

[The Art of Black Preaching and the Rhetoric of the Black Sermon](#)

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Call for Papers

Date

January 19, 2024 - April 30, 2024

Subject Fields

African American History / Studies,, Black History / Studies,, Communication,, Composition & Rhetoric,, Religious Studies and Theology

The Art of Black Preaching and the Rhetoric of the Black Sermon

Edited by Andre E. Johnson, Ph.D. and Courtney V. Buggs, Ph.D.

Traditionally, in the field of homiletics, there has been a debate among scholars as to whether preaching is a theological or rhetorical act. Some argue it has no place, while others suggest that rhetoric if it is to have a place at all, comes after the preacher crafts the sermon. However, it seems as of late that the field has made an interesting rhetorical turn.

For instance, Frank A. Thomas writes in his groundbreaking book [Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching](#) this has not been the case regarding the African American preaching tradition. Thomas argues that African American preaching is both rhetorical and theological. For Thomas, the “rhetorical processes are fundamental to African American preaching and not something that one adds on after the preacher has figured out the rational content of what to say.” Leaning into this rhetorical turn, Kimberly P. Johnson, in her foundational book [The Womanist Preacher: Proclaiming Womanist Rhetoric from the Pulpit](#) conducts a rhetorical analysis (close reading) of five womanist sermons to answer questions centering on womanist preaching.

Building on Kimberly P. Johnson’s work, Nicole Danielle McDonald, in her essay [Black Queer Preaching: A Close Reading of Bishop Yvette A. Flunder’s Sermon, “Silent No More,”](#) offers a rhetorical analysis of the sermon that suggests a “queer womanist rhetoric.” In his book, [The Reverend Albert Cleage Jr and the Black Prophetic Tradition: A Reintroduction of the Black Messiah](#), Earle J. Fisher examines Cleage’s book of sermons, [The Black Messiah](#), as a rhetorical artifact. Moreover, Fisher engages rhetoric in proposing his homiletical theory of “sermonic militancy” in [Introducing Sermonic Militancy—A Call Toward More Revolutionary Homiletics and Hermeneutics.](#)”

In continuing this rhetorical turn in the Black Preaching Tradition, in this special issue of [Sermon Studies](#), we invite essays that address the rhetorical nature of Black preaching and Black sermon production. We are interested in scholarship that sees rhetoric as part of the homiletical process that opens additional avenues for sermon preparation and reflection. As the [Academy of Homiletics](#) subgroup on rhetoric puts it, “Rhetoric provides homiletics with resources to examine aspects of the craft of preaching, focused on how potentially diverse listeners may be influenced to become receptive to sermonic appeals, whether explicitly or implicitly embedded in this reasoning. It also focuses on developing increasing awareness of what counts as contextually meaningful sermonic reasoning resources.”

In this spirit, we seek essays that address, but are not limited to, the following:

- Black sermons and the homiletical tradition
- Rhetorical criticism of sermons
- The rhetoric of special liturgical days and events
- Africana communication and the Black preaching tradition
- The preaching of a particular figure
- Examination of types of sermons, such as expository, womanist, folk preaching, etc.
- Examinations of “special event” or “special day” sermons, such as MLK Day, eulogies, etc.
- Analysis of parts of the sermon, such as the opening, use of anecdotes, the close, etc.
- The use of stylistic features in sermons
- The rhetoric of voice
- The rhetoric of online preaching
- Historical examinations of preaching

Essays should be no more than 4,000-5,000 words (inclusive of no more than a 250-word abstract, footnotes, resources cited, etc.). Please submit your essays [here](#) or to blackpreachingandrhetoric@gmail.com by April 30, 2024. Essays selected for possible publication in this special issue will undergo peer review.

The editors:

Andre E. Johnson

Andre E. Johnson, Ph.D., is the Benjamin W. Rawlins Professor of Communication, holds a University Research Professorship at the University of Memphis, and is the President of the [Religious Communication Association](#). He is also a Visiting Scholar at Memphis Theological Seminary, an affiliate faculty member at Christian Theological Seminary, and an Andrew Mellon Just Transformation Satellite Partner with the Center for Black Digital Research at Penn State University. Johnson's research examines the intersection of rhetoric, race, and religion, and he teaches classes in African American public address, religious communication, prophetic rhetoric, and social movements.

Dr. Johnson is the author of the award-winning [No Future in This Country: The Prophetic Pessimism of Bishop Henry McNeal Turner](#) (2020), [The Speeches of Bishop Henry McNeal Turner: The Press, The Platform and The Pulpit](#) (2023), and [Preaching in a Pandemic: The Rhetoric of the Black Church, Vols. 1-2](#), (2023) (with Kimberly P. Johnson and Wallis Baxter III). His latest book (with Amanda Nell Edgar) is [The Summer of 2020: George Floyd and the Resurgence of Black Lives Matter Movement](#), which is coming out in Spring 2024. Dr. Johnson is also the 2023 winner of the National Communication Association's prestigious Orlando Taylor Distinguished Scholar in Africana Communication.

Courtney V. Buggs

Dr. Courtney V. Buggs, Ph.D., is the Director of the Ph.D. Program in African American Preaching and Sacred Rhetoric and Assistant Professor of Homiletics at Christian Theological Seminary. She joined the CTS faculty in 2019 as a Louisville Postdoctoral Fellow and was appointed to the regular faculty in 2021.

Buggs' interest in the study of preaching began as she served faith communities in the United States and abroad, across Pentecostal, Methodist, and Baptist traditions, and in multi-faith military chapel settings. Her questions led her to pursue theological studies, seeking a better understanding of the church and historical practices that shape contemporary religious life. Buggs' research interests include ecumenical preaching practices, women and preaching, womanism, and critical pedagogy. Buggs has published journal articles and a book chapter, all related to preaching. She has also published denominational resources and writes theological reflections for local churches.

Buggs has served churches in various ministerial capacities and is ordained in the American Baptist Churches, USA. She is passionate about preaching, teaching, and working with students, particularly first-time preachers. Aside from teaching, Buggs is a regular guest preacher and leads workshops and seminars for developing clergy.

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