

Abstract

The Bible entered the modern, post-colonial world as the sacred text of Christianity and Western culture. When African-Americans encountered the “talking book” and learned to read it, they heard the stories of enslavement and the songs of deliverance. A mode of reading emerged that differed from the Euro-centric consultations called exegesis, hermeneutic, and sermonizing. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., calls the logic of the African-American mode of reference “signifying” in distinction from the Aristotelian logic of Saussure’s syntagmatic emphasis on the sign-signified equation. Signifying allows for “paradigmatic” referencing and works with a wide range of tropes and metaphoric connotations. Vincent Wimbush has used this term for his project in Signifying Scriptures. The present essay explores the difference between the Euro-American and the African-American cultural readings of the Bible, as well as the social logics of the Bible as Western myth.