



*Book Review*

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## **Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope**

**Andrea F. Emmanuel**

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**Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope**  
**Inter Varsity Press, P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515**  
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**R***eading While Black* is an unapologetic dialogue that establishes African American biblical interpretation as a method of hope to combat the perennial trauma and injustices suffered by Blacks in America. The author Esau McCaulley urgently challenges the theological cannon in an unorthodox scholarship as a response to limited evangelical input of the black experience. Through deep analysis, he posits the exegesis—Black ecclesial interpretation—as “an ‘academically unorthodox experiment’ of asking questions of the text that grow out the reality of being Black in America.” (p.20) The text, therefore, reveals God as a liberator addressing questions projected from present black experiences. McCaulley’s ethos is crucial to the authority of the text as a biblical scholar, priest, and an African American. His experiences with the police direct the urgency of his scholarship. The structure catalogs various topics such as Black rage and policing in a well-reasoned manner supported by a framework of biblical scriptures and historical references from slave narratives and civil rights activists, among others.

Chapter 1 retraces the roots of Black ecclesial interpretation of the enslaved, from the impetus of their social location. Placing God as their liberator from sources such as the Exodus narrative, a dominant theme throughout the work, connects this biblical response as relevant to black spaces today.

Chapter 2 addresses policing in America and tackles the question of police treatment of African Americans. McCaulley petitions for a Christian theology of policing, a theology of freedom, and one in which the government is responsible for righting the wrongs and see injustices undone (p.39).

Chapters 3&4 vindicate with biblical support, the rights of political criticism, protest, and justice. It reveals Jesus as a political advocate. The chapter situates justice for African Americans as a vision of Christ, an ally who gives the marginalized a voice, for as he says, “to think that more is possible is an act of resistance.” (p.65) The chapter speaks directly to Black cynicism and nihilism.

Chapter 5 situates Black identity as part of God’s vision and shatters the theory of Ham’s curse as a justification for slavery. McCaulley attests to the dignity and self-worth of Black identity through the dignity Christ received through the resurrection (p.111) and solidifies his claim through a connection of the Abrahamic promise which includes all ethnicities.

Chapter 6 focuses on Black rage, a cyclical rage that originates from “the heavy boot of white supremacy.” (p.122) that filters into Black-on-Black spaces.” (p. 125) He does not advocate violence but justifies space for Black resistance with sound biblical reasoning. He completes the chapter on forgiveness as a release of Black rage, but not at the expense of the continuance of Black suffering.

Chapter 7 explores the tension between the Bible and slavery and concludes that slavery was not God’s intention. As such, “the Christian could reason from creation to liberation.” (162) Apart from proving his claim, the author implicitly calls on the canon to reflect the scholarship for which he advocates.

**T**he book follows with a conclusion chapter, and a “Bonus Track” that provides supportive, additional information pertinent to understanding the authenticity of and need for Black ecclesial interpretation. It ends with a discussion guide, which invites the reader to dialogue with the scholarship.

This text serves as a model to combat the political and racial hindrances of the marginalized adult learner. It is therefore pertinent to adult education. Critics may argue that the author is apologetic throughout the text where he reiterates his claims and specifies what they are not. This is not an attempt to appease any opposition. Rather, it is a strategy addressing possible counterarguments. Evident in the work is the call for the theological canon to reflect scholarship of the Bible and the Black experience. This read holds a place of honor in academia to address and support the individual topics contained for expositions and debates to incite social change. It confronts the Black individual still trying to come to terms with an identity systematically mistreated to acknowledge that the Bible speaks to the Black experience.



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