

Andre E. Johnson. *No Future in This Country: The Prophetic Pessimism of Bishop Henry McNeal Turner*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020. 204 pages. \$27.00

In *No Future in This Country*, Andre E. Johnson, a scholar in rhetoric and media studies, critically analyzes and reflects on Bishop Henry Turner's rhetorical response to historical events, especially from 1896 to 1915. Johnson focuses on what he calls Turner's prophetic rhetoric, "grounded in the lament tradition of prophecy" (18) that addressed and resisted the inhumane conditions of his people in the U.S. Johnson shows how Turner's rhetoric changed from optimistic to pessimistic, as his effort for equality and freedom for blacks was repeatedly met with the resistance, ignorance, and violence from his racist country. Johnson calls such a rhetoric "pessimistic prophecy," whose main function is "to speak out on behalf of others and to chronicle their pain and suffering" (16).

There are six chapters. In the first chapter, "Turner and the *Plessy* Decision," Johnson discusses the *Plessy* Decision in 1892 that led Turner to denounce the Supreme Court for nullifying the citizenship of blacks in America. While others encouraged the public to calm down and patiently wait for a better understanding of the court's decision, Turner publicly criticized the court as an "abominable conclave of negro hating demons" (39). In the second chapter, "The Making of a Black Rhetorical Theologian," the author examines what he calls Turner's "rhetorical theology," which was rooted in the context of his audience and intended to lead to a practice for change. In a society in which the black identity was denied by the white, Turner rejected a God who was white and instead insisted that God is black.

In the third chapter, "Turner and the Creation of an Antiwar Protester," Johnson discusses how Turner's rhetoric changed over the course of his engagement with several wars, including the Civil War and the Spanish-American War. Turner joined the Civil War as the first African American chaplain, hoping that the contribution of the black community would bolster Lincoln's promise of freedom for slaves. However, in witnessing the systematic racism that refused to liberate his people fully, he later condemned any further involvement of the black community in another war. Then in the fourth chapter, "Turner and the Presidential Election of 1900," the author describes Turner's criticism of the Republican Party and their presidential candidate, William McKinley, for continuing to ignore the lynching, oppression, and disfranchisement of African Americans.

In the fifth chapter, "Turner and the Rhetoric of Emigration," Johnson examines how Turner used his rhetoric to empower black dignity and ensure black people's survival by encouraging emigration to Africa. In realizing that there was no future in which blacks could improve their human rights in the U.S., Turner believed that the only cure for the black condition in America was to move to Africa, where they could establish their own government and law. In the last chapter, "Turner and the Damning of America," Johnson discusses how Turner's rhetoric caused conflict not just with whites but also blacks who leaned more on optimism, as Turner criticized the flag and refused to sing *America* until his country became what it praised itself to be— a "sweet land of liberty" (159).

Deeply rooted in the reality of black suffering and oppression in the U.S., Turner's rhetoric was pessimistic in that he could not envision any different future for the black community in his country. For him, emigration to Africa or any other country was a way to empower blacks to determine their own future by escaping the unjust land and entering the promised land. Although Turner's fervent work for emigration did not lead to the result he expected, Johnson argues that Turner's rhetoric still helped to produce "some of the earliest

notions of Black self-esteem, identity, and personhood” (145). Although Turner did not see the promised land himself, his prophetic rhetoric sowed the seeds for that of Malcolm X, the Black Power movement, and even Martin Luther King Jr. in his later years (176).

While Johnson bemoans that there has been a lack of scholarly effort to study the African American prophetic tradition more thoroughly, one could argue that he could expand his sociological conversation to include some works by homileticians, such as Dale P. Andrews, who has already discussed the black prophetic tradition as grounded in the black sufferings of slavery, lynching, and racism and how it shapes black prophetic consciousness for the work of justice and transformation. In our society driven by xenophobia today, nevertheless, Turner’s life and prophetic rhetoric could inspire preachers to dare to lament the sins and brokenness of our unjust world, to proclaim the radical love of God who has created us all in God’s image, and to prophesy God’s liberation of the oppressed and marginalized today.

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