

## WORKS WRITTEN BY BLACK OLD TESTAMENT SCHOLARS

by Charlie Trimm and Brittany Kim  
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Black scholars have been underrepresented in Old Testament scholarship, particularly in North America. Even though a few Black scholars wrote dissertations on the Old Testament in the early twentieth century,<sup>1</sup> their numbers were always small and had only marginally increased by the time Charles B. Copher received his Ph.D. in Old Testament at Boston University in 1947.<sup>2</sup> Not until 1989 did an African American woman complete a Ph.D. in Old Testament when Renita Weems graduated with her degree from Princeton Seminary.<sup>3</sup> In 1991 Cain Hope Felder declared, “There are today just a little more than thirty Black North Americans with a completed Ph.D./Th.D. in biblical studies (less than one-fifth of 1 percent in North America alone). As of this writing, there are but two African American female Ph.D.’s in New Testament and two in Old Testament.”<sup>4</sup> The situation has improved since 1991, but the work of African American Old Testament scholars has still not been given sufficient attention within the broader scholarly guild. Moreover, although a much higher percentage of Old Testament scholars working in Africa are Black, their writings remain almost invisible to many Old Testament scholars in North America and Europe. Madipoane Masenya (ngwan’a Mphahlele) laments that “Africa is . . . a stranger in the global village, as it cannot participate as an equal partner. Hence, even within academia, resources developed in Africa are not always taken seriously, if at all, by the powerful.”<sup>5</sup>

This bibliography seeks to address this problem by highlighting the work of Black Old Testament scholars to encourage others to use these publications in research and teaching. The bibliography is not designed to be comprehensive, but merely to illustrate the range of scholarship available from these Black scholars. Clearly many other sources could be added to this list, and works on the Old Testament have also been written by Black scholars with

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<sup>1</sup> This group includes Pezavia O’Connell (“Synonyms of the Unclean and the Clean in Hebrew” at Pennsylvania University in 1898), James Leonard Farmer (“The Origin and Development of the Messianic Hope in Israel with Special Reference to Analogous Beliefs among Other Peoples” at Boston University in 1918), and Willis J. King (“The Book of Habakkuk from the Standpoint of Literary and Historical Criticism” at Boston University in 1921). For more details, see Abraham Smith, “Black/Africana Studies and Black/Africana Biblical Studies,” *Brill Research Perspectives in Biblical Interpretation* 4.2 (2020): 46.

<sup>2</sup> Bailey, Randall C., and Jacquelyn Grant. “Preface.” Page 7 in *The Recovery of Black Presence: An Interdisciplinary Exploration: Essays in Honor of Dr. Charles B. Copher*. Edited by Randall C. Bailey and Jacquelyn Grant. Nashville: Abingdon, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> “Renita J. Weems, Ph.D.” Ray of Hope Community Church. Online: <https://www.rayofhopenashville.org/renita-weems-bio>.

<sup>4</sup> Cain Hope Felder, “Introduction,” in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 1.

<sup>5</sup> “Exiled in My Own Home: An African-South African Perspective on the Bible,” in *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel’s Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora*, ed. Hugh R. Page Jr. et al (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 20–21.

advanced degrees in other fields, such as New Testament or Theology, though they are not included here. The first section omits editorial work, though a later section contains some edited collections and metastudies that are focused particularly on African, African American, postcolonial, and Womanist interpretation. At times we have swapped the order of author names in order to highlight the Black author or Old Testament scholar.

While Black interpretation exhibits some common features, these scholars are writing from a wide variety of contexts with different approaches and aims.<sup>6</sup> In particular, African and North American scholarship are distinct worlds, so we have broken up the first section along those lines, categorizing scholars based on where they are currently working. However, considerable variation may also be found within those groups. The background and concerns of Afro-Caribbean scholars differ from those of African American scholars, even if both are currently teaching in the US. And the historical and cultural context for scholars in Nigeria is not the same as for those in South Africa. For this reason (and because some scholars have moved across continents), we have included the country of origin for each Black OT scholar in parentheses after their name.

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<sup>6</sup> See the introductory essays in *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora*, ed. Hugh R. Page Jr. et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), especially Randall C. Bailey, Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele), and Rodney S. Sadler, "African and African Diasporan Hermeneutics: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Journey, Exile, and Life through My/Our Place," 19–24.

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### **Categorized by Author**

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<sup>7</sup> Aside from Innocent Himbaza, who teaches in Switzerland, the rest of the scholars in this category reside in Africa.

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### Categorized by Topic

#### Collections and Meta-Studies

The Collections and Meta-Studies section contains some works that were written and edited by non-Black authors as well as by scholars from other disciplines in order to offer a broader perspective on the fields of African and African American interpretation. Two major trends

within Black interpretation are (1) liberationist or postcolonial approaches and (2) feminist or Womanist approaches. To highlight these, we have devoted separate sections to them, and we have also drawn attention to a few essays discussing the place of historical criticism within Black interpretation.

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#### Teaching and Preaching

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