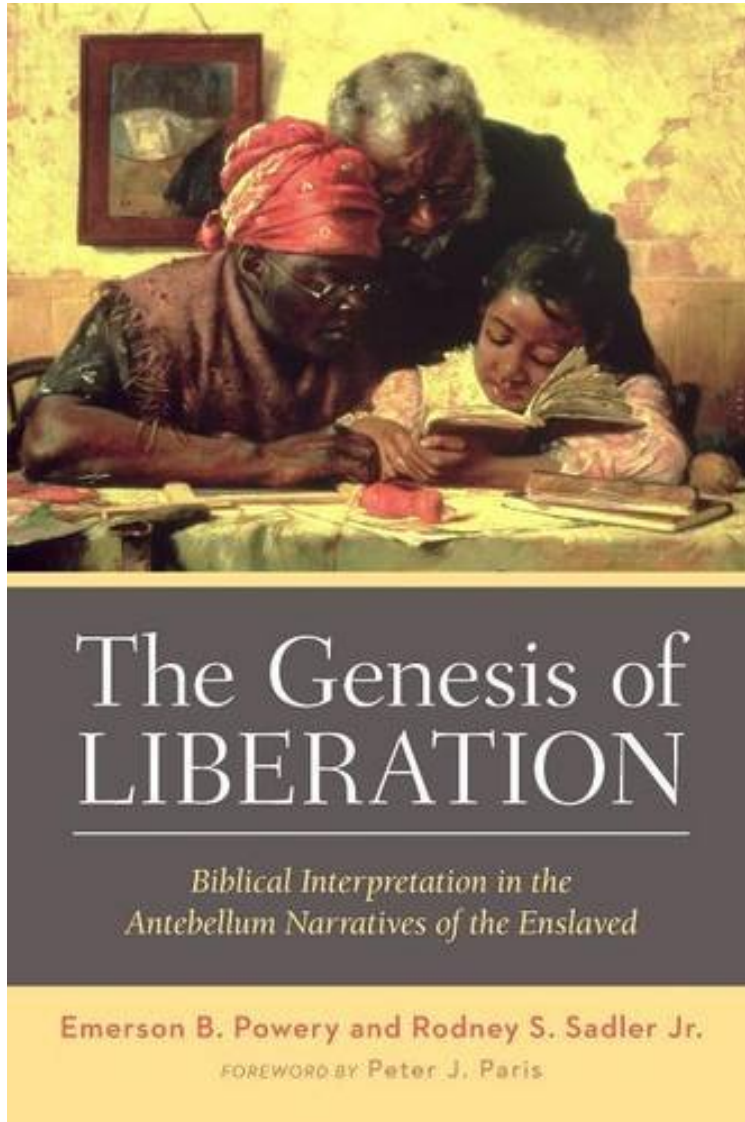


The Genesis of Liberation: Biblical Interpretation in the Antebellum Narratives of the Enslaved

Emerson B. Powery, Rodney S. Sadler Jr.
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freedom narratives of the formerly enslaved; these narratives arose prior to the Civil War. Powery and Sadler open a window of light onto the ambivalence of the biblical hermeneutic in these freedom narratives, showing clearly that the hermeneutic was one that both embraced the authority of Scripture as well as either muted the pro-slavery elements of Scripture or found a way to place them into a more liberating narrative. The distinctive feature of this book is its careful examination of freedom narratives as expressions of the hermeneutics of the formerly enslaved.

Considering that the Bible was used to justify and perpetuate African American enslavement, why would it be given such authority? In this fascinating volume, Powery and Sadler explore how the Bible became a source of liberation for enslaved African Americans by analyzing its function in pre-Civil War freedom narratives. They explain the various ways in which enslaved African Americans interpreted the Bible and used it as a source for hope, empowerment, and literacy. The authors show that through their own engagement with the biblical text, enslaved African Americans found a liberating word. *The Genesis of Liberation* recovers the early history of black biblical interpretation and will help to expand understandings of African American hermeneutics.

"Like artisans from great architects and choreographers to horticulturists and aerospace engineers Powery and Sadler craft a vision, create historic scaffolding, and engage powerful thought and transformative events to orchestrate the function of the Bible by the antebellum enslaved. These scholars critically mine the use of Scriptures by enslaved persons regarding issues of pedagogy and communal identity, as they challenge slave holding ideology and the need to critique mainstream Christianity. *The Genesis of Liberation* is a must read for those curious about diametrically opposed hermeneutical trajectories, the questions of liberation and justice, the intricate signifying and complicated matrix of oppression welded against those of African descent, and the inclusive history of biblical interpretation and appropriation in the United States of America." Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, Professor of Religion, Shaw University Divinity School "Instructive to scholars and informative to general readers, Powery and Sadler have created the most comprehensive and insightful study available of the Bible's impact on and significance to the African American slave narrative before 1865." William L. Andrews, E. Maynard Adams Professor of English, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill "'African Americans' respect for the authority of the Christian Scriptures is a miracle in itself.' This opening line in the first chapter begins the treasure hunt that Drs. Powery and Sadler lead with detail and historical acumen. This book about how early African Americans understood and embraced the Bible is also a miracle, weaving in and out of slave narratives and biblical hermeneutics with ease. *The Genesis of Liberation* joins a growing and necessary body of works that help us look back on our histories in order to go forward toward liberation. I hope every professor, student, pastor, and layperson, no matter their affiliations, read and use this book." Valerie Bridgeman, Associate Professor of Homiletics and Hebrew Bible, Methodist Theological School in Ohio "In this superb book, Emerson Powery and Rodney Sadler make a landmark contribution to antebellum American history that also illuminates general considerations of biblical interpretation. They document in sharp detail the scriptural engagement of well-known black leaders like Richard Allen and Frederick Douglass, but also important lesser-known figures like Solomon Bayley and William Anderson. In so doing they explain how the King James Version, which many white Americans used to defend slavery, became a book of great encouragement for worship, obedience, and liberation among African Americans. Although others have opened up parts of this story before, Powery and Sadler's book is now the gold standard for one of the most important developments in American religion and American history." Mark Noll, Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History, University of Notre Dame "Deploying critical biblical scholarship, the authors illumine the interior spiritual quest of the enslaved and formerly enslaved for ontological legitimation, as evidenced by their interpretive reading of the biblical text. It is full of insight and nuanced understanding of the ways 19th century black folk navigated their way through the currents of the misshapen Christianity presented to them toward a port of liberation. This accessible text demonstrates the generative black agency that defied the mental and spiritual subjugation the slaveocracy attempted to enforce, enabling black hermeneuts to 'talk back to the Talking Book' the Bible." Larry Murphy, Professor Emeritus of the History of Christianity, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary About the Author Emerson B. Powery is Professor of Biblical Studies at Messiah College. He is the coeditor of *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary* and the author of *Jesus Reads Scripture: The Function of Jesus' Use of Scripture in the Synoptic Gospels and Mark in the Immersion Bible Studies series*. Powery also serves on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Biblical Literature* and the *Common English Bible*. Rodney S. Sadler Jr. is Associate Professor of Bible at Union Presbyterian Seminary. He is the author of *Can a Cushite Change His Skin? An Examination of Race, Ethnicity, and Othering in the Hebrew Bible* and coeditor of *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora*. He also served as the managing editor of the *African American Devotional Bible*.