the rest of the populace and was influenced by the Traditional African Religion of the Kongo as much as it influenced it in turn. Dona Beatrice was probably a medium who channeled African spirits before she became possessed by St. Anthony and led her Antonian movement. In 1704 Dona Beatrice preached a far-reaching reform...She called for thorough Africanization. As she claimed to be in direct contact with heaven she was regarded as a *munaki* (prophetess). The Holy Family was black and hailed from Mbanza Kongo, and the symbols she used were evocative local symbols associated with water, the soil and local vegetation and were similar to those used, in particular, in the healing cults led by women (Vansina, p. 573).

The adoption of Christianity as the official state cult by the Ki-Kongo kingdom prior to the slave trade becoming full blown means there were slave who exposed and even converted to Christianity prior to arrival in the Americas. The case of Dona Beatrice also indicates that religious syncretism was already underway before Africans arrived in the Americas and that it was well suited to the aspirations for freedom by enslaved Africans. The records of the Inquisition trials conducted in Mexico document the confession of a female slave who maintained a shrine where she invoked the goddess of the sea, a number of saints, the Virgin Mary and Jesus. [Thornton, p.?] Shrines were an important aspect of African indigenous religion and they were found in numerous communities that escaped slaves established in remote areas of South America, the Caribbean, and even in the US—called maroon communities. A group in Africa that has been compared with the Maroons is the Sereer.

The Seerer (included are the Ndut, Noon, Saafen, Joobas) was one group which sought to insulate itself from being victimized by the slave trade. Searing, while noting important differences, nevertheless compares the Seerer's survival strategy to that of maroon societies in the Americas. The history of one Sereer settlement is instructive. According to this history: "The traditions recounting the foundation of the village of Bandia insist less on the ethnic origins of the original migrants than on their discovery of a land of refuge where they could settle independently of any political authority and regulate their own affairs." As early as 1455 Cadamosto had observed the Sereer and described their resistance to Wolof rule and hatred of slavery as founding principles in their society. "These people have no king or lords," wrote Cadamosto, "but they honor some people more than others, according to their qualities and conditions. They do not want any seigneur among them, because they do not want their

wives and their children to be taken away from them and sold as slaves, as is done by the kings and seigneurs in all the other countries of the blacks.” They defined themselves in terms of their opposition to Wolof rule and Islamization which they accomplished through their own cult that served as the center of their religious and political life whose head was the *barroom-xerem*—master, owner of the sanctuary. *Xerem* was the sanctuary located in the center of the village. There “testimonies were heard and judgments rendered.” And there the *barroom-xerem* performed the daily rituals that brought about the village’s protection by the spirits that were invoked.¹¹ The Sereer’s religious rituals functioned to protect them from capture and enslavement and maintain the boundary between themselves and the Muslim Wolof people who sought their capture and/or conversion. There were religious objects proliferating all over West Africa—*bocci*—that served this function and their stylization had much to do with their purpose.

In 1680 an Anglican clergy person, Godwyn, sought to impress upon his denomination the need to proselytize African slaves in Barbados and Virginia by describing the heathen religious and recreational practices they had carried with them from Africa such as: the “confidence” they put “in certain Figures and ugly Representations of none knows what besides themselves” and their “idolatrour dances and revels in which they usually spend their Sunday after the necessity of labor for their provisions...has been complied with.” [Fry, 47-8]

These ugly figures are the subject of Harvard University Art professor, Suzanne Preston Blier’s book, *African Vodun: Art, Psychology, and Power* (1995). She contrasts the aesthetic ideals of refinement and elegance seen in royal sculpture with that seen in the sculpture of commoners when she observes that “commoner works emphasize counteraesthetic, even antiaesthetic values and features of ugliness.” This aesthetic is not the result of lack of ability and taste on the part of both artist and client. These kinds of statues, according to Blier, “constitute in essence the aesthetic of choice of the subaltern groups living in this area—the rural residents, non-royals, and those generally suffering from the effects of disempowerment” (p. 30). In the Fon language, several qualities were associated with the negation of the aesthetic of beauty; messiness and when this quality was represented in a statue it can be seen “to compliment the confusion and disorder that defined many of their user’s lives.” Another quality associated with this antiaesthetic among the Fon is “force” and “strength” and distinct from say “grace” and “refinement.” These statues were supposed to embody this quality “to counter danger and difficulties that lie in life’s path.”

The selection of bocio materials for their physical and metaphoric strength and the emphasis in these works on knotting and tying suggests in turn the strength (*sien*) which these objects are intended to express through their forms and functioning. The prominent use of raffia cord, with its characteristic solidity and resistant, is significant too, for comparable strength is essential to bocio roles in turning away danger and discord from their various owners...Seeing these and related visual properties within sculptural form no doubt gave local viewers a sense of assurance and security in the

¹¹ Searing, James F. “No Kings, No Lords, No Slaves’: Ethnicity and Religion among the Sereer-Safen of Western Bawol, 1700-1914, *The Journal of African History*, vol. 43, No. 3 (2002), pp. 418-19.

face of various difficulties. Through emphasizing aesthetics of shock which in various ways privilege conflict, contradiction, chaos, obscurity, mystery, and brute force, these works convey energy of considerable potency (p. 31).

[illustration of statues; 1] in West Africa; 2) in Black Jewish cemetery in South America]

V. Black is Beautiful and Ugly Too

In the 1960s during the height of the Black Power Movement one also saw posters and graffiti stating “Black is Beautiful.” James Brown came out with a song that exclaimed audaciously, “Say it loud: I’m black and I’m proud.” Today with the likes of Bionce and Denzel serving as the exemplars of female and male beauty, some will wonder why it was necessary to make such assertions. Unless you grew up seeing advertisements in Jet and Ebony for skin whitening creams, it is difficult for some to imagine long and relentless struggle involved in getting black people to value and appreciate their own color and physical features. The struggle for black political empowerment of necessity required a parallel struggle on the aesthetic front because view of Burk regarding blackness being the source of aesthetic discomfort was pervasive in Western culture. The Black Consciousness Movement or Black is Beautiful Movement started at least as far back as the Harlem Renaissance when Langston Hughes would essay ‘The Negro and the racial Mountain’ in which advised black artists: “:We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn’t matter. We know we are beautiful and ugly too.”

What Kant failed to consider was that an aesthetic overcoming of the dichotomy between the phenomenal and noumenal realms so as to establish a ground for ethical action was not the only crisis philosophy needed to address in the West. What he failed to consider was that his pretensions of universalism were contradicted by his relegation of black’s feelings—and therefore aesthetic sensibilities, and therefore the capacity for ethical judgment and behavior—as never rising above the trifling. Hence, the inability to emphatically feel what enslaved blacks were feeling as they underwent the worst conditions associated with the sublime sealed them outside and beyond the knowability of the Enlightenment into the realm of the noumenal. Ralph Ellison would call it “invisibility.” Charles H. Long would say: blacks and other enslaved and colonized people became the “emperial Other.” By ontologizing the sublime in the black object, they failed to understand the historical conditioning that predetermined their perception and aesthetic response toward the black subject/object which, in turn, conditioned their ethical response. Indeed, the confidence Kant and Hegel placed in the West as representing the highest stage of cultural evolution meant its duty to non-Europeans was one of up-lift. The rest of humankind would relate to the West through emulation. The enigma of the sublime was never seen as something that implicated the role of slavery and colonialism in the birth of modernity and would require the West to relate inter-subjectively with its internal and external Others. What I want to suggest—ala Freud- is that sublime is historical and represents, in the West, “the return of the repressed.” Let us say the re/oppressed since those who are repressed in the dominant collective psyche are the oppressed. Those who can keep at a safe enough distance people and communities they

experience as sublime must come to appreciate their complicity in creating its conditions of historical actuality and contemporary possibility. At that moment what will terrify is not what lies external to the West—but as Fuseli, Goya, and others hinted at, what lies unexamined and unexcavated in its very structure. At that moment the person ensconced within the Western “episteme” in experiencing herself as the object of the enslaved/colonized gaze will see and understand differently.

We get a glimpse of the possibilities in some confessions of early modernists European artists such as Picasso and Françoise Gilot. In 1937, Picasso shared with André Malraux the influence African Art had on his work:

Everybody always talks about the influences that the Negroes had on me. What can I do? We all of us loved fetishes. Van Gogh once said, ‘Japanese art—we all had that in common.’ For us it’s the Negroes.... When I went to the old Trocadero, it was disgusting. The Flea Market. The smell. I was alone. I wanted to get away. But [didn’t leave. I stayed. I stayed. I understood that it was very important: something was happening to me, right? The masks weren’t just like any other pieces of sculpture. Not at all. They were magic things... The Negro pieces were intercesseurs, mediators.... I always looked at fetishes. I understood; I too am against everything. I too believe that everything is unknown, that everything is an enemy! Everything! Not the details—women, children, babies, tobacco, playing—the whole of it! I understood what the Negroes use their sculptures for Why sculpt like that and not some other way? After all, they weren’t Cubists! Since Cubism didn’t exist. It was clear that some guys had invented the models, and others had imitated them, right? Isn’t that what we call tradition? But all the fetishes were used for the same thing. They were weapons. To help people avoid coming under the influence of spirits again, to help them become independent. Spirits, the unconscious (people still weren’t talking about that very much), emotion—they’re all the same thing. I understood why I was a painter. All alone in that awful museum, with masks, dolls made by the redskins, dusty manikins. *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* must have come to me that very day, but not at all because of the forms; because it was my first exorcism painting—yes absolutely.

Françoise Gilot made the following confession about the impact of African Art on his own work.

When I became interested, forty years ago, in Negro art and I made what they refer to as the Negro Period in my painting, it was because at the time I was against what was called beauty in the museum. At that time, for most people a Negro mask was an ethnographic object. When I went for the first time, at Derain’s urging, to the Trocadero museum, the smell of dampness and rot there stuck in my throat. It depressed me so much [wanted to get out fast, but I stayed and studied. Men had made those masks and

other objects for a sacred purpose, a magic purpose, as a kind of mediation between themselves and the unknown hostile forces that surround them, in order to overcome their fear and horror by giving it a form and image. At that moment I realized what painting was all about. Painting isn't an aesthetic operation; it's a form of magic designed to be a mediator between this strange, hostile world and us, a way of seizing the power by giving form to our terrors as well as our desires. When I came to that realization, I knew I had found my way. Then people began looking at those objects in terms of aesthetics.

In my opinion, the theological disciplines have yet to allow black religion to shape the form and content of its consciousness in this way. Rather, black religion is, for the most part, kept at a safe distance regardless of the phenotype of the scholar.

Appendies.

- I. The topic of this lecture is motivated by my frustration with the continued marginalization of the phenomenon of black religion from theoretical discussions about modernity and post-modernity. And there is the broader problem of how knowledge is organized in the various theological disciplines, at the GTU and elsewhere, so as to distance phenomena that should be contemplated as a part of the same temporal/spatial gestalt. When I initially embarked upon my teaching career, I had the goal of creating and including course offerings pertaining to black religion in the theological curriculum and developed such elective courses as The African Diaspora; Black Church History; African American Social, Political Thought, etc. and organized the Black Church/Africana Studies Certificate Program with the assistance of other GTU African American faculty. I also teach the required course on Christianity in the Modern Period at SFTS which I endeavor to situate within the broader context of Modern World History. Mastering and integrating all the data that is accumulating from specialized studies is impossible for even a team of scholars, let alone a single scholar of my modest abilities. It is possible, however, to posit a framework for conceptualizing how various events crystallized into the structures, epistemological categories, subjectivities, and aesthetic sensibilities we associate with modernity. Over the years, it has become more and more apparent that the material I cover in my African Diaspora course and that covered in the course on Christianity in the Modern Period are inextricable related and situated within a broader context called modernity whose ligaments are: slavery, colonialism, the Enlightenment, Romanticism and the Revolutions about which more will be said. **In North America there was The War of Independence in the mid-eighteenth century and the Civil War in the mid-nineteenth century; in Europe there was the French Revolution; in Haiti there was the Haitian Revolution; in Latin America there were the wars of Latin American Independence; in West Africa there were the Nineteenth Century Islamic D'ijahads. In Europe the artistic movements that defined this period and expressed its sensibilities were: Neoclassicism and Romanticism.**

II. Temporal/Spatial Framework of the Atlantic World

For the purposes of my lecture the Age of Revolution in the Atlantic World begins in the mid-eighteenth century and extends into the late nineteenth century—let us say: 1760-1888. That last date is the year the last slaves were legally manumitted in Brazil. The revolutions that took place during this period pertained not only to philosophy and politics but occurred, as well, in geography and the way space was conceptualized. In *The Geographic Imagination of Modernity: Geography, Literature, and Philosophy in German Romanticism*, Chenxi Tang points out that every society is undergirded by a spatial order. Relying upon the work of Carl Schmitt he writes:

From the sixteenth to the end of the nineteenth century...the world as a whole was predicated upon the *jus publicum Europaeum*, a Europe-centered spatial order with two prominent features: the distinction between Europe and the rest of the world, which Europe regarded as a vast free space up for grabs; and the division of the soil of Europe into sovereign territorial states...the geographic imagination was essentially a European imagination, asserting discursive authority over the earth in parallel to the asymmetrical power relations between Europe and the rest of the planet..."It is no exaggeration," as Carl Schmitt argued, "to claim that all spheres of life, all forms of existence, all kinds of the human creative power, art, science, and technology had their share in the new concept of space" that underlay this asymmetrical spatial differentiation of humanity. [Tang, pp. 14-15]

I need to mention the scholarship that contributes to this discussion. Paul Gilroy looks at black culture as a trans-Atlantic phenomenon created by the slave trade in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). He acknowledges his debt to other black intellectual forbearers. I might cite W. E. B. DuBois' doctoral dissertation, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade* (1889) and his book *The World and Africa* (1946) along with Sir Eric William's *Capitalism & Slavery* (1944) and C.L. R. James' *Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Overture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938) (as suggesting the temporal/spatial framework of this lecture. Later came the publications of white scholars such as R. R. Palmer and Eric Hobsbawm. Palmer published his two volume set, *The Age of Democratic Revolutions, 1760-1800* between 1959 and 1964 and Eric Hobsbawm published his *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848* in 1962. Both works are very important contributions to the field of Atlantic History. Immanuel Wallerstein's *World Systems Theory* (1974) begins chronologically in the Atlantic in describing the non-reciprocal global economic exchanges between societies residing in the core, semi-periphery and periphery. A much more recent treatment was published in 2005 by Bernard Bailyn: *Atlantic History: Concepts and Contours*. In *The Birth of the Modern World; 1780-1914* (2004), C. A. Bayly says: "it is no longer possible to write 'European' or 'American' history in the narrow sense" and argues that "all local, national, or regional histories must, in important ways...be global histories." He sought to describe how the reverberations of critical world events during the Age of Revolution "spread outward and merged with convulsions within other world societies" while at the same time events in these societies "impacted back on the core, molding its ideologies and shaping new social and political conflicts." Palmer sought to provide a conceptual schema that would allow historians to view the data of the American and French Revolutions reciprocally. Hobsbawm treats the British Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution in the same fashion. In both, Europeans are situated as the civilizing epicenter from

which democratic ideas and institutions and economic innovation spread throughout the rest of the Atlantic world and beyond. Hobsbawm places more emphasis on economic than ideational factors in accounting for modernity. He wrote in his preface: "This book traces the transformation of the world between 1789 and 1848 insofar as it was due to what is here called the "dual revolution"—the French Revolution of 1789 and the contemporaneous (British) Industrial Revolution." And he went on to explain: "It is therefore strictly neither a history of Europe nor of the world. Insofar as a country felt the repercussions of the dual revolution in this period, I have attempted to refer to it, though often cursorily. Insofar as the impact of the revolution on it in this period was negligible, I have omitted it." (p. ix.).

Clearly, Hobsbawm's units of analysis are nation states insofar as they felt the repercussions of the French and Industrial Revolutions. We have to wonder, nevertheless, why Haiti received only five or six sentences in his out of his 308 pages since it was the first and only nation state in modernity to have been created through a slave insurrection. Palmer only devotes about two paragraphs in the 1,118 pages of his work to Haiti and none to Latin America because he ends his narrative before those revolutions began. Because freedom is the major trope through which the Age of Revolution is narrated, it behooves us to contemplate those whose presence in this age was predicated upon them not being free.

II.

Thus: Approximately one quarter of a million Africans were imported to the Americas before 1600 with 60 percent of these going to the Spanish possessions and the remainder going to Brazil. Things changed dramatically in the seventh century and continued to escalate into the eighteenth century when the decimation of the native population, demand for sugar, etc. made the whole enterprise involving slave labor profitable. Approximately one and one half million Africans were imported to the New World in the seventeenth century with the majority going to Brazil (41 percent); the Spanish territories received 22 per cent of the imports and the remaining 35 percent was absorbed by the British, Dutch and French colonies. The slave trade grew and became more organized throughout this century with the annual rate of imports rising from 1, 800 during the sixteenth century to over 17, 000 in the seventh century. More than half of all the Africans imported to the Americas arrived in the eighteenth century. Over 31 percent of the Africans imported to the Americas arrived in Brazil or 1.8 million persons. The British owned Caribbean islands received over 23 percent of the African imports or about 1.4 million persons. The sugar producing island of Jamaica received the bulk of these—6000, 000. The French owned Caribbean islands received over 23 percent of the African imports or more than 1.3 million persons with the majority—800, 000 going to Saint-Dominique on the western part of Hispaniola. Spanish America imported less than 10 percent or approximately 6000, 000 of the total persons imported. The majority of this number went to Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the eastern part of Hispaniola, the coastal settlements on the northern coast of South America and Peru through the Rio de la Plata region. The Dutch and Danish colonies received less than 6 percent of African imports or approximately 450, 000 persons. Britain's North American colony which became independent in 1776—the USA—took in almost the same number as the Dutch and Danish colonies—4000, 000 persons. [Curtin, p. 763] The percentage breakdown in terms of the part of West Africa from which the slaves embarked is: almost 25 percent from Senegambia to the Gold coast; over 23 percent from the Bight of Benin; almost 15 percent

from the Bight of Biafra; and almost 38 percent from West Central Africa. [Inikori, p. 105-6]By 1770—**“up to the middle of the nineteenth century, three times as many people had arrived in the Americas from Africa as from Europe”**.¹² It is hard for us to imagine this is North America or the US because it received only 4.5 percent of the total number or about 275, 000 in the eighteenth century. Approximately 9.5 million or 42 percent of the Africans brought to the Americas wound up in the Caribbean. South America received 49 percent of this population [Norton, p 34]At the time of American Independence the percentage of African slaves to the white population was at about 85 percent in the British and French Caribbean and about 35 percent in the American South but only about 3 percent in the northern states (Cany, p.228).

¹² Jose C. Moya, ‘Modernization, Modernity, and the Transformation of the Atlantic World in the Nineteenth Century,’ in *The Atlantic in Global History*, edited by Jorge Canizares-Esguerra, p. 180.