

THE ABENG

A Journal of Transdisciplinary Criticism

VOL. 7 • NO. 1 • 2026

Editor

Vincent L. Wimbush

Associate Editors

Lalruatkima | Rosamond Rodman | Tamara L. Siuda

Editorial Board

James Bielo
Miami University
Ohio

Barbara Holdredge
University of California
Santa Barbara

William Deal
Case Western Reserve University

Rosamond C. Rodman
Perimeter College
Georgia State University

Charlotte Eubanks
Penn State University

S. Michael Saad
Council of Coptic Studies
Claremont Graduate University

Volney P. Gay
Vanderbilt University

Grey Gundaker
College of William and Mary

Yvonne Sherwood
University of Kent (Canterbury)
United Kingdom

Ronne Hartfield
The Art Institute of Chicago

James Sidbury
Rice University

Katrina Van Heest
Tweed Academic Editing

Daymon Smith
Utah Valley University

Jacqueline Hidalgo
University of San Diego

The Abeng Submission Guidelines

Article and essay submissions may address any pertinent problem, topic, practices or phenomena in any historical period, including the contemporary situation. They may focus on any social-cultural complex or domain, including, but also going beyond, “religion.” Any disciplinary or field or transdisciplinary discourse may characterize a submission, as long as it reflects critical engagement of the framing ISS agenda. Please acquaint yourself with our ongoing research agendas prior to submission.

Articles

Word count: 5,000 (approximately)
Abstract: 150 words

Review Essays / Comments / In the News

Word count: 1,000 to 2,000 (approximately)
Abstract: 50-75 words

File Format: Microsoft Word (Times New Roman, 12 point, Left Justified, Double-spaced)

Citations Format: Footnotes

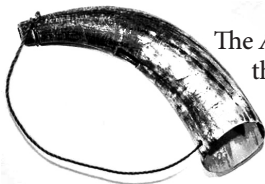
Citations Style: Chicago Manual of Style (18th edition)

Materials must not have been submitted elsewhere.

For all other types of submissions (alternate media formats including audio and video, interviews, etc.) please contact the editor.

Send submissions and inquiries to:
editor@signifyingscriptures.org

Editorial Mailing Address:
Institute for Signifying Scriptures
P.O. Box 2091
Decatur GA 30031



The *Abeng* (A-beng) refers to a kind of animal horn used in the African diaspora to facilitate communication within communities of maroons.

Support ISS

Become a member: <https://signifyingscriptures.org/product/membership/>

Renew your membership: <https://www.signifyingscriptures.org/my-account/>

Donate: <https://signifyingscriptures.org/product/donation/>

Table of Contents

Editorial Foreword: The Site of the Scriptural.....1 <i>Rosamond Rodman</i>	1
Synopsis of the Meeting.....7 <i>Richard Newton</i>	7
Keynote Address <i>Richard Newton</i>	
Decoding Diaspora: Scripturalectics of Resilience12	12
Engagements with Stephen Best's <i>None Like Us</i>37	37
Seminar Remarks on Stephen Best, <i>None Like Us</i> , Part I: "On Thinking Like a Work of Art".....38 <i>Tamara L. Siuda</i>	38
Hogs, Potatoes, and Songs...Oh My!: Home and Holding in the Archive.....49 <i>Rachel E. C. Beckley</i>	49
Student Observations.....66	66
Reflections on Diaspora, Identity, and Public Theology.....67 <i>Naomi Gonzalez</i>	67
Financial Trauma as Spiritual Rupture: Reflections from the Institute for Signifying Scriptures 2026.....71 <i>Ray'Chel Wilson</i>	71
ISS Podcast: "Scriptures Everywhere".....77	77
Save the Dates: ISS in 2028.....78	78

Editorial Foreword: The Site of the Scriptural

Rosamond Rodman

This present volume of *The Abeng* reflects conversations and encounters with sites and exhibits during the 2026 Institute for Signifying Scriptures (ISS) seminar, which marked the culmination of a decade of sustained, in-person inquiry into those madly misunderstood things called “scriptures.” Hosted and directed by Richard Newton, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, seminar participants explored the theme of *diaspora* through several touchpoints: Newton’s multi-modal Decoding Diaspora exhibit on display at the Gorgas House, the oldest building on the University of Alabama campus; site visits and tours across campus and throughout Tuscaloosa; and the chosen reading, Stephen Best’s *None Like Us*.¹ Our shared descriptions and encounters populate the pages that follow, and as you will see, the seminar provoked fascinating observations and reactions. Selected meeting participants have come together in this volume to offer their reflections and ongoing engagement with the seminar’s rich offerings.

Why and how do scriptures and diasporas intersect in the first place? Why would people who think and talk about scriptures be interested in diasporas—that “floating in a most peculiar way,” as Louis Chude-Sokei, quoting David Bowie, puts it—and vice versa?² ISS uses the term *scriptures* deliberately, as a pointed, political, and

1. Stephen Best, *None Like Us: Blackness, Belonging, Aesthetic Life* (Duke University Press, 2018).

2. Louis Chude-Sokei, *Floating in a Most Peculiar Way: A Memoir* (Mariner Books, 2021).

provocative concept for interdisciplinary exploration of performances of power and the politics of meaning. As Wilfred Cantwell Smith has argued, scripture is not a property of texts but of human activity.³ Both Smith's formulation and Vincent Wimbush's more radical extension emphasize that scriptures refer to human efforts to authorize and sustain meaning, often violently or with violent effects. ISS tracks not simply (textual) interpretation but the management of meaning itself: the ongoing production, circulation, and enforcement of authority that organizes social life. *Scripture*, in this sense, names the processes by which meaning is made to dominate and to stick: how authoritative sites come to be stabilized, normalized, and binding.⁴ ISS develops new forms of critical inquiry into ways that scriptural discursive formations shape human life.⁵ *Scripturalizing* refers to the myriad processes by and through which constellations of knowledge, power, and identity are mediated and managed. Crucially, this focus on scriptures and scripturalizing does not center texts, regarding them as the source of meaning. Scriptures can manifest in many ways: in a person or body of people, in places, in divining trays, in border walls, and also in texts. One good example of the expansive

3. Smith argued that scripture is not "a quality inherent in a given text, or type of text so much as an interactive relationship between the text and a community of persons." He continues to centralize/foreground texts, even as he puts forth "a new understanding of scripture...that no text is a scripture in and of itself and as such." Instead, Smith says, "I suggest: scripture is a human activity." Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Fortress Press, 1993), ix and 18. Emphasis his.

4. Wimbush, himself a student of Smith, found this take provocative but limited. To him, Smith's work "seemed little or inconsistently concerned about political issues and power dynamics, especially as they intersected with racial and ethnic identities." Wimbush expands/explodes Smith's "scriptures are a human activity" in two ways: first, by focusing on "the experiences of the historically and persistently subaltern, usually the darker peoples of the world"; second, by focusing well beyond texts to various forms and manifestations that "scriptures" might take, centralizing the focus precisely not on the text, but on the meta-textual: "The text-reading agenda has been and is still locked into the colonial agenda of the politics of meaning as reading difference....The study of the scriptural must be about excavation—of human beings registering discourse and power through whatever media are chosen and made available. So there are no scriptures—except...in terms of isolating, analyzing social relations, the politics of language, discourse and power." Vincent L. Wimbush, "Introduction: TEXTureS, Gestures, Power: Orientation to Radical Excavation," in *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (Rutgers University Press, 2008), 11; and Vincent L. Wimbush, *Scripturalectics: The Management of Meaning* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 154–155. Emphasis mine.

5. "As humans have imbued objects and persons and places, and so forth, with power, spiritual and metaphysical meaning, these have come to function in terms of what can be called 'scriptures.' And the latter can take many different forms..." "Mission Statement," Institute for Signifying Scriptures, accessed June 27, 2026: <https://signifyingscriptures.org/about/>.

way ISS regards scriptures/scripturalizing occurred in the days just before the meeting: an occurrence all the more poignant for the way it resonated with the seminar theme of “diaspora.”

Amid intensifying opposition to the second Trump administration’s approach to immigration, and in the wake of uproar over the deaths of people at the hands of Department of Homeland Security (DHS) patrol agents, the U.S. House of Representatives narrowly passed a funding package that avoided a government shutdown by temporarily funding DHS.⁶ Following the vote, Speaker of the House Mike Johnson fielded questions from reporters, one of whom asked how his support for hardline immigration enforcement squared with Matthew 25:35 (“I was a stranger and you welcomed me”), a passage Pope Leo XIV had recently invoked in a critique of the administration’s deportation policies. Johnson pounced. “So, you want me to give you a theological dissertation? ... Borders and walls are biblical, from the Old Testament to the New.”⁷ He later expanded this claim in a lengthy post on X, insisting again that “BORDERS ARE BIBLICAL,” a claim he supported with a cascade of biblical citations.⁸

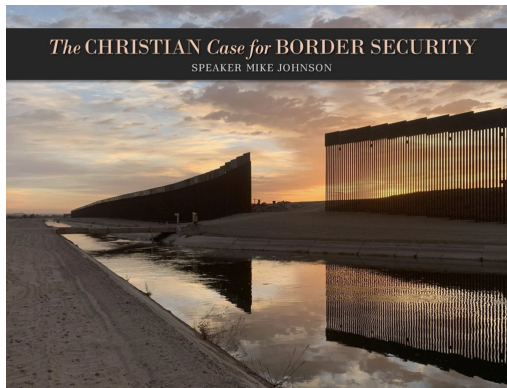


Figure 1.1: an image from Mike Johnson’s post on X.

6. Sam Gringlas, “House votes to end partial government shutdown, setting up contentious talks on ICE,” National Public Radio, February 3, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/02/03/g-s1-108506/house-vote-end-government-shutdown>.

7. Nayana Mena, “Johnson accused of ‘out-Bible-ing the Pope’ as he uses scripture to defend Trump deportations,” Premier Christian News, February 4, 2026, <https://premierchristian.news/us/news/article/mike-johnson-accused-of-out-bible-ing-pope>.

8. <https://x.com/SpeakerJohnson/status/2018777016607060089?lang=en>.

Johnson's feverish proof-texting captures the staged practices that are scripturalizing, and through which, in this case, geopolitical power was prepared and presented. What the Speaker performed was the labor of aligning state power, territorial control, and biblical legitimacy.⁹ His proof-texting smoothed and normalized the convergence of governance, violence, and moral authority. The huffy accumulation of chapter and verse, the ginning up of media coverage, and a prolix X post replete with a photo of *an opening* in the U.S.-Mexico border barrier (Figure 1) projected the image of a humane and biblically informed U.S. immigration policy, never mind that at a spectacular cost, "the U.S.-Mexico barrier stages a sovereign power and control it does not exercise, is built from the fabric of a suspended rule of law and fiscal nonaccountability, [and] has multiplied and intensified criminal industries."¹⁰

The border, not the Bible, is the site of the scriptural. That is, borders reflect a human effort to compose, authorize, prop up, and normalize sites where power and the powerful decide and disguise the regime. The wall, the checkpoint, the detention center: these are operative inscriptions. They are where meaning hardens into policy, into force, into violence. If you are reading the Bible and not the border, then you are reading the wrong thing. Johnson's biblical citations offer only red herrings.

This kind of reoriented reading was on full display as Newton introduced ISS seminar participants to the Decoding Diaspora project, which began with a family scrapbook of clippings he had been presented by his mother, along with a brilliantly faceted question: "What do you make of this book?"¹¹ The scrapbook contained clippings from Joel Augustus Rogers's syndicated newspaper column first published in 1934 as *Your History*, and later retitled *Facts About the Negro*. Rogers assembled graphics, drawings, events, and claims à la *Ripley's Believe It or Not!* into vignettes for a wide readership. Collectively, his assemblages constitute a counter-

9. A.k.a., white Christian nationalism.

10. Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (Zone Books, 2010), 38.

11. <https://decodingdiaspora.org/decoding-diaspora/index>.

archive that documented Black people and their contributions in world history.¹² Rogers constructs a “mythic Africa,” one emerging from, and reacting to, ongoing violent social dispersion and cultural contempt.

Decoding Diaspora was all the more fascinating for the way in which the chosen seminar text, Stephen Best’s *None Like Us*, presses hard enough to bruise the idea of any constituted, collective “we” following such (post-transatlantic) violent origins, or indeed, ever. Skeptical of efforts to secure a stable collective subject through any means, not least that of archival accumulation, Best focuses not on narrative or archival throughlines, but instead on the ruptures, absences, and non-belongings that must be smoothed over to sustain a coherent “we,” as well as to what ends such coherence can or should be sustained. His work redirects attention not only to what archives include, but to what they cannot.

Rogers’s “mythic Africa” confronted erasure and asserted Black historical presence. Best’s text underscores the fractures and absences any collective “we” must conceal. Speaker Johnson built a “theological dissertation” from a litany of biblical citations. All these examples make clear that authoritative meaning must be produced, performed, and staged. The Institute for Signifying Scriptures calls for recognizing that production for what it is, reading the infrastructures that make meaning operative, and recognizing the (meta-textual) scriptural terms of our human, political, and ethical lives.

Bibliography

Best, Stephen. *None Like Us: Blackness, Belonging, Aesthetic Life*. Duke University Press, 2018.

Brown, Wendy. *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*. Zone Books, 2010.

12. <https://gorgashouse.museums.ua.edu/2026/01/24/decoding-diaspora/>.

Chude-Sokei, Louis. *Floating in a Most Peculiar Way: A Memoir*. Mariner Books, 2021.

Gringlas, Sam. "House votes to end partial government shutdown, setting up contentious talks on ICE," National Public Radio, February 3, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/02/03/g-s1-108506/house-vote-end-government-shutdown>.

Mena, Nayana. "Johnson accused of 'out-Bible-ing the Pope' as he uses scripture to defend Trump deportations," Premier Christian News, February 4, 2026, <https://premierchristian.news/us/news/article/mike-johnson-accused-of-out-bible-ing-pope>.

"Mission Statement," Institute for Signifying Scriptures, <https://signifyingscriptures.org/about/>.

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*. Fortress Press, 1993.

Wimbush, Vincent L. *Scripturalectics: The Management of Meaning*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

Wimbush, Vincent L., ed., *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon*. Rutgers University Press, 2008.

Synopsis of the Meeting

Richard Newton

On February 5–7, 2026, the Institute for Signifying Scriptures (ISS) convened in Tuscaloosa, Alabama for its seventh annual meeting. In this hybrid event, seminar participants engaged in seminar discussion and transgressive examination around the theme, “Diaspora.” The Department of Religious Studies at the University of Alabama welcomed us and provided a layered field site for excavation. Students from UA’s Religion in Culture MA program enhanced our program by facilitating online and in-person engagement. This report shares highlights from this memorable event.

Our circle welcomed both in-person and online participants from around the United States. Some participants were new to ISS; others were longtime members. Sonya Harwood-Johnson, Director of UA’s Gorgas House Museum, introduced us to Woods Quad, the historic antebellum predecessor to the modern UA campus where our meeting would take place. Steven Ramey, Chair of the Department of Religious Studies, greeted us, sharing how ISS has enhanced the Department’s interest in the study of social formation and discourse. Dean Joseph Messina of the Barefield College of Arts & Sciences congratulated ISS on the work done and to be done, wishing us well as our meeting opened.

Richard Newton (University of Alabama) delivered a keynote address entitled “Decoding Diaspora: Scripturalectics of Resilience.” He acquainted us with his family’s scrapbook of newspaper

clippings from a serial column called *Facts About the Negro*, a *Ripley's Believe It or Not*-style serial on Africana contributions to world civilization. This serial was penned by journalist and folk historian Joel Augustus Rogers, who penned such serials from 1934–1966. Newton introduced the scrapbook as an example of what Houston Baker called the “post-trauma poetics” of diasporic peoples and placed Rogers’s *Facts* in conversation with Zora Neale Hurston’s *Barracoon: The Story of the Last “Black Cargo”* as part of a genre Genevieve Sexton has called “testimonial text(s).” Newton then invited us to read Rogers’s *Facts* darkly and signify the resources it provided for dealing with the aftermath of violent socio-cultural dispersion. We then went to Gorgas House Museum to experience a multimedia exhibition called *Decoding Diaspora*. Curated by Richard Newton and his students, the exhibition included archival materials, 3D-printed objects, digital mapping, hypertext timelines, and podcasting. Engaging the scrapbook in these ways helped participants consider Rogers’s response to the pressures of diaspora. Sonya Harward-Johnson encouraged us to further consider these pressures in relation to the Civil War and Civil Rights histories represented by Gorgas House.



Tat-siong Benny Liew (College of the Holy Cross) responded to Newton’s remarks and led us in a discussion on diaspora and its

many representations. Among his questions, Liew asked us to think about the utility of the metaphor of “decoding.” We discussed how our own scripturalization entails presuppositions about a correct past, true belonging, and proper social location. Diaspora serves as an opportunity to critically assess our cultural programming. The group then discussed the tensions between academic historicism, folk memory, and social resistance.

Jacqueline Hidalgo (University of San Diego) hosted a live recording of “Scriptures Everywhere!” ISS’s monthly podcast. We discussed the Introduction of the seminar text, Stephen Best’s *None Like Us: Blackness, Aesthetics, Belonging* (Duke University Press, 2018). Building on Best’s own interrogation of the politics of archival construction, we examined scriptures as both diasporic cause and diasporic effect.¹

To help us bring abstractions into view, students from the UA Religion in Culture MA program took us on a tour of the city. “Tuscaloosa: Dispersion, Disruption, and Diaspora” signified on our conference locale as a layered scriptural formation. The students took us to the Richard Shelby Federal Building and Courthouse to see its Grecian architecture and Caleb O’Connor’s *Points in Time* mural series. We then visited Capitol Park, which sits at the intersections of the ruins of the Alabama state capitol, a point on the Trail of Tears,



1. You can listen to that conversation and other podcast episodes at <https://signifyingscriptures.org/podcast>.

and a lynching site memorialized by the Equal Justice Initiative.

Saturday, February 7 offered a full day of engagement with Best's work. Rachel E. C. Beckley (University of Kansas) underscored the role of erasure in the archives of the metropole. Beckley brought attention to transgressive understandings of home at the site of her work in Lawrence, Kansas. From displacement of Indigenous peoples to Manifest Destiny to late-modern encampments, home seems never apart from histories of violence. She argued that Best's understanding of diaspora would benefit from a more complicated understanding of "home." Beckley's ethnography of her neighbors' experience—especially with medical institutions and law enforcement—troubles the contractual terms assumed in social constitutions. Ownership, custody, right-mindedness, and belonging were all shown as tentative and fraught ideas negotiated in diasporic relations.

Tamara Siuda (Claremont Graduate University) brought our discussion of Best to a close, but not without first bringing into relief the anxiety provoked by Best's provocations. At times, Best's critiques seemed, to some, dismissive of the value of diasporic formations. His rejection of the pasts to which we are indebted appeared too haphazard in that its rebuke of violent dispersion and archival mastery would also relinquish our holds to orienting sites like histories of progress, guiding myths, and filial pieties. Siuda posited that a binary approach would lead us astray. Instead, she called us to appreciate Best's reliance on aesthetics. He likens Blackness to a frame within which the mundane becomes profound and the beautiful is revealed to be profane. The conceit of Blackness—and the diasporic situation—is that it cannot exist as either one or the other. More formally it emerges from the oscillation between the two, an affect of our own proximity, relationality, and situatedness to the frame. The frame is an unsettling, disturbing commitment to persistence in spite of violence, a palimpsest history that records and overwrites our very reasons for being. Best invites us to remember that frames can and may need to be broken if free agency is truly our

pursuit.

Our seminar closed with a discussion of ISS's future. Facilitated by Vincent L. Wimbush (ISS Founding Director), we registered the richness of the conversation, the importance of our hybrid mode, and commitments toward future seminar meetings. Participants expressed interest in more programming in the interstices—including continuation of the “Scriptures Everywhere!” podcast, and a return to more dynamic uses of the ISS website. And in our final dinner reception, we gave thanks for company and recommitted ourselves to the work ahead.

Keynote Address

Richard Newton

Decoding Diaspora: Scripturalectics of Resilience

Previously in *The Abeng*, I called readers to consider “scriptures” as a sort of psycho-cultural code. Specifically, I argued that the social formations we call scripturalization may further be understood as akin to the back end of the modern internet: HTML or hypertext markup language.¹ The idea was to redescribe the internet as a near-endlessly referential system of linked media (hypertext) that operates on the structuring of difference (markup) and is governed syntactically (language). I was inviting us to wrestle with Descartes in a post-Enlightenment, post-modern, and post-Gutenberg way.²

On this side of the digital divide, one can scarcely predicate their own being (cf. “I think, therefore, I am”). We are because we are linked, tagged, and signified. There is no being without media, and that media is always social. Michel De Certeau gestured toward this in his sketch of the “mechanism of incarnation” in which configurations of “the text, tool, and body” act as a sort of “genetic

1. Richard Newton, “Remediating Scriptures: HTML as a Culture of Canon,” *The Abeng: A Journal of Transdisciplinary Criticism* 3, no. 1 (2019): 95–108.

2. Marshal McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (University of Toronto Press, 1962). Those familiar with the long arc of the Institute for Signifying Scriptures may recall essayist Richard Rodriguez’s musings on moderns as Gutenberg’s descendants. Rodriguez gave the keynote address to the 2009 conference that led to the ethnological anthology *Misreading America: Scriptures and Difference*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush, with assistance from Lalruatkima and Melissa Renee Reid (Oxford University Press, 2013). For an important tracing of ISS’s history, see Lalruatkima’s 2014 essay, “Taking Stock of a Rhizome: A History of the Institute for Signifying Scriptures 2004–2014,” Institute for Signifying Scriptures, <https://signifyingscriptures.org/taking-stock-of-a-rhizome/>.

code” taken as meaningful.³ He calls the world state where this happens a “scriptural economy,” a discursive site that abounds with “mechanisms of incarnation” where the word becomes flesh and flesh’s value is increasingly dictated by the word.⁴

What is the “scripturalized human,” and how does it work?⁵ I understand ISS’s critical comparative work as historical refractions designed to help us reflect on these among other questions.⁶ Humans, as we know them, do not simply exist; humans are coded into being. This coding happens through paradoxical matrices of meaning. At times, we are blithely unaware of this circumstance, taking for granted the terms on which we operate. Other times, we are keenly aware of our political conditions, rebuffing all advances that strip us of agency. All of this is happening while we code each other in light of our own circumstances, predilections, desires, and ideological interests.

This social coding leaves us with what anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, in dialogue with media studies scholar David Morley, called a postcolonial “dilemma” about what one does with the hegemony of textuality.⁷ Modern cultural formations, with their “rootinization” of media, are obituary enough for the death of the Barthesian author and the text.⁸ For Morley, diaspora reflects a social situation where the meaning of home can no longer be taken for granted by way of an agreed-upon monolithic reading but is instead marked by disjuncture or contest. Diaspora is the discursive aftermath where the notion of home has been dissolved “into an infinite number of possible readings which audiences might make of

3. Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (University of California Press, 1984), 145.

4. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 146.

5. Vincent L. Wimbush, ed., *Scripturalizing the Human: The Written as the Political* (Routledge, 2015).

6. Vincent L. Wimbush, ed., *Refractions of the Scriptural* (Routledge, 2016).

7. David Morley, “Decoding Diaspora and Disjuncture: Arjun Appadurai in dialogue with David Morley,” *New Formations* 73, no. 1 (2011): 51.

8. By “rootinized” I mean that these cultural formations are buttressed not only by virtue of repetition, but also by what is taken for granted as intrinsically meaningful sans scriptor. See Richard Newton, *Identifying Roots: Alex Haley and the Anthropology of Scriptures* (Equinox, 2020), 217. For the original discussion of “La mort de l’auteur,” see Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Images-Music-Text*, edited by Stephen Heath (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977), 142–148.

it.”⁹ What significance can there be if signs can be signified in infinite ways? Appadurai qualifies this relativity of meaning by teasing out the political facets of readership—the implied reader, the actual readers, those persons “read off,” etc.¹⁰ On the matter of diaspora, he has “the feeling that there is a kind of unresolved question here, about how these different ideas of the reader, the respondent, the viewer and the consumer, etc. can be brought into a fruitful relationship, without it all being reduced to some kind of ‘zero sum’ game.”¹¹ For Morley, this nuance can be brought out through an “encoding/decoding model” that observers how “the text has a structure! It is not equally open to any old reading that you might want to make of it. It’s more resistant to some readings.”¹² What I find particularly refreshing in their exchange is Morley’s insistence that some people’s readings of texts and home are more powerful than others precisely because of the politics of cultural resources, management, and access that Appadurai attempts to name.¹³ The title of a relevant Vincent L. Wimbush essay comes to mind: “It’s Scripturalization, Colleagues!”¹⁴

The context of Morley and Appadurai’s conversation was a 2008 conference on “Reading After Empire.” Ironically, I learned of this conference *post facto* and in print. The literary scholar Derek Attridge summarized one of the key questions of that forum about diasporic literature: “How do we read responsibly ‘when a work crosses geographical and linguistic boundaries [so that] the cultural context within which it was produced and within which it was first read...differs from the cultural contexts within which it is received’?”¹⁵ I encourage readers of *The Abeng* to explore the special 2011 issue of *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* 73, no. 1. I suspect they will find much to ponder.

9. Morley, “Decoding Diaspora and Disjuncture,” 47.

10. Morley, “Decoding Diaspora and Disjuncture,” 51.

11. Morley, “Decoding Diaspora and Disjuncture,” 48.

12. Morley, “Decoding Diaspora and Disjuncture,” 51.

13. Morley, “Decoding Diaspora and Disjuncture,” 47.

14. Vincent L. Wimbush, “It’s Scripturalization, Colleagues!” *Journal of Africana Religions* 3, no. 2 (2015): 193–200.

15. Attridge’s conference afterword is echoed in James Procter, “Introduction: Reading After Empire,” *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* 73, no. 1 (2011): 7.

At the same time, I submit that the question Attridge posed may be further generative when we observe diasporic literatures as data of our scripturalization. We could signify the question in a manner that homes in on a people, asking how we read responsibly when a *people* “crosses geographical and linguistic boundaries [so that] the cultural context within which they were produced and within which *they* were first read...differs from the cultural contexts within which *they* were received?” Here, we should learn from Jacqueline Hidalgo’s study of scriptural technologies as homing devices.¹⁶ Thinking with cultural theorist Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology*,¹⁷ Hidalgo argues that such an approach brings us to fathom “human social constructions,” “human projects and productions,” and their varied “consequences.”¹⁸

In different terms, this is the kind of inquiry we were invited to engage in by Vincent L. Wimbush in his address, “Meaning of Movement, Movement of Meaning: or, Reading Darkness as Marronage” during the Institute for Signifying Scriptures’ 2024 seminar meeting, which commemorated ISS’s 20th anniversary, as well as the 25th anniversary of the African Americans and the Bible Conference that year.¹⁹ I left that conference enriched and challenged to consider how to investigate what we make of our human condition in light of the pasts which we have preserved and through which we have managed to persevere.

It also enthused me to reimagine a project I had been working on for some time in light of the issue of diaspora. In February 2026, I hosted the “Decoding Diaspora Research Symposium” at the University of Alabama as a month-long gathering that queried the linkage between identity, memory, and peoples. It united cultural historians, curators, cultural critics, coders, K–12 students, and

16. Jacqueline M. Hidalgo, “The Bible as a Homing Device: Two U. S. Latine Case Studies.” *Religions* 16, no. 6 (2025): 696.

17. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006).

18. Hidalgo, “The Bible as a Homing Device,” 696.

19. See the meeting report, Lalruatkima, “Marronage and Movement: Twenty Years of the Institute for Signifying Scriptures,” Institute for Signifying Scriptures, <https://signifyingscriptures.org/iss-annual-meeting-2024-report/>.

the local community to theorize on our social constitution. This symposium commenced with the ISS's seminar meeting on the theme of diaspora, and it did all this through a transdisciplinary approach to a curious dataset—a mysterious scrapbook in my family's possession. You can access this dataset at <https://decodingdiaspora.org>.

That Decoding Diaspora centers around something so seemingly personal tells you something about me. In many ways, I come from a tradition that understands intellectual history as a fancy way of talking about the relationships that define us. What we know is shaped by those we claim to know and who claim to know us, and by whom we may only hope to be known.

I invite you to wrestle with the implications of two haunting questions and their implications—"Who're your kin? Who're your people?" I am reminded of an utterance recorded in the Gospel of Mark: "A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." [Mark 6:4 KJV]

On Diaspora

The story of Decoding Diaspora, as well as the question of diaspora, begins with the notion of home, and the fear and trepidation that comes with recognizing home's limits. We likely all have memories of places, moments, and features that we return to in order to make sense of ourselves, but they are different than moving through home, or even away from home, in real time. As novelist Salman Rushdie remarked about Dorothy's home in *The Wizard of Oz*, there is no place like it.²⁰ Nevertheless, home can be useful for dreaming with and against. Thus, we might begin to think of diaspora as a chance to consider a category of stories people tell when they find themselves unsettled, displaced, and without a home.

During Christmas break in 2013, I returned to Sugar Land, Texas, and the home where I was raised. I had finished a draft of the dissertation that would become the 2020 Equinox book, *Identifying*

20. Salman Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz*. BFI Film Classics (British Film Institute, London 2012).

Roots: Alex Haley and the Anthropology of Scriptures, and I had received an on-campus interview request for what would be my first tenure-track position. One early morning my mother, Charlotte Newton, brought me a strange, landscape-oriented scrapbook. Its covers were made of heavy black card stock, its pages a thinner construction paper, held by a shoelace-like string. The scrapbook was worn with age and the acid of mid-twentieth century paper. Inside, newspaper clippings were glued to the paper backing: brittle to the touch and literally crumbling in my fingers. The scrapbook was simultaneously an archivist's dream and nightmare.



My mother told me the scrapbook had belonged to her mother, Lucille Rice, and asked me something like, “What do I make of this book?,” with all the expectation of a parent who had bent over backwards to make sure her child grew up enough to come back and supposedly know some things. And in that moment, my answer was “Well, I have no idea.” Too busy to be bothered, I promised her that I would look into it after I completed my dissertation. The scrapbook turned out to be pretty fascinating. Its pages were clippings of a cartoon newspaper serial called *Facts About the Negro*, written by J.

A. Rogers and illustrated by A. S. Milai. Its provenance was the early 1960s, according to the *Pittsburgh Courier* masthead, but its style was much older. It was clearly a riff on World War I and World War II-era *Ripley's Believe It Or Not!* cartoons; however, its content was provocative, containing Afrocentric vignettes from world history.

Each page usually contained three illustrated vignettes, and there were some 100 pages of them in the scrapbook. What was strange is that the “racecraft” within was not typical of what we thought we knew about my grandmother, Lucille Rice.²¹ It was so blunt, forward, and pointed. It did not read like Grandma Rice, a good Methodist, staunch integrationist, and supporter of education. And yet in the margins of this scrapbook, I found her handwriting. She clearly identified with what she had read in the clippings. On one page she wrote, “This book is old and so am I.” On others, she inscribed her address or her own name or the names of relatives. I had seen the same marginalia in her Bible after she had passed.

Now, everyone in my family knew that my grandmother had suffered from dementia for decades, but we also knew better than to write off her scribblings. After all, she had prayed us through all sorts of travails with her writings. She had survived more change in this country than we could dream of—her husband fought in World War I, her kin in the 320 Barrage Balloon Battalion (which cleared the way for the Allied advance at Normandy during World War II). She was of course present for the Civil Rights Movement, and watched the televised landing of a man on the moon.

You could not just write or read her off—at least not very easily.²² Regardless of whether my grandmother’s writing was on account of dementia or some arcane discipline, I am now of the mind that she was practicing what cultural critic Audre Lorde called self-care: that is, a political act of self-preservation.²³ What led me to that conclusion was my final conversation with her oldest daughter, my aunt Frances L. Dyer.

21. Karen Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (Verso Books, 2012).

22. cf. Morley, “Decoding diaspora,” 51.

23. Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light and Other Essays* (Ixia Press, 2017 [1988]), 130.

Aunt Frances was a career nurse and my grandmother's caretaker. At first, my aunt agreed with my mother's assessment that Lucille Rice would never have signed on to *Facts About the Negro*. But then—upon reflecting on me and my now previously-mentioned book—she recalled a moment in 1976, when ABC television announced it would debut a miniseries adaptation of Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* to showcase Black history to a wider American audience. According to Aunt Frances, when Grandma Rice heard this news, she said, "Hmph... They won't tell the real story." Upon hearing this, I remembered that Lucille Rice had also seen the scars of a relative who, in her telling of it, "had been whipped worse than anything we would hopefully ever see."

When I returned to Claremont Graduate University, scrapbook in hand, I showed Vincent L. Wimbush, my classmates in the Critical Comparative Scriptures program, and some participants in an ISS Brown Bag Lunch what I had found in the archive. In that intellectual home, I remember being encouraged to continue to think about my mother's haunting question: "What do I make of this book?"

The question deserves pause. When we enter the archive, we must watch for signs of what philosopher Jacques Derrida termed "archive fever": the idea that we go into ivory halls with rose-colored glasses, predisposed to find something revelatory when what is actually in the archive is only funhouse mirrors—reflections and refractions of what we presuppose—bouncing off new historical finds.²⁴ If this is the case, we must prepare not for clarification and illumination, but for a critical appraisal of power which Vincent L. Wimbush has called "reading darkness."²⁵

For the scrapbook, this was especially the case, given the Black diasporic situation from which it emerged. Literary theorist Stephen Best argues that "the history of the Black Atlantic comes

24. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (University of Chicago Press, 1966).

25. Vincent L. Wimbush, "Reading Darkness, Reading Scriptures," in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, edited by Vincent L. Wimbush (Continuum, 2003), 1–43.

into existence only through loss and, in turn, can be sustained only through more tales of its loss.”²⁶ This is how the façade and contents of the archive are built. The archive is never the home of the past. It is a monument to the complicated politics of our human condition. Literary critic Houston Baker Jr. distinguishes between archive fever and reading darkness in a compelling fashion. With Derrida, Baker reminds us of the etymology of the archive and the Grecian notion of *archeion*, the master’s house. The *archeion* is a storehouse of canon law, authorized texts, tools of regulation, “myths of origin,” and the prizes of conquest.²⁷ But then Baker turns to the archive of Zora Neale Hurston to underscore a different kind of working with the past. “History’s everyday use is to mold written self-defenses against the ever-beating seas of the repressions and suppressions of fractured memory.”²⁸ Baker calls this order of archive a “post-trauma poetics” and defines diaspora as a scenario where one creates new connections between home and the past while under duress.

We might look to the example of Hurston’s *Barracoon: The Last Known “Black Cargo.”*²⁹ Written in 1927 and posthumously published in 2018, it is Hurston’s ethnographic study of Africatown, Alabama, and especially concerning Oluale Kossola, also known as Mr. Cudjo Lewis. Lewis was the last survivor of the *Clotilda*, a slave ship used in the mining of Black flesh. The *Clotilda* set sail in secret in 1860, fifty-two years after the US Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves. After the *Clotilda* arrived in Mobile, Alabama with human cargo ordered by plantation owner Timothy Meaher, its captain, William Foster, torched the ship to hide the evidence of this transgression. While the existence of the *Clotilda* has long been part of the folklore of Lewis’s descendants, who purchased Meaher’s

26. Stephen Best, *None Like Us: Blackness, Aesthetics, Belonging* (Duke University Press, 2018), 67.

27. Houston A. Baker Jr., “Intuiting Archive: Notes for a Post-Trauma Poetics,” *African American Review* (Spring 2016): 1.

28. Baker Jr., “Intuiting Archive,” 3.

29. Zora Neale Hurston, *Barracoon: The Last Known “Black Cargo”* (Amistad Press, 2018). See also Season 1 of the ISS podcast, *Scriptures Everywhere!*, hosted by Jacqueline Hidalgo, as the series of conversations there focuses on Hurston’s *Barracoon* (<https://signifyingscripts.org/podcast/>).

land in 1865 following Union liberation, many doubted the veracity of their claims to Africa.

In 2018, when I was on campus for a job interview at the University of Alabama, I recall sitting at Hotel Capstone down the street, watching the television news announce the finding of the *Clotilda* wreckage. Thus began all sorts of archival and commercial excitement. In hindsight, it is hard not to sit with my grandmother's caution: "but they won't tell the real story."

That is part of what makes Hurston's work so interesting. When read critically, it primes us to reconsider what historian of religion Bruce Lincoln called "regimes of truth": the stories in which we find ourselves.³⁰ Hurston's *Barracoon*, Haley's *Roots*, and Rogers' *Facts* all belong to a genre of myth Genevieve Sexton calls "testimonial texts," a dizzying narrative conflict where the authors seem to need to face an atrocious past, and access a history that is in so many ways impossibly inaccessible, in order to make sense of their present.³¹

If we see diaspora as site of innovative relations with both the past and with post-trauma poetics, then perhaps we might better understand the scriptural technologies around us. Lars Pharo defines scriptural technologies as the development of writing techniques for practical objectives but also for change or to influence one's environment.³² Thinking in concert with the case made by ISS, scriptural technology is a way humans heuristically brace discourse, or the ideological work we make words do for us and to others, and that work ensures that expressions have effect.

All this to say, I grew interested in the ways my grandmother and presumably other mid-20th century African Americans found "a real story" in Rogers's *Facts*. By real, I mean something along the lines

30. Bruce Lincoln, "Theses on Method," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 17, no. 1 (2005): 10.

31. Genevieve Sexton, "The Last Witness: Testimony and Desire in Zora Neale Huston's *Barracoon*," *Discourse* 25, nos. 1-2 (2004): 191.

32. Lars Kirkhusmo Pharo, "Authorities of Scriptural Technologies in America," in *Scripturalizing the Human: The Written as Political*, edited by Vincent L. Wimbush (Routledge, 2015), 39-53.

of Charles Long's argument on Black significations: an emboldening of "the ways in which names are given to realities and peoples during this period of [post-Enlightenment] conquest; this naming is at the same time an objectification through categories and concepts of those realities which appear as novel and 'other' to the cultures of conquest."³³ Rogers's *Facts* helped people like my grandmother's kin to work through disinformation and disorientation about the place of their Black flesh in some empire's new world.

Whatever truth one may find in Grandma Rice's dementia, there can be no mistaking her being afflicted with the "diasporic condition." Historian Michael A. Gomez elaborates that this condition is:

often an unsettled (and unsettling) experience in which the question of "belonging" is unresolved: Africa, as a land of origin, is in many ways unrecoverable; whereas it is a challenge to fully regard an oft-hostile host environment as "home," and under such circumstances, diaspora is experienced as a continuum of liminality, along which communities and individuals—linked as much by common experience as by genetic makeup—are located at various points.³⁴

My grandmother's scrapbook provides us with an opportunity to diagnose the dis-ease symptomatic of diaspora while also registering, in its carriers, the scripturalectics of resilience.

But to do this, we must inoculate ourselves from "archive fever," wherein we see this scrapbook and say, "Ah, a scripture," forgetting the psychic baggage and historical cargo that accompanies it and us. Instead, we should acknowledge how the phenomenon of the scrapbook appears with what Casey A'hearn has called "readiness to hand"—seeming fittedness or rightness for the user.³⁵ Furthermore,

33. Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Davies Group, 1999 [1986]), 4.

34. Michael A. Gomez, *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora*, Second Edition (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 3.

35. Casey Logan A'hearn, "The Public's Response to the Book of Mormon: A Critical Phenomenology of Scripture," *Postscripts: The Journal of Sacred Texts, Cultural Histories, and Contemporary Contexts* 15, no. 1 (2024): 55.

I submit that resisting the (dis)ease of the archive cannot happen without a decoding of the cultural program—in this case, Diaspora—in which the scriptural technology finds application. In so doing, we might begin to learn from, to quote the Johnson brothers’ anthemic lyric from “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing,” the lessons that “the dark past has taught us.”

J. A. Rogers: A Case Study

Joel Augustus Rogers was born in empire, at the fraught site of Negril, Jamaica in the British West Indies. He was born around 1880; the precise year is unclear in the historical record. Rogers was the child of an itinerant Methodist overseer—not an ecclesial bishop, but a plantation supervisor. His parents were also ardent supporters of education, and he identified them and himself as of mixed race. He may have done a stint in the British navy in some capacity, but this, too, is unclear in the historical record. What is more certain is his 1906 arrival in the United States—specifically Chicago, where he had hoped to study at the famed Art Institute. This did not come to fruition for the young Rogers. What became certain, by his own account, is that the discourse on race in the United States operated differently than he had come to understand from his home in Jamaica.

Rogers would begin figuring out his way in the disorienting United States while serving as a train car steward known as a Pullman Porter. While there are many ways one could tell Rogers’s story, his early curriculum vitae and biography exemplify fixation with the past, with empire, and with all manner of body politics. In 1917, he published *From Superman to Man*, a travel dialogue between a Pullman Porter and a white politician. It is worth noting that Rogers’s book was published twenty-one years before Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuman’s Action Comics #1, entitled *Superman: Champion of the Oppressed*. Rogers was working in an earlier, though related *zeitgeist*: taking a rationalist approach to dismantling the notion of the white *übermensch* that would find its most conspicuous

presentation in the Third Reich.

In 1919, Rogers signified his own race science argument in *As Nature Leads*, a case for rootinizing what was then called miscegenation. He claimed that race-mixing was part and parcel of the long history of human development. *As Nature Leads* and his later works were entrepreneurial, self-published efforts. Rogers would come to fund his writing with contract work as a journalist in New York City. In 1921 he joined the migration and renaissance for which places like Harlem became remembered. He found steady work writing for Marcus Garvey's *The Negro World* and *Daily Negro Times*, *The New York Amsterdam News*, and most consistently, *The Pittsburgh Courier*. Rogers's work focused on shaping the consciousness of Black people and their modern plight. This entailed documentation of movements like Garvey's exploits in Pan-Africanism, W. E. B. Du Bois's reading of the color line, Black GIs fighting for Double Victory, the installation of Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, and the Second Italo-Ethiopian War.

Rogers' journalistic efforts reflect three important currents in the evolution of his thinking about the Black Atlantic and African Diaspora:

(1) His writings were critical of white supremacy as a local and global project. He wrote against the Ku Klux Klan and European fascists, especially in Italy.

(2) His travel to national and international metropolises put him in proximity to archival sites that would inspire his approach to Africana history. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Rogers published massive anthologies that centered the contributions of Black people—massive tomes including *World's Greatest Men of African Descent* (1931), *World's Greatest Men and Women of African Descent* (1935), and *World's Great Men of Color* (1946)—along with shorter pamphlets like *100 Amazing Facts About the Negro* published in 1934. All

of these publications catalog firsts, superlatives, and major contributions of Africana people.

(3) He continued to develop his rationalist approach to race science. *Sex and Race* (ca. 1940–1942, 3 vols.) and *Nature Knows No Color Line* (1952) press a historical argument about the construction of racism. Within them and elsewhere, one can see homages to David Hume and inspiration from the Freethought Movement.

Cultural critics Henry Louis Gates and Darryl Pinckney have made strong cases for understanding Rogers as a progenitor of sorts to later Black history efforts.³⁶ But Thabiti Asukile rightly details that Rogers stood apart from canonical elites like DuBois and Carter G. Woodson.³⁷ Lacking the intellectual credentials of his scholarly contemporaries, Rogers—the historian—was on a periphery that positioned him to report on Black literati, but be largely overlooked in the historical record.

This is not to say Rogers was not influential. Asukile notes that Rogers's *From Superman to Man* was required reading at the University of Chicago Divinity School in the 1920s.³⁸ Its critique on racism was palatable enough for the purposes of liberal Protestantism—one site where the West was working out its own body politics over and against the Rest.³⁹

36. For important theorizing on Rogers as author and historian, see Darryl Pinckney, *Out There: Mavericks of Black Literature* (Basic Civitas, 2002), 1–54; and Henry Louis Gates, *100 Amazing Facts About the Negro* (Pantheon Books, 2017).

37. Thabiti Asukile is the most published scholar on Rogers' oeuvre. See his important discussions in "The Harlem Friendship of Joel Augustus Rogers (1880–1966) and Hubert Henry Harrison (1883–1927)," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 34, no. 2 (2010a): 54–75; "J. A. Rogers: The Scholarship of an Organic Intellectual," *The Black Scholar* 36, nos. 2–3 (2006): 35–50; and "Joel Augustus Rogers: Black International Journalism, Archival Research, and Black Print Culture," *The Journal of African American History* 95, nos. 3–4 (2010b): 322–347.

38. Interestingly, George Foster at the University of Chicago Divinity School assigned *From Superman to Man* as required reading. Foster was likely an acquaintance from Rogers's time in Chicago. Thabiti Asukile, "Joel Augustus Rogers' Race Vindication: A Chicago Pullman Porter & the Making of *From Superman to Man* (1917)," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 35, no. 4 (2011): 291.

39. Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

But Rogers's most effectual work arguably came by way of the newspaper serial. When he returned from Europe in 1934, he launched "Your History," the spiritual predecessor to *Facts About the Negro*, the clippings in my family's scrapbook. It was published in *The Pittsburgh Courier*, which was read in Black enclaves throughout the United States. In 1935, two New Orleans schoolteachers shared their thoughts on the importance of Rogers's history. I relay this find of Thabiti Asukile's from *The Pittsburgh Courier*:

1. It may be preserved in scrapbook form. (Its appeal to children is striking). 2. It may well grace the bulletin boards of progressive lodges, libraries, civic clubs, and schools. 3. It serves as an impetus to encourage the further study of Negro history. She adds: "I am certain that with your fund of journalistic experience, that you will readily agree that often an illustrated feature or cartoon achieves greater results than a page of dry paint. (Especially when it is easily assimilated and digested "at a glance.")"⁴⁰

I found myself feverish when I first read this, as I was well on my way studying Rogers's *Facts* when I came across this excerpt. Here was a precedent for my grandmother's scrapbook.

Scripturalectics of Resilience

On one hand, I was surprised about my own misreading of my grandmother's politics, for the reasons I mentioned earlier. But then again, she and Rogers were of similar worlds. She too was counted among the people called Methodists. Her husband and her sons fought for Double Victory in World War I, World War II, and Korea. She was a staunch supporter of education: she and my grandfather led efforts to hire a schoolteacher and buy books for Black children

40. Asukile 2010b, 334. He references the newspaper article "History Teacher Accounts 'Your History' Feature as One of Finest Things in Courier: New Orleans Man Gives Some More History as He Lauds Work of J. A. Rogers and George L. Lee" from *The Pittsburgh Courier*, September 19, 1935.

in segregated Sedalia, Missouri. They both had suspicions about the whole story being told. That story is what ISS has come to call scripturalization—never separated from its history of violence. Furthermore, we could elaborate on the specific machinations employed to carry out and accommodate that violence. Wimbush has called these “scripturalectics,” and what I find compelling about his theorizing is his attention to the violence of normalization, especially evident in the mimetics of minoritized peoples.⁴¹

At times, these mimetics use the rhetoric of resistance as a way of carving out difference between the perpetrators and the victims of violence. And while I think it important to register matters of positionality and accountability, those who are said to survive within regimes of scripturalization reify the violence of the regime. That is at least part of what makes scripturalization novel, insidious, and effective. When I read the scrapbook, I do not see a testimony of resistance. I see efforts to decrease the power of the scriptural regime by equipping diasporic agents to endure the violence and (for better or worse) redirect it. This is what I call the scripturalectics of resilience.

My grandmother’s identification with Rogers’s *Facts* suggests, to me at least, the appeal of his scripturalectics of resilience as a sort of diasporic vaccine against modernity’s pestilence: specifically in this case its Negrophobic necropolitics, the pathological fear and revilement of Black flesh. In this regard, her scrapbook might be read for its post-trauma poetics. By practicing a method of cultural analytics I call data signification, my research team used digital tools to decode the scriptural technology that is Rogers’s serial *Facts*.⁴² It enables us to fathom how persons like my grandmother and Rogers come to discursively make the world more of their own.

The primary conceit of data signification is a refutation of our contemporary obsession with “big data.” Data signification

41. Vincent L. Wimbush, *Scripturalectics: The Management of Meaning* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 6.

42. For more specific discussion of cultural analytics, see Lev Manovich, *Cultural Analytics* (MIT Press, 2020).

recognizes that computers can help us appreciate that a single datum is infinitely complex. I think this important because if we fetishize the tools—digital or otherwise—we will miss the work humans do to ourselves and others: the references, the equations, the deletions.⁴³ In her installation “The Library of Missing Datasets,” artist Mini Onuoha provokes us to consider the stories and persons missing from the computational record of our bureaucracies. Onuoha writes, “When you look into them, you start to realize that they almost universally intersect with the interests of the most vulnerable.”⁴⁴

What myths does the dark past teach us? What do we make of Rogers’s *Facts*? For me, data signification brings four uses of scriptural technology or scripturalectics into view. The first is what I would call a *disruptive cartography*.⁴⁵ This is the notion that maps, as spaces of world conception, are sites of discourse rather than records of reality. Whatever their overlap with empirical territory, map are first and foremost tools of orienting people to make-believe. My first research inquiry into Rogers’s *Facts* was to ask: where, precisely, is his mythic Africa? I use the term mythic here not as fact-checking, but as reference to Bruce Lincoln’s point about myth as narrative in ideological form.⁴⁶ Myth is not just story. It is the discursive packaging through which humans enforce social orders on themselves and others. Rogers’s geography reflects a creative understanding of diaspora as a diverse ever-presence, more than it does a people forged in the crucible of dispersion. My team demonstrated this by geo-tagging all of the locations mentioned in the scrapbook clippings. When we mapped these locations using the geographic information system software ArcGIS, what became clear is that Rogers’s Africa is not the continental territory, but an

43. Mimi Onuoha, “The Library of Missing Datasets,” in *Black Futures*, edited by Kimberly Drew and Jenna Wortham (One World Productions, 2020 [2016]), 136–139.

44. Onuoha, “The Library of Missing Datasets,” 139.

45. While the phrase “discursive cartography” finds purchase in various intellectual exchanges, I am specifically informed by Michelle Gonzales, “Latino/a Theology: Doing Theology Latinamente,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 41, no. 1 (2002): 64; and Jean-Pierre Ruiz, *Revelation in the Vernacular* (Fordham University Press, 2021).

46. Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (University of Chicago Press, 1999), 147.

intercontinental psycho-social expanse.

The second use is something my team has come to call *strategic anachronism*:⁴⁷ the creative manipulation of our temporal predilections. For instance, if we recognize that history is not what happened in the past but the contingent, useful ways in which we fashion the past, then we should study the deployment of synchronic, diachronic, and always imaginative uses of memory. Rogers does this deftly. Each serial page usually contains three vignettes from seemingly random moments in diaspora history. These dizzying chronologies are an affective tactic. For those outside the community, Rogers's historical attention appears scattershot and overwhelming. There are too many moments to engage or critique. For those who identify with his Negro, Rogers's historical imagination is a constellation reflective of diasporic possibilities. My research team was able to amplify these affects using sonic archiving, creating micro-podcasts of the 100 newspaper pages clipped in the scrapbook. Each page became an episode of performative readings of Rogers's texts. To aurally simulate Milai's illustrations, the production team inserted Foley sounds and impressionistic music evocative of the images. Listeners hear what they might read and see where they are looking. As each page and episode make clear, Rogers juxtaposes disparate moments. He is not moored to a linear view of time. He renders Africana history synchronistically. Each of Rogers's selected moments is an opportunity to ponder his Negro as the quintessential human.

However, Rogers does not dismiss the utility of a linear approach to time. On the contrary, we found that Rogers locates crucial moments from prehistoric times through the 1960s, when he literally highlights events and figures in news periodicals. As well, Rogers forecasts how he thinks Africana history will precede, later—making predictions about future sociological trends and

47. Since working on *Decoding Diaspora*, I have learned that the classicist Sarah E. Bond has also used the phrase "strategic anachronism" in her theorizing of socio-economic labor collectives in Western antiquity in relation to modern union towns. See *Strike: Labor, Unions, and Resistance in the Roman Empire* (Yale University Press, 2025).

gesturing toward notable Black figures which he suspects will break segregationist barriers.

Third is his *rhetorical editorialism*. As much as Rogers wanted to be a visual artist, he was a wordsmith. Rogers not only has much to say about race. He has many ways of talking about race. In experimenting with computational distant reading techniques, my students came to appreciate the mathematics of Rogers's plotting of the color-line. When they segmented Rogers' text into units for analysis, they found consistent inversion in his racial diction. The more that words with the morpheme "Negro" appear in a segment, the less words containing the morpheme "white" appear in the same area. We have come to call this a statistical disempowering of superman to man. Rogers's logic (cf. Gk. *logos*, word) pulls political levers in readers' conception of the racialized human.

Finally, we should give renewed attention to the *masquerade* underway.⁴⁸ Rogers presents the diasporic situation as far more manageable when understanding that the performance of power is scripted in many fonts. When we printed 3D replicas of artifacts and portraits that reflected Rogers's view of the world, we grew more attentive to his read of human constitution. He talks of color and hue, but he also speaks of racial strain, hair texture, erotic desire, and feats of strength. Rogers has us watch the drama unfold in the theater of military campaigns, the art scene, the annals of kingdoms, tribal rituals, the university, and the marketplace. Our team became more sensitive to this after we began using computer-aided design to produce tactile representations of Milai's images, helping us pay better attention to Rogers's agenda.

Concluding Invitation

Decoding Diaspora provides a case study with which ISS conversation partners may think. On decodingdiaspora.org, one may explore Rogers's *Facts*, extending the study of how they have

48. Vincent L. Wimbush, ed., *Masquerade: Scripturalizing Modernities Through Black Flesh* (Bloomsbury, 2017).

been read, preserved, chronicled, mapped, recorded, and curated. To be clear, this order of cultural analytics—the melding of social theory and computational methods—is neither an effort to scour nor renovate the archive. That would be to fall prey to the delusions of archive fever. In the testimonies of figures like J. A. Rogers, Oluale Kossola, and Lucille Rice, we find evidence of complicated persons resiliently living with the dangerous preexisting condition we have come to abbreviate as diaspora. Tempted as we may be, we should neither demonize or glorify them. Again, the ecstasy that would result is a symptom of the fever.

What *Decoding Diaspora* calls for instead is reflexive examination of our own encoding into scriptural matrices. The data significations invite us to decode ourselves: in order to make sense of diasporic formations, what causes them, what makes them appealing, what makes them threatening, and what makes them all too strange and yet so familiar. It is to read Rogers's *Facts* darkly, reacquainting ourselves with the principle that facts are the scriptural human's discursive constructions (cf. Latin *facere*, to make) deployed to orient themselves and others. What we see in Rogers's *Facts* is what we should likely notice all around us, were we to pay attention.

Decoding Diaspora offers a chance to rethink who are our kin and who are our people. But if we are honest, diaspora also asks us to acknowledge what we will remember and what we will forget on the way to making our worlds. The real story of diaspora is precisely that—being in a situation where you cannot prevent breakage, but can sift through the pieces you find: things, words, people, places, and memories to hold and that hold you.

Bibliography

- A'hearn, Casey Logan. "The Public's Response to the Book of Mormon: A Critical Phenomenology of Scripture." *Postscripts: The Journal of Sacred Texts, Cultural Histories, and Contemporary Contexts* 15, no. 1 (2024): 49–68.
- Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke University Press, 2006.
- Asukile, Thabiti. "J. A. Rogers: The Scholarship of an Organic Intellectual." *The Black Scholar* 36, nos. 2–3 (2006): 35–50.
- . "The Harlem Friendship of Joel Augustus Rogers (1880–1966) and Hubert Henry Harrison (1883–1927)." *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 34, no. 2 (2010a): 54–75.
- . "Joel Augustus Rogers: Black International Journalism, Archival Research, and Black Print Culture." *The Journal of African American History* 95, nos. 3–4 (2010b): 322–347.
- . "Joel Augustus Rogers' Race Vindication: A Chicago Pullman Porter & the Making of *From Superman to Man* (1917)." *Western Journal of Black Studies* 35, no. 4 (2011): 281–293.
- Baker Jr., Houston A. "Intuiting Archive: Notes for a Post-Trauma Poetics." *African American Review* (Spring 2016): 1–4.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." In *Images–Music–Text*, edited by Stephen Heath. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977.
- Best, Stephen. *None Like Us: Blackness, Aesthetics, Belonging*. Duke University Press, 2018.

- Bond, Sarah E. *Strike: Labor, Unions, and Resistance in the Roman Empire*. Yale University Press, 2025.
- De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendell. University of California Press, 1984.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever*. Translated by Eric Prenowitz. University of Chicago Press, 1966.
- Fields, Karen and Barbara J. Fields. *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*. Verso Books, 2012.
- Gates, Henry Louis. *100 Amazing Facts About the Negro*. Pantheon Books, 2017.
- Gomez, Michael A. *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora*, Second Edition. Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Gonzales, Michelle. "Latino/a Theology: Doing Theology Latinamente." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 41, no. 1 (2002): 63–72.
- Hidalgo, Jacqueline M. "The Bible as a Homing Device: Two U. S. Latine Case Studies." *Religions* 16, no. 6 (2025): 696.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. *Barracoon: The Last Known "Black Cargo."* Amistad Press, 2018.
- Lalruatkima. "Taking Stock of a Rhizome: A History of the Institute for Signifying Scriptures 2004–2014." Institute for Signifying Scriptures, 2014. <https://signifyingscriptures.org/taking-stock-of-a-rhizome/>.

- _____. "Marronage and Movement: Twenty Years of the Institute for Signifying Scriptures." Institute for Signifying Scriptures, 2024. <https://signifyingscriptures.org/iss-annual-meeting-2024-report/>.
- Lincoln, Bruce. *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship*. University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- _____. "Theses on Method." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 17, no. 1 (2005): 8–10.
- Long, Charles H. *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*. Davies Group, 1999 [1986].
- Lorde, Audre. *A Burst of Light and Other Essays*. Ixia Press, 2017 [1988].
- McLuhan, Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. University of Toronto Press, 1962.
- Morley, David. "Decoding Diaspora and Disjuncture: Arjun Appadurai in dialogue with David Morley." *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* 73 (2011): 43–55.
- Pharo, Lars Kirkhusmo. "Authorities of Scriptural Technologies in America," in *Scripturalizing the Human: The Written as Political*, edited by Vincent L. Wimbush. Routledge, 2015, 39–53.
- Procter, James. "Introduction: Reading After Empire." *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* 73, no. 1 (2011): 5–10.
- Manovich, Lev. *Cultural Analytics*. MIT Press, 2020.

Masuzawa, Tomoko. *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Newton, Richard. "Remediating Scriptures: HTML as a Culture of Canon." *The Abeng: A Journal of Transdisciplinary Criticism* 3, no. 1 (2019): 95–108.

_____. *Identifying Roots: Alex Haley and the Anthropology of Scriptures*. Equinox, 2020.

Onuoha, Mimi. "The Library of Missing Datasets." In *Black Futures*, edited by Kimberly Drew and Jenna Wortham. One World Productions, 2020 [2016], 136–139.

Pinckney, Darryl. *Out There: Mavericks of Black Literature*. Basic Civitas, 2002.

Ruiz, Jean-Pierre. *Revelation in the Vernacular*. Fordham University Press, 2021.

Rushdie, Salman. *The Wizard of Oz*. BFI Film Classics. British Film Institute London, 2012.

Sexton, Genevieve. "The Last Witness: Testimony and Desire in Zora Neale Huston's *Barracoon*." *Discourse* 25, nos. 1–2 (2004): 189–210.

Wimbush, Vincent L. "Reading Darkness, Reading Scriptures." In *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, edited by Vincent L. Wimbush. Continuum, 2003, 1–43.

_____. "It's Scripturalization, Colleagues!" *Journal of African Religions* 3, no. 2 (2015): 193–200.

_____. *Scripturalectics: The Management of Meaning*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

Wimbush, Vincent L., ed. *Scripturalizing the Human: The Written as the Political*. Routledge, 2015.

_____. *Refractions of the Scriptural*. Routledge, 2016.

_____. *Masquerade: Scripturalizing Modernities Through Black Flesh*. Bloomsbury, 2017.

Wimbush, Vincent L., ed., with assistance from Lalruatkima and Melissa Renee Reid. *Misreading America: Scriptures and Difference*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Engagements with Stephen Best's *None Like Us*



Seminar Remarks on Stephen Best, *None Like Us*, Part I: “On Thinking Like a Work of Art”

Tamara L. Siuda

At the 2026 ISS meeting, we had several opportunities to interact with our chosen seminar text, Stephen Best’s *None Like Us*.¹ We discussed it over multiple sessions, including one I facilitated, as well as a live podcast session focused on the book’s introduction, called “Unfit for History.” In this essay, I share my thoughts around the first section, including Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, where we are encouraged to “think like a work of art.”

Chapter 1 is entitled “My Beautiful Elimination” and largely concerns itself with taking works of visual art and poetry not solely as messages from an artist to an observer, but as examples of ways of thinking that can be applied to Black experience, particularly around the idea of Black history formation. It is not *what* we are thinking when we tell ourselves stories about the past, and it is not the content of historical study which Best is philosophizing about in this chapter, but a sort of deconstruction around *how* we think about the Black past, and a failure to “make the past present”—a recurring phrase that ends up being part of the name of Chapter 2. That the history of Blackness is filled with difficult and frequently violent events creates a “melancholy turn” Best keeps returning to as a frame, described using metaphors of picture frames and glass windows: a frame that in Best’s mind needs to be broken so that

1. Stephen Best, *None Like Us: Blackness, Belonging, Aesthetic Life* (Duke University Press, 2018).

what is within the frame does not remain within. Even in a history defined by endless, meaningless destruction, Best seems to be calling upon readers, as observers of and participants in this history, to do further destruction to it.

What is Best getting at, and what artworks has he chosen to illustrate these points with? He starts by discussing the works of a Ghanaian sculptor, El Anatsui. On his own website, the artist describes himself as creating art out of trash:

El Anatsui uses resources typically discarded such as liquor bottle caps, cassava graters and newspaper printing plates to create sculpture that defies categorisation. His use of these materials reflects his interest in reuse, transformation, and an intrinsic desire to connect to his continent while transcending the limitations of place. His work can interrogate the history of colonialism and draw connections between consumption, waste, and the environment, but at the core is his unique formal language that distinguishes his practice.

Anatsui is well-known for large scale sculptures composed of thousands of folded and crumpled pieces of aluminium bottle caps sourced from local alcohol recycling stations and bound together with copper wire. These intricate works, which can grow to be massive in scale, are luminous and weighty, meticulously fabricated yet malleable. He leaves the installations open and encourages the works to take new forms every time they are installed.²

El Anatsui's work illustrates Best's points in a tangible way. Upon approaching these artworks one is struck by how they

2. From the artist's statement on his own website: <https://elanatsui.art/biography>.

catch the light, how they seem like *priceless* objects, not *useless* ones, and that observers no matter their backgrounds have the same experience encountering them: they first believe the artworks to be made of something shining and valuable, and then, the closer they move toward the forms, observers comprehend that art has been created out of trash: “You feel an impulse to approach the object, drawn in by its shimmer, and as you get closer you experience the frisson of thwarted expectations... [d]istance made a difference in understanding... West African scrap metal resurrected as mural. What was gold now reveals itself to be mere trash.”³

This perceptual journey was the artist’s intention: El Anatsui’s work leads us through this process to think about the oscillation between “gold” and “trash” inherent to experiencing it. “Why am I being invited to see trash as the before and after of the artwork?” Best asks. “Why is trash its simultaneous origin and destination, point of emergence and disappearance, an analepsis and a prolepsis?”⁴ He then draws our attention to the oscillating movement, which he compares to the concept of *gestalt*, in this art as well as in our conceptions of Blackness and Black aesthetic as it relates to the formation of Black history. This is framed in a repeated phrase set in italics: *It’s gold... No, it’s trash. It’s bottle caps... No, it’s artwork*, which Best inserts like a call and response through the rest of the chapter.

Oscillation between what is and what is not, what has happened and what will happen, not two sides of a coin but a perpetual dance or motion between this and that, between gold and trash, in Best’s mind, occurs by or in a frame of some kind. He invokes the concept of *trompe l’oeil*, then inverts it, saying El Anatsui does not want you to mistake his art for a “real” object, but wants you to mistake real objects, in this case gold-colored bottle caps and wire, for shimmering cloth-of-gold. Both uselessness and pricelessness are inherent to this art and cannot be separated, but oscillate between each other: “...while the work invites us to linger between its two

3. Best, *None Like Us*, 29–30.

4. Best, *None Like Us*, 31.

objects of attention, between trash and gold, it cannot itself be reduced to one or the other—what it is (bottle caps) or what it is not (gold). Instead, the artwork must be perceived in terms of the *form* that it takes—that is, as matter striving to ‘look like’ a work of art... an Anatsui complicates what we mean when we say that a work of art is something around which we have *put a frame*.”⁵

Best focuses on this concept of frame or framing: as “a politics” and, following Jonathan Culler in his work *On Deconstruction*, as “decisive for aesthetics.”⁶ He quotes Culler, Stanley Fish, Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, and Walter Benn Michaels on framing, and reminds us that a frame can be a physical object like a picture frame that contains a piece of artwork, but it can also be a technique to capture or aestheticize ways of thinking. “The frame, in this sense, is decisive not only for aesthetics but for politics. Frame is processual. Frame indicates a decision. Frame constitutes a politics.”⁷ Furthermore, Best concludes, the frame itself is what needs to be removed in order to encounter a thing as it is, to achieve a literal history and not a “framed” one.

The idea of finding history not in what has been framed, but within a frame’s discarded remains, or in the destruction of history’s creations, appears in several places in Chapter 1. Significant reference is made to a Paul Klee painting, *Angelus Novus*, itself interpreted with a arresting frame by Walter Benjamin, who saw in Klee’s image “the angel of history” and wrote about it in the “Ninth Thesis” from *Theses on the Philosophy of History*:

A Klee painting named “Angelus Novus” shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe

5. Best, *None Like Us*, 45.

6. Best, *None Like Us*, 45.

7. Best, *None Like Us*, 46.

which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.⁸

In no place does Klee concur with Benjamin's assessment, nor to my knowledge does Klee ever explain the angelic figure he painted into *Angelus Novus* in this way, or in fact, in any way at all. This framing of an "angel of history" is entirely Benjamin's, compelling as it might be. Is history gold, or is it trash? Is it a chain of events, or the wreckage of catastrophe? Or is it both? When looking at the angel of history, is it looking back at you? If we are to think like a work of art, "[w]herever we stand, history holds the place of an absence... our view onto history's 'pile of debris,' which is necessarily blocked by the angel's back."⁹

Like the detritus associated with Benjamin's angel of history, "[t]rash is the before and after of the artwork" in El Anatsui's creations. Best names this as *mistake*, in line with El Anatsui's intentional inversion of the usual *trompe l'oeil* effect. The place *where art is not* also defines *where the art is*—which, ultimately, is nowhere. This is its true beauty:

Confounding the relation of before and after, cause and effect, the work wants you to see that there is beauty in the world, that that beauty has been there all along, and that we are able to see that beauty inherent in the fragments of the material world on account of their being taken out of it and placed in the proper frame. But to the degree to

8. Walter Benjamin, quoted in Best, *None Like Us*, 36.

9. Best, *None Like Us*, 36.

which the work succeeds in getting you to see that its beauty is ubiquitous, that it is actually *unframed* and part of the infinity that is the natural world, the irony is (and this is why this work is the real thing) that it sets the conditions for its own obsolescence, for its ultimate irrelevance. It is beauty itself that, in the final instance, “eats away” at the boundaries of the work and smooths the path toward its integration. Beauty is a force for erasure.¹⁰

As an erasing force, beauty is dangerous beyond measure. Recalling the inscription on Eris’s apple: τῇ καλλίστῃ, (“for the most beautiful”), the “most beautiful” is a harbinger of violence and danger, a creator of catastrophic wreckage.

Best then takes on the artworks of Mark Bradford, a South Central Los Angeles artist who created multiple works consisting of gathered paper scraps he found in the neighborhood and then framing, reframing, and unframing them using various techniques including painting over parts of them, then scratching out paint to excavate portions of their hidden words, to change them into something else. Bradford’s works have an overall effect of effacing. They drill down to other meanings, hidden in the trash of their origins, to find new meanings that are changed or unearthed. This is a tangent on palimpsest and an overlay of earlier layers with later ones, rendering both unintelligible except in how they relate to each other. Thinking like a work of art as well as an historian: is this sort of intentional palimpsest a reflection of the archive, where we are only capable of working with snippets and glimpses, sifting through piles of events and/or catastrophes at the angel of history’s feet, only to find trash?

Or is it gold?

One person’s trash is another person’s treasure, after all.

Following on his discussion of Mark Bradford, Best leaves the visual arts behind and begins to invoke poetry: specifically,

10. Best, *None Like Us*, 49.

Gwendolyn Brooks's 1987 poem, "Boy Breaking Glass."¹¹ Best offers this poem as his answer to those who are afraid he might be suggesting that Black people should let go of history, or even stop having a history, in order to be free of its melancholy. He is not walling off and then reinscribing history like Bradford, nor is he trying to turn trash into gold like El Anatsui. Instead, Best seeks to break the glass: in this case, the glass of the frame that limits Blackness, or diaspora, to a this or a that, or to any perspective that would prevent embracing a beauty that can render "none like us" to exist ever again. As Brooks's boy explains in the poem: *Nobody knew where I was and now I am no longer there.*¹²

The diasporic person is both unknown and thrown into a further unknown, like the double diasporic reality for many Black Americans who are not geographically where they might have been, twice or more removed, or who are psychologically more than once removed from the melancholy of the violent past. Place is not place and past is not past: it oscillates, as the boy describes his creation, or as Vincent Wimbush put it when he mentioned this poem during our podcast discussion, his *invention*: "If not a note, a hole."¹³

Poetry shows the way, because it is a record of failure. "[A] poem can do what it does only to itself"; one cannot "actualize the impulse that gave rise to it without betraying it"¹⁴ So, is embracing a desire for wholeness after diaspora also a betrayal? Or is it only a failure?

Chapter 1 ends with a discussion of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's idea of "beside," as defined in her 2003 work *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*: a third thing that refuses to be binary, a thing that breaks the above or below, the front- or the behind-ness of things. What forces move with, or *beside*, the angel of history? What moves beside the frame? The gold (no, it's trash!)? The palimpsest? The broken glass?

Chapter 2 turns toward a discussion of history and the

11. This discussion begins on page 55 and the poem itself is reproduced in full on the following page.

12. Gwendolyn Brooks, quoted in Best, *None Like Us*, 56.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*, 58.

failure to make the past present. We discussed parts of Chapter 2 more deeply during the podcast session, as it echoes thoughts Best laid out in his introduction: that Black history is “unfit,” and seeking it can only create its destruction. This chapter did not feel as strong to me as Chapter 1, but this could be because the argument here is so dense. It represents a much larger conversation, with multiple perspectives affecting understanding. I suspect that every person who reads Chapter 2 will take something different away from it, and that they might all very well be correct in doing so.

I was deeply struck by the David Lloyd quote on page 65: “The restlessness of the dead stems from the lack of a future fit for them.” Does this mean that the past is, or should be, nonexistent, like Best asks us to consider in Chapter 1? Or does it mean that the rupture of diaspora is a wound that cannot be healed, a present that cannot become past? There is always a danger of conflating catharsis with redemption, thinking that if we wrestle with the past enough it might somehow be redeemed. Yet when discussing the Black past, there is an inability at play: we can neither free ourselves from its violence and melancholy, nor can we redeem those things. There is a *besideness* here, a call to move and to dance, to oscillate in grief and woundedness, to seek a third thing that can neither be continuance of violence nor its erasure, a palimpsest of identity born of the note and the hole. Being un-situated, un-framed, grasping that such a thing is impossible to touch and yet its existence is still somehow felt: it is like a phantom limb, an ache at the heart of diaspora which pulls at those moving through it just as forcefully as it pushes them away.

Best then gives a brief survey of the centering of slavery in Black history, and substantial discourse around the works of Toni Morrison, highlighting distinct differences in angles between two of her books (*Beloved* and *A Mercy*). In *Beloved*, Sethe defies the idea which Best put forth in Chapter 1, that one can somehow let go of the slave past:

The picture is still there, and what's more, if you go there—you who never was there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you.¹⁵

This is not a soft happy ending of healing wounds, but a lurking horror, warning of the persistent aura of *what happened*. All the violence that caused diaspora and created the melancholy world is still there in that terrible place, and it will only harm you more if you try to go back.

This “terrible place” of history is an expression of the traumatization and perpetual re-traumatization affecting Black people, over and over and again and again. The past is not past because it is not over with—and it has never been over with. We are trapped in the frame of the past, which Morrison tells us, “is not a story to pass on,” but yet, we cannot stop passing through it. We remain in this frame trapped by the grief of it, buried in its catastrophic wreckage. “The ‘time of slavery’ is neither to be resigned to nor confused with the past, for the distinction between the past and the present founders on the interminable grief engendered by slavery and its aftermath.”¹⁶ We are stuck in this grief by our inability to mourn it, as Best continues, quoting Hartman again: “Can one mourn what has not yet ceased happening?...then and now coexist; we are coeval with the dead.”

We *are* coeval with the dead, not because of any orientation of the past to the present, but because the dead are not “past” simply by virtue of no longer residing in the living world. In many Indigenous worldviews, from which all Black ancestors come even if experiences differ from either my own or from those of the Egyptian worldviews I study, the dead are neither past nor absent. They are still and always abiding with us in a different form of being: living in a different town, as it were. It is the violence of slavery that demoralizes Black people by separating them from their ancestors, first physically and

15. Toni Morrison, quoted in Best, *None Like Us*, 69.

16. Saidiya Hartman, quoted in Best, *None Like Us*, 71.

then psychically. But this is a frame, and here, again, we do not have to remain trapped in this frame. This is true of all people in diaspora and not only Black people; I observe it in my own diasporic existence on multiple levels and that of the diasporic community of Los Angeles's Copts with whom I have the honor to work.

We do not have to mourn the dead. They are not gone, they have not been lost to us, and they accompany us in diaspora to keep us connected to that place where we were, even if nobody knew where it was and now we are no longer there. We do grieve, but what we grieve is not their loss, since they are not lost. We grieve the rupture and violence that tore them from living and made them ancestors before their time, that sent us into worlds that were not for us, worlds that broke our chosen frames such that they can never be restored, and any new frames we might want or need to build cannot ever be the same.

The dead remain, not to drag us down to be ground under the feet of the angel of history, but to help us escape it. They do not walk behind us, but beside us and with us, in a present that is always present. An ancient Egyptian wisdom text says: "Why worry about yesterday or tomorrow? Yesterday is gone and tomorrow has not yet come." The frame is bounded by the unframed and the beauty lies in breaking the frame: the note, the hole, the overture, and the desecration, shattering like the glass of a breaking window.

Best invokes Benjamin's interpretation of Klee's angel as the angel of history once more, suggesting it wants to "bear witness to the wreckage of the past, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed."¹⁷ And again, out of Best's frame I go. I do not share this view. The angel is indeed witness to the past, but the dead are not asleep, and there is no return to a there that is no longer there. Instead, diaspora thrusts us outward and away, like another angel of yore, this one standing at the gate to the Garden with a flaming sword and waving us away, the message here being: return at your peril. In diaspora we have neither the luxury of grieving yesterday

17. Best, *None Like Us*, 72.

nor being anxious about tomorrow. We are on the run from history this very moment, spreading outward from the cracks we have made beside our ancestors in its glass.

Bibliography

Best, Stephen. *None Like Us: Blackness, Belonging, Aesthetic Life*. Duke University Press, 2018.

Brooks, Gwendolyn. "Boy Breaking Glass." In *Blacks*, edited by Gwendolyn Brooks. Third World Press, 1987. Accessed June 27, 2026. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43322/boy-breaking-glass>.

El Anatsui. "Biography." Accessed June 27, 2026. <https://elanatsui.art/biography>.

Hogs, Potatoes, and Songs...Oh My!: Home and Holding in the Archive

Rachel E. C. Beckley

I. Of a Potato and a Hog: What I Hold

During the ISS 2026 conference, Richard Newton took us to the Gorgas House Museum at the University of Alabama. This museum housed his digital and public humanities project, *Decoding Diaspora*.¹ Richard narrated the project as we entered the first room where rows of whitish-gray plastic 3D-printed objects sat. I stood in the back of the room hoping to not be distracted; my brain has difficulty focusing on words when there is something physical calling my attention, and this room was my kryptonite. Even in the back of the room, however, I found myself captivated by a little 3D-printed blob. As I stared at it, my brain flipped, trying to understand what this blob was. I couldn't wrap my head around it. It seemed ill-formed, with pockmarks all over. I finally realized I could not intellectualize it to render it recognizable. But how else could I know?

So, I reached out, cupped it in my hand, and it suddenly became clear. Next to me, a friend and colleague looked at me holding the thing. Not wanting to interrupt Richard, I tried to contain my feelings of whimsy and discovery as I whispered to her, "It's a potato!" I didn't feel I had fully conveyed my sheer childlike joy to touch an art piece, and only in touching and holding it, had I

1. See <https://gorgashouse.museums.ua.edu/>. More on this project later; however, I encourage the reader to review Newton's "Decoding Diaspora: Scripturalectics of Resilience" in this *Abeng* 7, no. 1 (2026): 12–36.

realized what the object was. Reading the caption, I learned that this potato signified Junius G. Groves, “The Potato King,” who migrated to the Kaw Valley of Kansas.² Holding the plastic potato brought Junius’ work in the real world to life.



Figure 5.1: Image FN-3

<https://decodingdiaspora.org/decoding-diaspora/data>

Groves arrived in the Kaw Valley able to buy land, but he was a farmer. All of his money likely went into the land and supplies,

2. It was only a funny coincidence that I was drawn to a Kansas item, coming from the University of Kansas myself. You can read Rogers' summary and Lee's illustrations of Junius G. Groves on Newton's website under "Preserving Mythic Africa," page FN-3. <https://decodingdiaspora.org/decoding-diaspora/data>, last accessed June 11, 2026. An image of the plastic potato I held is also included on Newton's website, under Curating Mythic Africa, in the second image "The first 3-D objects printed for Decoding Diaspora," <https://decodingdiaspora.org/decoding-diaspora/curating-mythic-africa-1>, last accessed June 11, 2026.

playing the odds to see if he could make a living. He not only made a living, but was so successful that he beat the white Europeans/Americans at their own game. He increased his holdings to 500 acres and, because his potatoes were such a valuable commodity, forced Union Pacific to build a railroad spur to his property. As a result of his success, Groves built a mansion and refused an offer from the railroad to buy his land. On his own, Groves offers a picture of the scripturaletics of resilience. Newton describes this resilience as a “sort of diasporic vaccine against modernity’s pestilence.”³ Putting a finer point on it, this pestilence is “Negrophobic necropolitics” which Richard describes as the “pathological fear and revilement of Black flesh.”⁴ While still working within scripted frameworks (in Groves’ case, cash crop agriculture and capitalism) how are diasporic figures resilient against (or sometimes with) the oppressive systems that hold them, especially those systems that specifically fear Black flesh? Resilient against these necropolitics, Groves did not resist capitalism or cash crop agriculture. He worked to benefit by that very system which deemed him and other Black men anathema, and he did so to incredible success.

Junius Groves does not only have his historical context. He also has the larger context of the comic page itself (pictured above), curated to sit nestled between other stories by Joel Augustus Rogers. Rogers’s *Facts About the Negro*, a series that places African and African-Americans in the center of history rather than its periphery,⁵ did not place Groves randomly on just any page of the series. It is situated with two other summaries of Black men portrayed as beating white Europeans at their own game, using techniques originally meant to exclude them.

The first vignette features the city of Adowa (or Adwa), Ethiopia. Rogers writes that Italian forces were “annihilated” by Emperor Menelik II near Adowa in 1896, serving as the “first great defeat of white by Black” in two centuries. The battle “sent a shiver”

3. See Newton, “Decoding Diaspora,” 27.

4. Ibid.

5. More on *Facts About the Negro* below; or read Newton, “Decoding Diaspora,” 16ff., 23.

through imperialist Europe. In the comic page's third vignette, Rogers details how William I of Germany appointed Claudio Jose Brindis de Salas, the Cuban-born "King of the Octaves," as "Court Violinis" (sic) after he beat out other European contestants at a Paris competition.

The entire page stands as witness to Black men who demonstrated they were not only the equal of white Europeans or Americans, but could in fact beat them at their own games—war, agriculture, or the violin. Junius Groves, Emperor Menelik II, and de Salas all represent Richard's scripturaletics of resilience by persevering despite Negrophobic necropolitics. But specifically, they are resilient against this system of oppression by playing the white man's game and then succeeding in that game originally constructed to exclude them.⁶

For now, I will put down the potato and pick up with another story.

*** ***

One September afternoon in 1895, police chased Hog Woodruff, a Black⁷ resident of the notorious East Bottoms in Lawrence, Kansas. The journalist described the scene like a modern-day car chase: over fences and under bushes Hog jumped and scrambled, always one step ahead of the police. At one point during the chase, the journalist reports that Hog looked back and yelled at the police: "I'm a wolf!

6. I am not using the language of gameplay randomly. I mean to point towards Vincent Wimbush's use of masquerade. I recommend the reader look to Wimbush's curated exhibit at Pitts Theological Library at Emory University, online here: <https://digital.pitts.emory.edu/s/masquerade/page/intro>, last accessed June 15, 2026, as well as his edited volume *Masquerade: Scripturalizing Modernities Through Black Flesh* (Lexington Books, 2023).

7. In a variety of other newspaper articles Milton is called "colored," and named alternatively "Hog," "Hogg," or "Rain-in-the-Face." The latter name indicates a potential Indigenous heritage as well as African American heritage (Rain-in-the-Face as a name was not original to Hog. Rain-in-the-Face was also an (in)famous Sioux chief discussed several times in the Lawrence newspapers as a confidant of Sitting Bull, a warrior in the Battle at Rosebud and the killer of George Armstrong Custer. Whether these things are "actually true" or not, they were widely publicized in the Lawrence newspapers). Mixed Indigenous and African American heritage also seems likely, because Milton was taken to court by the city of Lawrence for "selling liquor to the Indians," indicating he had close connections with people from the Indigenous community. His real name was Milton Woodruff. For a visual, see my Storymap of Milton Woodruff at <https://storymap.knightlab.com/edit/?id=milton-hog-woodruff>.

You better look out for me!” Successful in eluding capture, Hog disappeared into the seedy underbelly of the East Bottoms.⁸ After the chase, Hog hid, or more accurately was hidden, by the denizens of the East Bottoms. Nevertheless, a few days later, he was brought to the police station, tied up in a clothesline by his own people, as he barked: “It took three men to take me in!”

I took Hog’s challenge to the police seriously. I did look out for him. His real name was Milton, but he proved even more evasive in the archives than on the well-trodden streets of the East Bottoms. I, too, chased Milton; I’ve chased him through newspaper police reports and meager civil case dockets, but Milton has eluded me (although, I admit, I haven’t tried a clothesline). Because he ran away and proved elusive when he did so, Milton can only be read as Hog, a Black-fleshed criminal of Lawrence. Milton did not *want* to be found—by police, by his own people, or, it seems, by me. I wish he did want to be found, though, because he was exactly what I was looking for.

For my current project, I am tracking abject populations across time, using Lawrence, Kansas as a case study and employing both archival and ethnographic methods. These “abject populations” refers to a group of people who have been called many different words throughout the years. In the 1880s, society called them “paupers,” “transients,” or “rounders,” while in the 1930s, it was “bum” and “shanty-town dweller.” Later, in the 1980s, our society labelled them “welfare queens,” and today, they are called “panhandlers” or “homeless” or “chronically encamped.”⁹ Collectively, throughout time, this changing population broadly represents a group accusingly called the “unworthy poor.” They are community members who engage in “underground economies”—a scholarly way of referring to activity society calls “crime.” Marx refers to them as the *lumpenproletariat* or the underclass, sometimes translated as riff-

8. “Police Report,” *Lawrence Daily Journal*, September 4, 1895.

9. If the reader is unfamiliar with the term “chronically encamped,” it refers to a subset of unhoused people who camp for an extended period of time in tents or makeshift structures in specific places. These are often called “homeless camps.” One of the largest and most famous encampments in the United States is Skid Row in Los Angeles, spanning more than 50 city blocks.

raff.¹⁰ I wanted to uncover Hog because he perfectly represented these abject populations. He was a criminal of Lawrence who freely engaged in selling illegal liquor. Sometimes without an official house, Hog seemed to find places to spend the night, popping up throughout the East Bottoms.¹¹

In researching the changing population of transients, rounders, the unhoused, and the chronically encamped through time, I postulate the key feature holding them together is not whether or not they actually had a house or settled in a given area. It is that they were/are always defined as settling *wrongly*. In a society in which people participate in structured and predictable performance scripts, there are those who decontextualize and recontextualize¹² these performances to such an extent that they are no longer recognizable by the rest of society. For a chronically encamped person, “home” is recontextualized as a tent. “Settling” becomes camping, and “work” becomes participation in informal or underground economies. Those who chronically do this perform settlement so *wrongly* that they become anathema; that is, recontextualizing living and settling in a way society cannot follow. This group exists only as a monstrous opposite to “proper” settlement, and that monstrosity comes laden with assumed moral characteristics.

In the case of unhoused and especially encamped populations, our society uses predictable scripts to talk about them. These scripts come in some main types, two of which are immoral and medical. The ethnographer Theresa Gowan refers to this as “sin-talk” and “sick-talk.” Sin-talk understands houselessness as a “moral offense,” calling for the “twin strategies of exclusion and punishment,” while sick-talk renders houselessness as “pathology” that demands “treatment.” These “discursive logics,” Gowan explains,

10. Santana Khanikar, “Lumpenproletariat,” *The Sage Encyclopedia of World Poverty*, edited by Mehmet A. Odekon (SAGE Publications, 2015). Frantz Fanon describes, but also romanticizes, the lumpen class by referring to them as the most important thrust of revolutionary movements: Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, 2021), 58–59.

11. Hog appears as the head of household in one census I could find; however, this research is ongoing.

12. Charles Briggs and Richard Bauman, “Genre, Intertextuality, and Power,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 2, no. 2 (1992): 148.

“represent a structure of meaning and intention, a magnetic force that lends coherence, authority, and legitimacy to everyday speech and practices...”¹³ Unhoused people are on the one hand deemed perpetually unrighteous. Their lack of standard housing is equated to a criminal or immoral life filled with vice or just plain laziness. On the other hand, our society also uses heavily medicalized language to refer to unhoused people, assuming they must be addicts or diseased. As one of my ethnographic interlocutors told me as two people hurried away from him: “they’re afraid they’ll catch the homeless.”¹⁴

In my digital humanities mapping project, Unsettled Lawrence,¹⁵ I mapped language used to describe different areas of Lawrence’s East Bottoms, as well as the people who settled there. It was generally a place of precarious housing equivalent to encampment today,¹⁶ and almost entirely populated with Black folks escaping enslavement and subsequent domestic terrorism in the South. After mapping more than fifty individual physical spaces referenced in newspapers, the language of sin and sickness, described by Gowan, became immediately apparent. The East Bottoms was not simply an area of poverty. It was an area reporters assumed was filled with wanton vice and crime, where people wallowed in disease and filth. This language continues to present day with media that more readily assume vice and crime in areas of unhoused encampment. If people cannot settle “properly,” it must be because they cannot live “properly.”

As a result, this community is always read as immoral and slovenly, even when they demonstrate the exact opposite. This is what I mean when I claim that they represent a monstrous Other. As discourses swirl *about* this group (and never *by* them), they are only read as deviant. Following Spivak, who claims that there is

13. Teresa Gowan, *Hobos, Hustlers, and Backsliders* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xxi and 28–29. Importantly, Gowan also introduces a third discourse of “system-talk,” but for the purposes of this article, I will only focus on sin- and sick-talk.

14. Shane [last name withheld for anonymity purposes], “Catching Homeless,” interviewed by Rachel E. C. Beckley, August, 19, 2025.

15. Unsettledlawrence.org.

16. Many of the houses there were referred to as “shacks,” “tents,” and “hovels.”

no unrepresented or uninterpreted view of the subaltern “...whose identity is its difference,”¹⁷ this means that the encamped unhoused population, even if it might try to represent itself, is always read as monstrous. The scripts our society uses *make* them that way.

In beginning this project of mapping discourse, however, it was not enough to locate this group of people in the historical archive. I wanted and needed current examples in order to better understand the behavior of individuals in the past. In 2022, I began an oral history project that would later become an ethnography of current encamped populations in Lawrence. This work dramatically changed the way I viewed both the archive and the work I had done.

II. Of Surveys and Songs: Learning to Hold

Vignette 1

In November 2023, the new Director for Lawrence, Kansas’s Homeless Solutions Division gathered the encamped community to take a survey. The purpose was to make the population *legible* to government workers, as well as to gauge interest in what would become the pallet shelter that now sits near the edge of the city limits on North Michigan Street.¹⁸ In hearing about this survey, I was haunted by the image of Hog bound in a clothesline, forced to be made legible even when he tried to hide. Several of my storytellers invited me to accompany them as they filled out the questionnaire.

As my storytellers sat face-to-face with this document, they began to react: some laughed, some earnestly tried to respond to the questions, even when they couldn’t make sense of them, and some were derisive and loud, throwing the paper back in the faces of the volunteers.

The questions on the document used language which the community never used for itself, and the questionnaire did not make clear how the information would be used. Its wording was unclear,

17. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Macmillan, 1988), 27.

18. For more information see: <https://www.lawrenceshelter.org/thevillage>.

and even obtuse; for example, one question posed “What was your prior income?” One responder looked at me curiously after reading this question. “At what time?” he asked and scoffed. This question did two things: first, it inappropriately linked a lack of work with houselessness; second, it assumed legal work was the only way to draw an income. This particular responder worked a legal job off and on continuously whether housed or unhoused, and had a range of income, especially when he “hustled” on the side. At the time of this questionnaire, he was working an informal job that yielded varying amounts of income.

Other people read the questions out loud to themselves. Occasionally someone would look at me and say, “What does this mean?” At one point, one of my storytellers read another question out loud to me: “What are you currently doing?” it asked.

“What the fuck does that mean?” they asked me. Feeling defensive, they then assured me, “I’m doing shit!”

One important question asked responders to list their barriers to housing. Another responder looked up from the sheet and asked: “What is a ‘barrier to housing?’” then replied to their own question, “I don’t have any barriers!” offended that the question assumed anything about them.

“How many wheels do you have?” the survey went on to ask. This question intended for responders to indicate if they had access to “wheels,” that is, their own transportation. But the usage of this term was clearly not one responders easily understood. One of the responders laughed and said to me, “I have six wheels! Four on the bus and two on the bike!” and proceeded to write a big “6” as their answer.

As I left with one of my interlocutors, I saw him turn in his survey to one of the officials. The official looked at the document and then said, genuinely moved, “I finally found out your real name!” After we walked out, I asked my him: “Was that actually your real name you put on the sheet?”

“Fuck, no,” was the answer. “I’m not gonna put my real name

on that paper. You got to earn my real name. I'm not gonna just give it." This storyteller remained anonymous.

The city hoped to gain useful data regarding unhoused, encamped people. Instead, community members responded with obfuscation, fake names, and jokes. The city got a group of people who refused to be read.

Vignette 2

Early in the morning one October in 2024, the city came to bulldoze the Amtrak



encampment, setting up orange cones and yellow tape. People pulled the last of their wagons out of the woods, loaded with any items they could quickly grab or pack.

Eventually, everyone was removed from the camp, and a handful of us stood on the other side of the tracks.

At that moment, Vee began to walk the railroad tracks, just on the other side of the cones and police tape. Her undulating voice rose in the cold air, singing in her mother's Potawatomi language. I froze and then began to rummage in my bag for anything that could record sound. This *had* to be documented. After all, wasn't that why I was there as an historian and ethnographer: to force ephemeral things to be visible? No, I could not let Vee's song just dissipate as random sound into the chilly morning wind. To do so would make me complicit in the act of erasure that was going on around me. I felt feverish (perhaps with archive fever!).

No one else around me moved as they listened, and I felt suddenly silly that I was trying to find something to document the

moment. This group's entire community was about to be bulldozed. Nothing would be left of what they had built over the past five years or longer; the Amtrak encampment is a very old camp in Lawrence with on-and-off campers in the area dating as far back as the 1880s. This particular iteration of the camp was about five years old. The Amtrak community had told me this erasure would happen, and now, here we were. Was there any better homage to what was going on than a song that would reverberate through the air and then disappear? Was there a better image to represent Vee than the one above, which has only the tracks and the cones—and no Vee at all. To actually take a picture of her as she sang would have misinterpreted the situation, forcing her to remain even as she was being thrown out.

III. Who we Hold

IIIa. Diaspora and Home

As is the case for many of us when we work on long-term projects, my thoughts changed significantly over time, especially the time that passed between reading about Hog's chase and hearing Vee's song. The ISS 2026 conference gave me the opportunity to deeply reflect on these changes. The conference encouraged us to think about diaspora, framed by Richard Newton's Decoding Diaspora museum exhibit and Stephen Best's book *None Like Us*.

Newton's Decoding Diaspora project, as well as his article in this issue of *The Abeng*, contemplates diaspora by first considering "home"—past, present, and future. In the present, the diaspora dweller thinks back on the home they were forced to leave while trying to create a new home in a new place where, one day, they (or their children) will be from.

Decoding Diaspora is based on Newton's family's scrapbook of journalist Joel Augustus Rogers' *Facts About the Negro*. This widely-published newspaper column with comic-style illustrations by Ahmed Samuel Milai and George Lee centered African perspectives

and people throughout world history. In essence, Rogers constructs a diaspora that is both real, in the historical sense, and imagined. *Facts About the Negro* forges a living past that, as Newton states, "...helped people, my grandmother's kin, work through disinformation and disorientation about the place of their Black flesh in some empire's new world."¹⁹ This brings us back to Newton's scripturaletics of resilience. Rogers' work not only contains stories of resilience in an oppressive system, but also enabled Newton's family to be resilient in the face of Negrophobic necropolitics.

While *Decoding Diaspora* examines Rogers' (and the onlooker's) view of the Black Diaspora specifically, I could not help but make parallels to encamped populations generally.²⁰ While not a diasporic population in the traditional or scholarly sense, they are a population that is constantly uprooted as a result of iterative trauma. My use of "uprootedness" intentionally evokes Richard Newton's book *Identifying Roots*, in which he argues that diaspora is a result of uprooting (removal from the place called "home"), rerooting (going to a new location), and finally rootinizing (identifying as from the rooted place).²¹ My group of storytellers in the unhoused encamped community of Lawrence are both at home (by no means the transients or "bums" of the 1930s, the majority of these encamped people have lived in their community for more than a decade) and yet never at home, because they are uprooted from public social spaces as well as bulldozed from their camps. They must then set down new roots and routinize their lives in new spaces. One set of my interlocutors has gone through this process no less than eleven times in the span of four months, for example. My ethnographic interlocutors talk about places they are from, where they felt most at home, and make-believe where they hope to be later. They also use methods of resilience in order to face oppressive systems.

How we make-believe (and how make-believing makes *us*) is

19. Newton, "Decoding Diaspora," 22.

20. While not necessarily part of the Black Diaspora, it is crucial to note that people of color are overly represented in encamped and unhoused communities.

21. Richard Newton, *Identifying Roots: Alex Haley and the Anthropology of Scriptures* (Equinox, 2020).

an act of scripturalizing. We use predictable scripts laden with power and social norms to tell stories about who we are and where we come from. Anything outside those scripts cannot be read/interpreted—such things are anathema, just as encamped individuals can never be considered housed or settled but instead represent a monstrous Other to settlement. Rogers's work, which operates within and without these scripts, does not always compute²² (for traditional historians) either. For example, his maps are so general, they disrupt the concept of a geographic Black diaspora. Where is diaspora? Apparently, to Rogers, it is everywhere. Newton's mapping shows the variety of places which Rogers references. From Norway to Japan to Brazil,²³ Rogers's diaspora is expansive rather than restrictive. For example, he includes the Olmec in modern day Mexico, as well as Tirhaquah, King of Egypt in 670BC, and the Buddha.²⁴ Blackness, as we understand it, is a modern invention coming long after any of these particular figures historically lived.

In my vignettes above, my storytellers reflect on home and the stories they want to tell. In response to the survey, they made-believe quite a bit: a name, how many "wheels" they had, what work means to them. In this case, the city had a clear script they expected the unhoused, encamped population to follow that included discussing systematic barriers to housing, work, and transportation. This is not to say there are no systemic barriers, of course. But when asked, this group rejected that script and substituted their own. They hid, contrived, and made jokes in order to break the script assigned to them through the questions.

Vee's song also placed her at home. She remembered going to pow-wows in her youth, dancing, camping, and making tea. Part of the Potawatomi Nation who were forcibly and violently moved by the U.S. government from the Great Lakes region to just outside what is now called Topeka, Kansas, Vee found her home in the song she sang. That song challenged the bulldozers, placed her at home,

22. Or, using Newton's focus on (de)coding, cannot *compute* as housed or settled.

23. This is in reference to "disruptive cartography," Newton, "Decoding Diaspora," 28.

24. This is in reference to "strategic anachronism," Newton, "Decoding Diaspora," 29.

and also indicated her future, even though at that moment Vee was completely unsure where the future would take her.

IIIb. Best: Not Speaking to Say Something

In chapters 3 and 4 of Part II in *None Like Us*, Stephen Best urges the historian to consider how *recovery* of the diaspora elides into the *redemption* of diasporic peoples. As historians uncover and excavate hidden histories, especially of diasporic populations who have long been oppressed under colonial systems, they often fall into the trap of interpreting past peoples as binaries: either victims of oppressive systems or valorous rebels fighting the good fight against those systems. The enslaved person can only be read as victimized or valorized; they are imprisoned in their behavior so that any alternative action cannot compute. Best's provocative point is that current constructions of Blackness are in fact built upon these fabrications.²⁵

To give examples of how diasporic people eschew the desire of the historian to make them have *meaning* (either as victims or rebels, but always to "recover" them in some way, as if they had ever been lost) Best proceeds to focus on those "...figures who resist our attempts to restore them to wholeness, who resist our projects of historical recovery..."²⁶ Using the suicide of an enslaved person as an extreme example of self-silencing or refusing to be read, Best asks what right we have to forcibly make someone speak when they have purposefully silenced themselves, and urges historians to "...hold in abeyance the impulse to demystify [those who have self-silenced]."²⁷

In reading Best and viewing Newton's museum curation, I was deeply struck by the questions both brought up. With my story of Hog, for instance, I was using him as a specific example of a group of people: in other words, I viewed him as a *what*, rather than a *who*, that I was looking for. The same is true for the city of Lawrence using a survey to quantitatively capture a community of people they

25. Best, *None Like Us: Blackness, Aesthetics, Belonging* (Duke University Press, 2018), 87.

26. Best, *None Like Us*, 87.

27. Best, *None Like Us*, 95.

thought they already knew. But that group of people itself—these abject populations or the *lumpen* class—is make-believe. They are a constructed category which I went into the archive to uncover and (likely, if I am honest with myself) to redeem. But Hog ran away. Could I “hold in abeyance the impulse to demystify” him? Could the city of Lawrence live in messy uncertainty about this community? Certainly not! At least for Hog, I felt I owed it to him, and to others who have been written out of our history books, to uncover him.

Since leaving Hog alone was not an option, how could I uncover him? In searching this question out, I went to another methodological field entirely, beginning to create my own ethnographic archive of materials. There, I found more avenues of self-silencing: refusing to speak, because sometimes staying silent is the only way to be heard. Since this population lives on the periphery of society, knowing that they are defined as diseased and morally impaired, they will, at times, make themselves unreadable and invisible like Hog. Part of this choice has to do with exhaustion; people tire of trying to make themselves be seen and understood. The work of decontextualization and recontextualization is difficult. My storytellers who live encamped lives must constantly demonstrate to those reading them that they are regular people, citizens of Lawrence, Kansas, just like the onlooker. Sometimes, they tire of it. At that point, they often choose to make themselves unreadable and silent. They recognize that the only way to truly speak (that is, to not be represented, rendered, or constructed as the subaltern) is in fact to say nothing.

Best’s warnings to not succumb to archival fever and Newton’s haunting question of “who are your kin?” are both more difficult to deal with outside of a traditional historical archive. When the person you are academically writing about can look you in the eye; when you can hug them; when they can read your work and disapprove; and when you can see the trauma around them, it is much harder to succumb to archival hubris. In other words, when you hold people close as people, feeling their edges and contours, it becomes suddenly

clear who they are in all their muddy complexity. I am not looking for abject populations generally. I have found people. Once you talk with them and learn from them, you can no longer view them as objects to be excavated. In forcing legibility, we *are* feverish in trying to find archival meaning; the quest to *make meaning* is an obsession among historians and others who delve into the archive. Indeed, what harm do we do when we force the archival text to give up its dead? Is the wound we create of trying to make some meaning out of absence worse than the scar of its absence? What of people like Hog who contest their own recontextualization? Do we do more damage to him and his memory if we tie him, legible, in a clothesline and deliver him to the very surveillance from which he fled?

Where do we go from here? What is the point of recognizing that we must switch from a *what* we study to a *who* we study? And how do we just leave certain past people in the dark? Is it not better to uncover them? Best asks us to, perhaps, stop trying so hard and stop being so melodramatic. A fine critique; but I believe more is needed.

Specifically, to do what Best and Newton ask of us also requires a different way of writing and reading and describing. It also requires us to reconsider the *who* we are holding. When I held the potato and recognized it for what it was, it was still grayish-white plastic. *It* was not the potato. It evoked a potato. The people we find in the archives (whether traditional or ethnographic archives) do not “exist.” We still construct them and make-believe them. That is not to say we can’t do our jobs. It is that we must do them mindfully, holding the person (whether past or present) close and recognizing that we are always make-believing them in the first place.

Bibliography

Best, Stephen. *None Like Us: Blackness, Belonging, Aesthetic Life*. Duke University Press, 2018.

Briggs, Charles, and Richard Bauman. "Genre, Intertextuality, and Power." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 2, no. 2 (1992): 131–172.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Revised sixtieth anniversary edition. Grove Press, 2021.

Gowan, Teresa. *Hobos, Hustlers, and Backsliders: Homeless in San Francisco*. University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Newton, Richard, "Decoding Diaspora: Scripturalectics of Resilience." *The Abeng: A Journal of Transdisciplinary Criticism* 7, no. 1 (2026): 12–36.

Newton, Richard. *Identifying Roots: Alex Haley and the Anthropology of Scriptures*. Equinox, 2020.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Macmillan, 1988.

Wimbush, Vincent. *Masquerade: Scripturalizing Modernities Through Black Flesh*. Lexington Books, 2023.

Student Observations

Reflections on Diaspora, Identity, and Public Theology

Naiomi Gonzalez

Phillips Theological Seminary

My academic and vocational interests lie in public theology and pushing back against the white Christian nationalist rhetoric and ideology that dominate public discussions of theology and Christianity in the United States. Before the Institute for Signifying Scriptures (ISS) 2026 Meeting in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, my understanding of public theology was simplistic: translate complex academic theological ideas into an engaging format for as wide an audience as possible. Not an easy feat by any means, but relatively straightforward. Moreover, I assumed the ISS seminar would have very little impact on my interests in public theology. For some reason, I thought theologians had very little use for examining scripture, outside of referencing the biblical text. Instead, the ISS Annual Meeting prompted me to recognize that public theology needs to engage scripture (in its broadest sense), history, and processes of identity formation, especially when exploring and critiquing white Christian nationalism.

As a student of Christian theology, my understanding of what constituted scripture was extremely narrow. I understood scripture as being tied to the biblical text, with perhaps some references to tradition and rituals to include Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy. However, ISS argues that scripture also includes how communities use texts and traditions to create meaning, transmit knowledge, and

contest authority and power.¹ Meaning that as someone who wants to engage in public theology, I will, of course, need to engage in conversation and debate over interpretation and the socio-historical context of the biblical text, but doing so is not enough. ISS forced me to question what other “scriptures” I should consider at play, either explicitly or implicitly. For instance, white Christian nationalism has a specific and narrow understanding of Christianity that endorses white supremacy, rigid and sexist gender norms, and seeks to limit women’s and LGBTQ+ rights. Christian nationalism also seeks to dismantle the separation of church and state. My focus before ISS was simply on how Christian nationalists incorrectly interpret the biblical text through their narrow hermeneutical lens: an important, but insufficient task. What I learned at the ISS seminar encourages me now to ask: what *other* scriptures do Christian nationalists embrace, and how have these scriptures been used to further their racist and violent aims? Christian nationalists do not just interpret the biblical text in isolation but also in conjunction with their understanding of the United States Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and alongside right-wing texts held in high esteem, such as *The Turner Diaries*. In Christian nationalism, whiteness is arguably the defining feature that undergirds their understanding of Christianity and nationalism, and that in turn influences the scriptures they hold as sacred.

Moreover, the seminar also forced me to ask questions about the scriptures used by those of us who are pushing back against white Christian nationalism. Most of the communities where I engage in public theology are predominantly white, highly educated Christian spaces. These spaces identify as “progressive” politically and theologically, though “progressive” is a contested term. They reject the blatant racism, sexism, and homophobia/transphobia of Christian nationalism. And yet, their scriptures still center predominantly white male voices. These spaces will refer to the “major” voices in

1. Vincent L. Wimbush describes “Scriptures” as “shorthand for the phenomena and dynamics, the rituals and practices, and the fraught problematics of and contestations around the politics of language and knowledge.” Vincent L. Wimbush, “Introduction: Scriptures and Transgression,” in *Refractions of the Scriptural: Critical Orientation as Transgression* (Routledge, 2016), 2.

white Christian theology, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, and Paul Tillich. Other theologians, especially Black and brown theologians, are only mentioned in passing. And even then, the mentions are limited to perhaps James Cone and Gustavo Gutiérrez. In these progressive spaces, whiteness remains a defining feature of how they understand Christianity and its relationship to the state; however, they present their understanding of whiteness as being in stark contrast to that of Christian nationalists. Although their defining feature of whiteness is allegedly more self-aware and benevolent, it is still centered around the notion that those with white skin have the most to contribute to conversations regarding Christianity and politics.

Before I attended the ISS seminar, I simply would have stated that these white progressive public theology spaces need to add a few more Black and brown voices to decenter whiteness. However, the discussions at the meeting, specifically around diaspora in conjunction with Stephen Best's text *None Like Us: Blackness, Belonging, Aesthetic Life*, prompted me to explore how identities are formed and maintained within communities and to reject the assumption that identities are fixed. Instead, communities have to continually negotiate belonging, memory, and difference. This, of course, problematizes my earlier assumption that the way progressive theology can decenter whiteness and combat white Christian nationalism is by simply adding more marginalized voices and continuing as normal. Instead, progressive public theologians, including myself, must ask questions about identity formation, whose histories and voices are being centered, and what scriptures are being used to reinforce a community's understanding of itself.

Bibliography

- Best, Stephen. *None Like Us: Blackness, Belonging, Aesthetic Life*. Duke University Press, 2018.
- Wimbush, Vincent L. "Introduction: Scriptures and Transgression." In *Refractions of the Scriptural: Critical Orientation as Transgression*, edited by Vincent L. Wimbush. Routledge, 2016.

Financial Trauma as Spiritual Rupture: Reflections from the Institute for Signifying Scriptures 2026

Ray'Chel Wilson

Phillips Theological Seminary

What we determine is scripture, what we decide is sacred, what we choose to pay attention to...these are never neutral choices; they are acts of power. At the Institute for Signifying Scriptures, scholars gather to do the heavy lifting of examining how this “scripturalization” functions: not just as a religious term, but as a site of historical erasure and cultural reformation. As a Certified Financial Therapist and seminarian operating at the intersection of body and institution, I came to the Tuscaloosa meeting on “diaspora” to see how my praxis might sit within this collective. I found that my study of individual and intergenerational financial trauma was not separate from the inquiry of the room. Rather, for me, it was an investigation into the material scripture: the systems of extraction that codify survival as our only legacy.

At the Institute for Signifying Scriptures conference in Tuscaloosa, scholars gathered to examine exactly that: what makes something sacred, who gets to decide, and what that decision costs. The conference’s inquiry into “diaspora,” a term often defined by forced displacement and the scattering of peoples, demands that we also account for what is lost in that movement: the economic lineage of the people themselves. If diaspora is the physical and cultural scattering of a community, then my work explores the financial scattering that follows. When people are displaced, they

are not only separated from land; they are often severed from their knowledge of ancestral methods to achieve economic wellbeing.¹ By engaging with ISS's interrogation of sacredness and scripture, I am asking us to recognize that the "diaspora" is not just a geographic state; it is an economic condition, where survival is prioritized over the preservation of intergenerational stability. Thus, walking into the conference, I kept returning to a single line from the end of Zora Neale Hurston's *Barracoon*: "He wanted to work in his garden or fix his fences. He couldn't be bothered. The present was too urgent to let the past intrude."²

Cudjo Lewis (born Oluale Kossola), one of the last documented persons transported to the United States mainland as human cargo of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, couldn't tend to history. Survival demanded his entire attention. But here's what struck me: Hurston didn't let this stand as mere tragedy. She spent time with him: not rushing past his refusal, not erasing the legitimacy of his need to stay present. She spent her time talking to Cudjo, trying to figure out the answers. That methodological patience, that refusal to sanitize complexity, was present at ISS, too. That patience felt like the most womanist thing happening at a conference in the middle of the Deep South.³

The ISS conference itself was doing what Zora Neale Hurston modeled. Religious studies scholars, literary critics, historians, theologians weren't dropping silos of expertise down on Hurston's book. Rather than merely applying our siloed expertise to Hurston's work, we sat in the constructive tension of our transdisciplinary collective for days. We held the space between "diaspora" and "scripturalization," defined as the power to codify specific narratives into "sacred" or "authoritative" truths, allowing

1. These ancestral methods include communal practices such as susu circles and other forms of cooperative, trust-based wealth building that have long sustained marginalized communities.

2. Zora Neale Hurston, *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo,"* narrated by Robin Miles (HarperAudio, 2018), audiobook, chapter 12 ("Alone," the final chapter), at 5:15–5:30.

3. This disciplinary multiplicity, bringing together religious studies, literary criticism, historical analysis, and lived testimony, mirrors the integrative approach required for financial justice work to move beyond siloed expertise.

the narratives to interrogate one another without rushing to simple answers. As I listened and occasionally offered insights from my own praxis, it became clear that this friction was not a distraction, but the method for new understanding itself. And in that space, I heard the problem I've been naming in my work on financial trauma, which is the physiological reaction to financial experiences of distress from birth through adulthood.

Listen to what Hurston's quote is actually describing: a person so trapped in survival that they can't easily tend to their own history. That's not laziness or apathy. That's institutional design meeting a nervous system under chronic stress, and it is what happens in communities where redlining kept homeownership from the grandparents of today's African Americans, where wage theft compounds each generation, where predatory lending feels like the only door to capital.⁴ The present becomes too urgent. The capacity to sit with the past diminishes when you're living with an allostatic load: the accumulated wear of systemic extraction that can delay awareness and action.⁵ This is what I call intergenerational financial trauma. The way that the forced economic exclusion of ancestors of African-Americans gets encoded (scripturalized) in our present nervous systems, our money scripts, our survival strategies. A single parent working two jobs often has difficulty accessing the ancestral knowledge of how their people built community wealth before systems engineered extraction. Thus, survival is fragmentation.

Intergenerational loneliness and intergenerational financial trauma are the same wound, expressed in two registers. One is spiritual: the ache of disconnection, the abandonment of ancestral

4. Darity and Mullen (2020) document that the median white family holds nearly eight times the wealth of the median Black family, a gap traceable directly to slavery, redlining, and ongoing wage theft. See also McKenzie (2023) on the cyclical and cumulative nature of financial trauma in marginalized communities.

5. See, e.g., K. F. Kirk et al., "Associations Between Mental Health and Social Needs Among Black Patients in Primary Care Settings," *Journal of Primary Care & Community Health* (2025); Marcia Elizabeth Ifeoma Uddoh, "Moderation of financial stress and cardiovascular disease risk in Black Catholics: A social-ecological pathway utilizing latent class and structural equation analyses," *PLOS Mental Health* 2, no. 6 (2025): e0000047; H. Zare et al., "Income Inequality, Gender Disparities, and Ethnic Differences: Investigating Allostatic Load in American Adults," *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities* 12, no. 3 (June 2025): 1967–1979.

wisdom, the loss of community healing practices. One is material: the encoded survival strategies, the nervous system activation, the institutional extraction. Both are real. Both are harmful. And both are what happens when the present becomes so urgent that the past must be erased.

My research at Phillips Theological Seminary examines how financial trauma emerges at the intersection of individual nervous systems and institutional extraction. I focus on first-generation wealth builders and communities experiencing intergenerational poverty, those for whom survival-based financial behaviors are not pathology, but intelligent responses to systemic exclusion.⁶ When I engaged in research on faith-based resilience in the Carolinas with Duke University's Nicholas Institute, this topic became real: a family facing extreme heat turns up their air conditioning to survive the night. The electricity bill spikes. The institution extracts. The person feels the hopelessness of that extraction. That moment. That bill. That feeling. That's institutional financial trauma happening in real time. It's not separate from the individual's nervous system. It's the institution's violence meeting the body.

My economic justice research showed something quiet but crucial: congregations are already witnessing and interrupting this dual trauma. They're bundling care in the forms of food, cooling, and listening in spaces that know how to tend to both the spiritual and material dimensions of survival. When I design frameworks for financial healing, secular interventions rarely account for this. They teach budgeting like it's neutral. They ignore that financial behavior is spiritual inheritance, and that institutional extraction keeps happening.

The individual-institutional lens matters because it names the reality: you can't heal a person's relationship with intergenerational trauma without addressing the systems harming both their assets

6. This individual-institutional interaction lens recognizes that financial trauma cannot be addressed through individual financial literacy alone, nor through institutional policy change that ignores the embodied, nervous-system impact of economic violence. Both dimensions must be held simultaneously, which is why congregations and faith-based approaches are essential—they already practice this integration.

and their ancestors. Whether we're talking about ancestors (the spiritual and relational inheritance) or accounts (the material wealth that was stolen or never accumulated), both have been systematically harmed. As the discussions during ISS stressed, the disciplines have to come together. Religious studies scholars interrogating scripture, historians documenting erasure, literary critics sitting with complexity. Congregations in the Nicholas Institute study already understand this. They know that food, listening, and prayer all matter and they know care is relational. What they need is partnership with practitioners who understand financial trauma specifically: people who are trained to recognize how institutional extraction shows up in the nervous system, how inherited money stories shape survival, how shame becomes encoded in the body, and how this impacts learned helplessness. Together, congregations and financial therapy practitioners can address the full injury of simultaneous spiritual amputation and material extraction. This isn't an add-on. It's what genuine financial justice looks like.

Theology needs political economy. History needs the lived witness of embodied communities. Literary analysis needs spiritual practice. Financial justice work needs to sit with faith leaders: people who already know how to keep folks present to both survival and meaning, to both individual dignity and institutional accountability. To engage with "scripture" in this context is to recognize that it is not merely a static text, but an active authoritative force. When I speak of the "scriptures of extraction," I am referring to those systemic mandates that codify marginalization as an inevitable reality, effectively erasing our histories to serve the present crisis. Conversely, to "scripturalize" our own narratives is an act of radical reclamation. It is the process of authorizing our lived experiences of survival, communal care, and ancestral wisdom as the true, sacred bedroom of our existence. This is not merely swapping one text for another, but constructing a dovetail joint between our material lives and our spiritual heritage, building frameworks where financial flourishing and dignity are no longer mutually exclusive, but are

instead the central tenets of our collective liberation.

Bibliography

Darity, William A., Jr., and A. Kirsten Mullen. *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*. University of North Carolina Press, 2020.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo."* Narrated by Robin Miles. HarperAudio, 2018. Audiobook, 3 hr., 50 min.

Kirk, K. F., S. Budd, A. Splain, C. L. Parsons, A. Kini, G. Daniel, et al. "Associations Between Mental Health and Social Needs Among Black Patients in Primary Care Settings." *Journal of Primary Care & Community Health* (2025).

Lewis, Michelle E., Ray'Chel Wilson, Julee Snyder, and Ashley Ward. "Conversations with Faith Leaders: Exploring Faith-Based Perspectives on Heat Resilience in North and South Carolina." NI 26-13. Nicholas Institute for Energy, Environment & Sustainability, Duke University, 2026. <https://nicholasinstitute.duke.edu/publications/conversations-faith-leaders-exploring-faith-based-perspectives-heat-resilience>.

McKenzie, Chloe B. "Financial Trauma: A Literature Review and Conceptual Model." National Endowment for Financial Education, 2023.

Uddoh, Marcia Elizabeth Ifeoma. "Moderation of financial stress and cardiovascular disease risk in Black Catholics: A social-ecological pathway utilizing latent class and structural equation analyses." *PLOS Mental Health* 2, no. 6 (2025): e0000047.

Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Orbis Books, 1993.

Zare, H., D. R. Gilmore, S. Assari, and I. B. Molina. "Income Inequality, Gender Disparities, and Ethnic Differences: Investigating Allostatic Load in American Adults." *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities* 12, no. 3 (June 2025): 1967–1979.



The podcast “Scriptures Everywhere” is back. This fall, the Institute for Signifying Scriptures (ISS) presents **Election: Signs of the Times**, a five-part series considering the diverse places, spaces, and ways that scriptures are being made. The language(s) of nation, election, political participation, democracy, justice, and civic engagement are constant modes through which material systems and psycho-social realities take shape. They generate, by signifying and signifyin’, economies of thought and commerce from which this scripturalized world operates. As the United States prepares for its midterm elections, ISS asks how scriptural worlds are being made in and through this moment.

Look for information about this fall’s podcast in your inbox and on the ISS website.

For those who missed the live sessions or wish to revisit these past conversations, all episodes from the 2025 and 2026 seasons are archived and available on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and the official ISS Libsyn page (sites.libsyn.com/585795/site). Listeners can also find more information and register to participate in future sessions at signifyingscriptures.org/podcast/.

Save the dates—ISS in 2028!

We have a busy year planned for 2028. Please save these dates and check the website for more details and registration information.

February 2028 at the University of Kansas

The 2028 ISS seminar will be held in February at the University of Kansas in Lawrence (dates coming soon).



April 7-8, 2028 at the Robert W. Woodruff Library at the Atlanta University Center in Atlanta, Georgia

Plan to join us for a very special event: the opening of the exhibition of Vincent L. Wimbush's professional career collection, and the convening of a related symposium.



