Raising Consciousness: Challenging Diversity in Christian Publishing

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Raising Consciousness: Challenging Diversity in Christian Publishing

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The Christian publishing industry has overlooked the importance of diversity, particularly its impact on black American audiences. While studies show that diversity and inclusion can lead to more innovation through problem-solving, there persists a paradox where a lack of opportunities, disparities in wealth and employment and systemic prejudices can play a role in the ethnic and racial homogeneity of the Christian publishing industry. Thus, there are many barriers preventing people of color from emerging to the market, reflecting in the storytelling, content creation and audience of African-descent followers.
The proposed thesis will review the low representation of black Americans in the publishing industry, the need for diversity in Christian publishing and how a white default mentality and European aesthetics have profoundly impacted black American churches. Moreover, while it is common to attribute such disparities to differences in quality and relevance, such subjective statements on preferences also lead to unconscious racial biases against black writers, creators and graphic designers.
Research Questions

- Why is the graphic design field lacking in diversity?
- Why is the publishing industry lacking in diversity?
- How do race and ethnicity impact the visibility of black people in the Old Testament?
- How does the history of race in the United States impact black American churches?
- How can black creators – writers, editors and graphic designers – challenge those misconceptions in Christian publishing?
Race, The Black Experience and the Bible

“We must face the sad fact that at eleven o’clock on Sunday morning when we stand to sing ‘In Christ, there is no East or West,’ we stand in the most segregated hour of America.”

The Rev. Martin Luther King (para. 16)

The Christian faith has long had a painful and complicated history with black Americans. During slavery in the United States, white slave owners told the African slaves and their descendants that they had no heritage in the world and stripped them of their culture. Additionally, slave owners told slaves that they were less than human. The Three-Fifths Compromise of 1787 determined that three out of every five slaves as a person (or each person was three-fifths of a human) for determining a state’s number of seats in the House of Representatives.

To balance slave owners’ religious beliefs and the cruel nature of the slave trade, they used an interpretation of the Genesis 9 story involving the supposed curse placed on Ham by his father, Noah. The story involves Ham telling his brothers that he observed their father in a drunk and naked condition. As a result, Noah placed a curse on his grandson, Canaan:

“And he said, ‘Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren’”

(Genesis 9:25).
This curse was a misinterpretation, implying the descendants of Ham (the black nations) would become subordinate to and servants for the nations of people fathered by Noah’s other two sons, Shem (the progenitor of the Asiatic nations) and Japheth (the progenitor of the white nations). There was no biblical curse on Ham to substantiate the theory on Ham and his other three sons’ subordination, meaning that only one son, Canaan, and his people (the Canaanites) were subject to Noah’s curse.

The Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) expanded on this biblical story to imply there was a curse on Ham and all of his sons, meaning Noah cursed the entire black race to become servants to Shem’s and Japheth’s descendants. This misguided interpretation became the basis to support African/black people’s subordination, oppression and enslavement. Moreover, religious institutions supported this sentiment for centuries (Goldenberg, 149).

In reality, the black presence in the Bible is prevalent throughout the Old Testament. The first prominent and visible nation listed in the Old Testament was Ethiopia, as referenced in the following passage from the second chapter of Genesis:

“And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia” (Genesis 2:13).

Greek classical writers in the ninth century B.C., translated the empire’s ancient name of Cush to Ethiopia’s modern character. The Greek term Ethiopia meant “a man with a sun-burned or black face (Hansberry, 6, 24).” The translation recognized the noticeable dark-skinned people living in the nation.

At 3300 B.C., the Cushite (Ethiopian) empire was well established and much older than Egypt. Genesis 10 says Nimrod and his Cushite people were the early settlers in Mesopotamia (called “the Cradle of Civilization”) and Assyria. The Ethiopians controlled the old Arabian lands and islands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea.

The Ethiopian empire is one of the oldest empires of the biblical era. The Ethiopians were ancestrally related to the Egyptians, Canaanites and ancient Babylonians as recorded in Genesis 10. Additionally, the Old Testament mentioned Egypt as “the Land of Ham” in Psalms 78:51; Psalms 105:23; Psalms 105:26-27; and Psalms 106:21-22. The Old Testament writers were consistent in their association of Egypt with
Ham’s family of nations — there was no mention of Egypt belonging to the nations of Shem or Japheth.

There are profound differences in the concept and attitude of race in the Bible compared to the Eurocentric interpretation. The Old Testament centers around nations of people, which was a way of grouping people during that era. Old Testament writers did not know about terms such as race and racial identification. People’s racial classifications along color lines and ethnic origins were a European-related invention created approximately in the 15th and 16th centuries to rationalise enslavement, oppression, and demeaning identity.

Furthermore, there has been an emphasis by modern society to remove or deny the presence of African nations in the Bible. The most apparent attempts are removing Egypt as an African nation and its placement in the Western world. The implications that one of the first modern civilizations in history was a black nation refutes the notion that black people did not contribute to the world’s advancement.

As a result, black Americans’ common acceptance is that the Bible — and Christianity — is a white, Eurocentric religious experience. A typical black Christian church has stained pictures of a white Jesus with a Bible filled with white Eurocentric images. The implications to black worshippers is “if Jesus is white and God is white, then authority is white,” says Anthea Butler, an associate professor of religious studies at the University of Pennsylvania (“Editorial: Why White Jesus Is a Problem,” para. 8).

History professor Winthrop Jordan — a writer on the history of slavery and racism in the United States — stated that English perceptions about color, Christianity and social hierarchy contributed to their “unthinking decision” in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and a race-based justification for chattel slavery (p. 72). Jordan also argues that black and white associations as symbols of good and evil transferred to race, showing Europeans as ideals of purity and African-descent people as representative of sin.

Though the Christian church has fought against racism and segregation since the end of slavery in 1865, most white Christians fell between open endorsement and quiet acceptance. “It’s not as though Christians — particularly white Christians — didn’t know there were alternatives,” said Christian historian Jemar Tisby. He argues that white Christians has some personal stake in maintaining the status quo, from fear of what other people would say or retaliation for speaking up for racial quality (143).
The Christian Publishing Industry at a Glance

In 2018, religious book sales generated $593.7 million in sales, up from $568 million in 2017. Religious presses’ revenue was $1.22 billion in 2018 (a 14.7 percent increase from 2017), with 75.7 percent of its revenue coming from print formats, according to the Association of American Publishers (Statista, para. 1).

In 2015, Lee and Low Books partnered with St. Catherine University to produce its Diversity Baseline Survey, looking at gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability in the publishing industry. Lee and Low issued the survey to 13,237 publishing house employees and journal reviews, which revealed the following:
In 2019, Lee and Low Books updated and expanded its survey to include a larger sample of 153 companies, including all Big Five publishers, eight review journals, 47 trade publishers, 35 university presses and 63 literary agencies. The results produced moderate changes:
Recent U.S. Census numbers show that the United States demographics is 60.1 percent white, Non-Hispanic; 18.5 percent Hispanic; 13.4 percent black or African American; 5.9 percent Asian; and 2.8 percent biracial (“Census Quick Facts”).

In comparing both survey results, there is more diversity at the executive level (22 percent non-white in 2019 vs. 14 percent non-white in 2015). While this change is promising — a change in industry culture generally starts with changes at the upper levels — the percentage of white people in editorial departments increased from 82 percent in 2015 to 85 percent in 2019. The implication is that most editors overseeing the books are white people, even if the publishing industry produces more diverse books.

**Diversity in Children's Books**

The Cooperative Children’s Book Center — a library with the University of Wisconsin’s School of Education — has documented statistics on children’s books featuring black depictions since 1985 and other underrepresented groups since 1994. In its 2019 survey of 3,716 books on the characterization of diversity in children’s books and young adult literature, the CCBC revealed:

To put the numbers in context, children’s books featuring animals (28 percent) had nearly equal representation as all minority groups, the LBGT community and the disabled combined (Herndon, para. 6).
When reviewing books featuring characters written and/or illustrated by authors and/or illustrators of the same race, the survey showed that most of the diverse characters result from members of the same race creating them. The occurrence of same-race creators and characters occurred almost exclusively with Asian, Latino and Pacific Islander concepts. Yet more than half the black/African characters are the creation of black/African authors and/or illustrators — demonstrating that many black creators are not involved in the depiction of published images reflecting the black experience.

**Pipeline Paradox**

The civil unrest from the summer of 2020 —where non-white people are challenging the racial inequities in U.S. institutions, including the church — has spotlighted the Christian industry’s need for more diversity. “In our hyper-individualistic culture, white Americans tend to reduce systemic racism to a question of personal beliefs or behavior, thinking we are exempt from racism if we don’t personally use the n-word or consciously discriminate against people of color,” WJK Senior Acquisitions Editor Jessica Miller Kelley said (Wenner, para. 6).

However, the aforementioned studies from Lee and Low Books and the Cooperative Children’s Book Center show there is a disconnect between publishers who cite an inadequate piple for creators of colors, and the creatives stating a lack of opportunity.

The paradox is part of the larger systemic disparities in education and wealth, as there are minority creatives who do not have the access or sufficient networks make inroads into a mostly white-dominated industry. For instance, a 2012 study of The New York Times’ book reviews showed that 655 of the 742 books it reviewed were from Caucasian authors. In contrast, Asian authors made up 33 of its reviewed books, followed by black/African America (31), Hispanic (9) and Middle Eastern authors (8) (Hess, para. 1).

When industries such as the Christian publishing industry do not combat a white-default ideology, European aesthetics, perspectives and subject matter become the priority. While African American readers seek out Christian books, other non-black readers may reject the books as not being relevant to the core reading base (mainly, white mainstream audiences). Additionally, some black authors find themselves in a quandry in trying to attract non-black authors, as the common response from publishers is consumer demand fuels an increased supply of black representation in Christian books.

In essence, publishers are creating a self-fulfilling prophecy: If there is a narrow visibility of black creators, then there likely will be limited sales. If publishers limit marketing books from black Christian creatives, then subsequent books of similar content also will face those restrictions — thus enforcing the perception that black Christian authors have limited marketing potential. Author Sharon Etwell Foster states African-American writers targeting an evangelical audience don’t have an easier road: “There were no black editors, graphic artists, or salespeople” with the Christian publisher Multnomah when she published her first book in 1999. “I quickly accepted that writing in Christian publishing was as much about being a cultural ambassador as it was about writing (Sanders, para. 5).”
The topic of racial diversity is not a new topic to the communications and arts fields. In 1991, the essay “Why Is Graphic Design 93 Percent White?” was a response to the American Institute of Graphic Artists’ Design Conference, which brought together designers of color, educators and professional trade organizations to discuss why the field did not reflect a multicultural society. According to AIGA Executive Director Caroline Hightower, the event was a “national event (devised) to create increased racial representation in the field (Mitchell-Powell, para. 4).

Unfortunately, while the ebb of interest in this topic has wavered over the next 29 years, the results are disappointing. The 2019 AIGA Design Census polled more than 9,000 people in the design field. Its findings showed that only 3 percent of respondents identified as black American or of African origins, an underrepresentation given that black Americans represent roughly 13 percent of the U.S. population (Design Census 2019).

These statistics’ impact is that graphic design’s role is to solve communications problems using visual elements that appeal to an extensive range of audiences, becoming increasingly multicultural. Audiences cut across not only racial and gender lines but also different ethnicities, sexual orientations and cultures. For black Americans, it means even fewer opportunities to have a role in depicting their collective voice through design.

While graphic design can permeate people’s lives as the art expands to digital platforms — including animation, virtual reality, user interface and user experience design — demographic diversity and the industry’s culture impact its future growth. The 2019 Design Census still shows...
that 71 percent of graphic design respondents identify themselves as Caucasian (Design Census 2019).

The purpose of this project is to uncover any underlying issues that are preventing black Americans, change any misconception while lowering any obstacles to entering the publishing field, particularly in the area of graphic design. According to AIGA, more than 86 percent of professional graphic designers are white (Carroll, para. 3), with black Americans representing the 3 percent, as mentioned earlier.

The lack of diversity is not only prevalent in graphic design but all communications and arts fields. The Bureau of Labor Statistics – the principal fact-finding agency in labor economics that disseminates information to the U.S. government and the public – states that 7.7 percent of all professionally employed people in the arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations are black. Moreover, it says that only 5.7 percent of all designers are black (“Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity”).
Knowledge Gap

There will be several questions that this project will attempt to address regarding diversity in Christian publishing and the graphic design industry:

- What diversity reflects black American interests in the Christian publishing industry?
- What is their perception of the Christian publishing industry? How would they feel about being in an industry with few black Americans?
- How do they feel about historical images of black people in Christian publishing? Do they disagree or disagree with specific imagery?
- What do they think about gender, cultural and other social issues in Christian publishing, such as colorism, the elevation of or discrimination against black Americans based on complexion?
- What forms of self-expression do they feel comfortable with when it comes to working on individual projects?
The primary resource for this project for reflecting the importance of diversity in the publishing and graphic design industries. This visual elements of this project will be design projects created by my publishing company, A Touch of Omari.

A Touch of Omari is a full-service creative agency that specializes in the production of design projects from concept to completion to make into publication-ready material. The thesis will focus on two black Christian publication projects for R. Harrill Enterprises — the children’s book “Makeda: Queen of Sheba,” which won the International Book Awards category of Children’s Picture Book: Hardcover Non-Fiction; and “Children of Genesis,” a religious historical book detailing the presence of black people in the Old Testament.
For the design process for “Makeda: Queen of Sheba,” the premise of is to show the development of a children’s book that follows the study of not only the Old Testament, but the Kebra Nagast – an Ethiopian account of Queen Makeda’s life and her legacy.

Author Ronald Harrill wanted to give readers a look into the life of the Queen of Sheba. Though mentioned in the Bible for her visit to King Solomon, Harrill reveals that Makeda became the ruler of the Ethiopian empire as a teenager and traveled to Jerusalem to learn how to be a more effective leader.

“After years of research on Africa and people of African ancestry, I found that Ethiopian history was one of the oldest, richest and most fascinating of any country I studied,” Harrill said. “I found the legacy of the Queen of Sheba to be intriguing and I wanted to share it with readers all over the world (Johnson).”

The concept of the book is to show a young, rich and powerful queen of a biblical-era African empire deciding to take a dangerous nine-month journey to study with another ruler. But even at her young age, Makeda felt that education was more valuable than any treasure she possessed.
The initial cover art concept for "Makeda: Queen of Sheba." The page eventually became a splash page at the end of the book.
Interior page sketches for “Makeda: Queen of Sheba.”
Cover page sketch for “Makeda: Queen of Sheba.”

Interior sketch concept of “Makeda: Queen of Sheba.”
An interior splash page for “Makeda: Queen of Sheba.”
Interior sketch concept of “Makeda: Queen of Sheba.”
To complement the African feel of "Makeda: Queen of Sheba," the book uses the typeface Afroflare for the cover title and drop caps for the chapter headers. Scholtz Fonts, the foundry that created Afroflare, says its inspiration comes from "gusty breezes that buffet you while you cross the African veldt on safari in an open vehicle. It is lighthearted and sunny; quirky and humorous."
The final version used for the cover featured gold gradient colors to symbolize the wealth and power of the Ethiopian (Cushite) empire. The gradient effects were created in Photoshop, with the sparkles created with sparkle brushes in Photoshop.
“With the front cover, we wanted to present a powerful image to young black girls that one of the most prominent queens in the Old Testament looks like you and is a champion of education and achievement.”

Ronald Harrill
A unique aspect of the Ethiopian empire was its leadership under female rulers who demonstrated courage, wisdom and diplomacy equaled to kingdoms that were led by traditional kings. The biblical era records the presence of Ethiopian queens from 1000 B.C. through at least the third century A.D. Makedawas a powerful leader of the Ethiopian empire whose influence spread throughout Israel, Egypt and neighboring countries.
Makeda’s journey to Jerusalem to visit King Solomon and the events of this historic meeting is in 1 Kings 10: 1-13. The first verses detail the enormous riches and treasures that Makeda gave to Solomon. The queen challenged the king with intellectual debate and hard questions (1 Kings 10: 1-3).
Makeda was born into the Ethiopian royal family around the time 1000 B.C. to King Kawnasya and Queen Ismenie. When her older brother Rouz died tragically in a fire as a young boy, Makeda became the sole heir to the throne. After King Kawnasya’s death, Makeda became queen at age 16.
First Kings 10:11 introduces the Phoenician king Hiram. The Phoenicians were descendants from Canaanite ancestry, meaning they also were from Ham’s family tree. Hiram maintained a navy for his nation of people, in addition to high-level commercial trade and commerce.
Makeda later stayed in Jerusalem as a guest. According to the Kebra Nagast, she studied with Solomon and had access to his other scholarly teachers. She sometimes received special instructions from him (1 Kings 10: 4-5).
First Kings 10:11 introduces the Phoenician king Hiram. The Phoenicians were descendants from Canaanite ancestry, meaning they also were from Ham’s family tree. Hiram maintained a navy for his nation of people, in addition to high-level commercial trade and commerce.
The biggest creative challenge of this project was reacquiring the rights of the book from the original publisher, which went out of business in the late 1990s. Once acquired, the manuscript went through an extensive editing process. In addition, other tasks include art direction layout and design and setting up book distribution. The biggest success was winning the International Book Awards’ which category of Children’s Picture Book: Hardcover Non-Fiction.
Design Process

For the design process for "Children of Genesis," author Ronald Harrill wanted to uncover the black presence in a two-year research of the scriptures in the Old Testament. Before the Hebrews’ existence, the early Babylonians, Ethiopians and Egyptians maintained urban living areas, farmed their lands and domesticated the animals. They managed the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates rivers during droughts and overflowing annual cycles. They skillfully built dams, canals, irrigation systems and constructed massive lakes-reservoirs to store water during drought periods.

During the Old Testament era, the Hebrews/Israelites were not major inventors. A lot of the inventions from that era came from the Hamite nations. For example, the Sumerians in Mesopotamia and the Egyptians were leaders in the early development of writing and monument building.

When the Israelites migrated into the Canaan lands, they moved into cities the Canaanites had already built. Moreover, the historical Canaanites were not the stereotyped people portrayed in modern times. The Israelites never eliminated the Canaanites during the Old Testament days and, in fact, lived among the Canaanites.
The Book of Genesis tells the story of Noah and the Great Flood that destroyed all known human life, except for Noah’s family. Chapters 9 and 10 identified Noah’s three sons who had the task of repopulating the earth after the Great Flood through their descendants: Ham, Shem and Japheth. Genesis 10 contains the 30 genealogy verses that recorded the descendants of each of Noah’s sons.

The front cover on the left represents to readers the personification of each son in imagery. Ham (center) and his descendants had more than 1,000 biblical references in the Old Testament. This number does not include all descendants of Cush, Canaan and Mizraim, such as the Phoenicians and the Sidonians, which would increase the references.
(Preface) My Journey

I have often discussed events that shaped my life and propelled me on this never-ending journey of research on African and African people of African ancestry. It has been a 47-year journey that started in college and has been enriched with continuous passion to research and explore the wonders of our historical past.

As I look back at my life, I see a series of events and circumstances that contributed to my cultural and personal development. I certainly did not understand the big picture at those events occurred, but I now see them as the foundation that helped me arrive at the point of writing this book.

In October 1956, my grandmother gave me no first Bible. I was an inquisitive 6-year-old first-grade student at an all-Negro segregated school in North Carolina. The Bible had a white-banded cover, which caught my eye because it was different from the standard black cover bibles in our church. For the next six years, I carried my Bible to Sunday School and church. I constantly studied it and the pictures contained in the Bible. Along with my formal education, the Bible was the primary source for my learning. The Bible helped me learn to read, form sentences, and pronounce new words.

In my early years, the pictures in the Bible dominated my thoughts. As I read and listened to stories of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Noah and the Great Flood, Moses with the 10 Commandments, these people were my early-life heroes. Even though all characters in the pictures were white, that concept didn’t bother me because I was taught that race — if our all-Bible characters were strong, white people. This is what I grew up believing. I can’t recall any times that I questioned the validity of those pictures.

I belonged to a church, curing old southern black church founded in 1867. We believed and taught members that everything in the Bible was true and correct — in other words, “Don’t question it.” Even during my teenage years, I simply didn’t dream or fantasize that there could have been black people participating in significant biblical events.

My Early Cultural Platform

The first 17 years of my life, were spent as a second-class citizen in the United States of America. Growing up during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, we simply didn’t have full rights and citizenship freedom. We were particular to living in designated neighborhoods reserved for Negro people (now African Americans were called “Negroes” during that period). We attended all Negro schools, we could not sit down and eat at local restaurants, and we had to sit upstairs in seats allocated for colored Negro people when attending the local theater.

My official birth certificate recorded my race as “colored” and the color designation also included both of my parents. I heard the term “colored people” often as a child and this didn’t bother me at all. I saw the word “colored” lined on public bathrooms and water fountains reserved for our people.

Somewhere near the third grade, around 1958, I began to hear people calling us Negroes. I began to read and see the term Negro as I progressed in school and that was a good experience.

I had until maybe the mid-1960s when a new phenomenon, racial impact covered the landscape and we became known as black people.

1964 was a memorable year with the passing of the Civil Rights Act that mentioned we were new first-class citizens in the USA. 1964 produced another cultural shock for me as I was selected to become one of the original black students to integrate our local junior high school.
There were nine or ten of us black students who moved into an all-white school of about 1,000 students. I didn’t want to leave my all-black school in a younger environment, but my family told me the integration movement was needed for our community and for me personally. That was a tough emotional year for the few black students attending the school as we had to endure some challenging situations. During that school year, I realized that white students were no smarter or better than black students which greatly prepared me for my future years in adulthood.

Sometimes around my 16th birthday in 1966, after I got my driver’s license I remember our racial name had officially changed from Negro to black. In a span of just 16 years, I had three different legal racial designations from the United States government (Colored, Negro, Black).

My childhood years in the decade of the 1960s were a transformative time in U.S. history—the Civil Rights era, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X and Robert Kennedy, the Vietnam War, the Black Panther Party, and the hippie-flower power movement.

However throughout the 1960s and later, the pictures of those white-beard biblical characters never changed. Those white biblical characters remained embedded in our church bibles and also entrenched in our minds.

Off to College

My next cultural milestone involved attending North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro, N.C., a historically black university. I enrolled in the fall of 1968, about six months after the assassination of civil rights icon Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

By the time I entered college in 1968, my racial identity was fully black as the Negro term was slowly phased-out. I liked the same black and the racial self-esteem boost that went along with the word. I remember the beginnings at North Carolina A&T State University, and the legendary soul singer James Brown had released a song that became our anthem, “Say It Loud—I’m Black and I’m Proud.”

N.C. A&T was a cultural blessing for me. The late 1960s and 1970s was an explosion for the rebirth and expansion of black history, culture and its connection to African traditions and customs. I found myself immersed within a society of students from across the United States and some foreign countries. Students with different ideas and exciting backgrounds who enlightened me on news, events and stories about the black race.

I remember students who came from the Northeast criticizing me about Marcus Garvey, Langston Hughes, The Lus Post, and other black luminaries. I remember the Northern students wearing clothing with the symbolic colors of red, black and green—associated with the Pan-African colors of the blood of African ancestry (red), the people (black) and the land of Africa (green). Part of my memorable and best experiences was pledging and joining into Phi Beta Theta Fraternity in the fall of 1969. The brotherhood connections and lifetime friends are treasures of a lifetime.

I remember prominent black lecturers speaking on campus, including Shirley Chisholm (Bowman Truman) and Dick Gregory. The list of dynamic lecturers and speakers that visited our campus triggered thoughts and dreams about my own upcoming future of African research.

The college experiences provided the basic platform for me to begin exploring African history for the next 45 years—and I never stopped. I will always be indebted to my alma mater for the things I learned, absorbed, filled in and achieved during my undergraduate years.

California Dreaming
Final Work
Maps and timelines used in “Children of Genesis.” The information shows the visual presence of black and Asiatic presence in the Old Testament.
The prominence of the Ethiopian empire during early biblical days was present in Genesis. Ethiopia was the first significant nation listed in the Bible:

“And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia.”

*Genesis 2:13*

Havilah, a land connected to the Ethiopians, was listed in Genesis 2:12, but Havilah by itself was not considered a significant nation.

**CHALLENGING QUESTION**

Why did the Old Testament writers mention Ethiopia, a black nation, so early in Genesis? Was this a coincidence or an important reference statement?

**The Ethiopian Presence**

Nothing was coincidental or casual about the Ethiopian presence in the Bible. This initial statement in Genesis was a written testament to the strong legacy of Ethiopia. From the beginnings of Genesis and throughout the Old Testament, stories described the Ethiopians as world leaders in civilization and advancement.

Historians across the centuries were aware of the Ethiopian empire’s historical presence. Examples of Ethiopian royalty in the Bible include Queen Candace in Acts 8:26-28 and King Tirhakah in II Kings 19:8-9 and Isaiah 37:9-10. Their written stories and testimonies agree with the Old Testament accounts of Ethiopia. Stephanus of Byzantium from the sixth century A.D. voiced his universal declaration about Ethiopia:

“Ethiopia was the first established country on Earth and the Ethiopians were the first to set up the worship of the gods and to establish laws.”

A.H. Heeren (1760-1842), a European historian who provided research and valuable information on ancient Ethiopia, stated:

“From the remotest times to the present, the Ethiopians have been the most celebrated and yet the most mysterious of nations. In the earliest traditions of the more civilized nations of antiquity, the name of this most distant people is found. The annals of the Egyptian priests were full of them, and the nations of Inner Asia on the Euphrates and the Tigris have woven the fictions of the Ethiopians with their own traditions of the wars and conquests of their heroes.”

Christian Charles Josias von Bunsen (1791-1860), a 19th-century German scholar, said:

“The Hamitic family as Rawlinson proves must be given the credit for being the fountainhead of civilization. This family comprised the ancient Ethiopians, the Egyptians, the original Canaanites and the old Chaldeans. The inscriptions of the Chaldean monuments prove their race affinity.”

Bunsen also said the following about Cushite expansion:

“Cushite colonies were all along the southern shores of Asia and Africa and by the archaeological remains, along the southern and eastern coasts of Arabia. The name Cush was given to four great areas, Media, Persia, Susiana and Aria, or the whole territory between the Indus and Tigris in prehistoric times. In Africa, the Ethiopians, the Egyptians, the Libyans, the Canaanites and Phoenicians were all descendants of Ham. They were a black or dark colored race and the pioneers of our civilization. They were emphatically the monument builders on the plains of Shinar and the valley of the Nile from Meroe to Memphis.”

British author and historian Thomas Maurice (1754-1824) stated in his book “History of Hindostan:”

22. Ibid., Page 19.

A layout of pages in “Children of Genesis.” The visual aesthetic of the pages are to use clean navigation of text, Bible verses and a showcase of challenging questions for readers.
The premise of creating “Makeda: Queen of Sheba” was to create a children’s book that not only explores the Old Testament story of Makeda, the Queen of Sheba, but to reflect an increasing responsibility to push back against the notion that there was not a black presence in the Old Testament. Using the resources of the Old Testament, the goal is to show a wholesome, Biblical story that reflects diversity.

For “Children of Genesis,” the intent was to show the black nations never left the books of the Old Testament; modern humanity merely decided to provide a remake of characters and societies for their self-interests. Modern theories and assumptions about the identity of Old Testament nations regularly contradict how Old Testament writers depicted these nations.
Conclusion

This thesis analyzes how the lack of diversity in Christian publishing has been a recurring topic of conversation for decades. While industry studies believe the issue is solely a lack of exposure, it also reflects that black Americans face far-reaching systemic problems in entering the field as authors, editors and designers. And although conversations about diversity are becoming increasingly more common, these conversations have yielded marginal concrete progress.

Self-publishing

The strategic solution must address multiple issues. With the emergence of Amazon and electronic media services, the publishing industry has become decentralized from the traditional major publishers. Self-publishing has become a viable alternative publishing model. Editorial and distribution services, online marketing and other infrastructural platforms seem to offer independent authors more significant potential for success.
Additionally, independent publishing allows creators to control pricing, production, release schedules, intellectual property rights and much higher royalty rates. Traditional publishers have multiple gatekeepers who will have creative control of the content; with independent publishing, creatives can pull together their collective resources to create their content while having total autonomy in the creative and distribution process.

Arguably the biggest downfall of self-publishing is paying for the editing, design, printing and marketing costs for print books. A Touch of Omari provides these services as an in-house agency, which mitigates the authors’ search for these services.

Collaborative Effort

Closing the diversity gap requires collaboration between independent creatives, stakeholders and publishers to create standard practices. In this case, creatives must work together with organizations like the American Institute of Graphic Artists and publishers such as the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. At the same time, creatives must work with educators at the high school and college/university levels to promote diversity in design and the creative arts.

One professional organization committed to increasing diversity in design is The One Club’s Here Are All The Black People (https://www.waatbp.org/). This annual one-day multicultural career fair provides creatives interested in design, publishing and advertising a chance to network. Advertising executives Jimmy Smith and Jeff Goodby created the event after a panel discussion focused on the creative fields’ lack of diversity.

About the Commitment

Diversity is a lifelong mission, where a more outstanding commitment will require Christian publishers to undergo a fundamental transformation beyond publishing books by black American creatives. Christian publishers must acknowledge that there is a black presence in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament; black creatives do not serve a “niche” market; and there are systemic issues that are keeping black creators from entering the field as a career.
Appendix

All images created by Michael O. Johnson, except:
Stock images from Shutterstock. Pages 7, 9, 11, 17
Infographic from the Cooperative Children’s Book Center. Page 27
Infographic on diversity in graphic design from AIGA. Page 32


