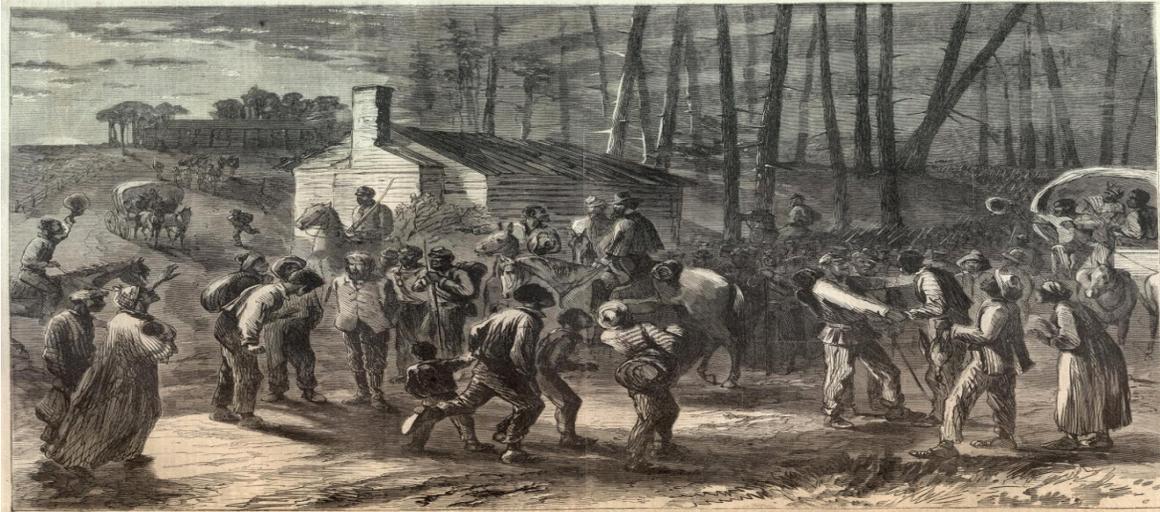


# Slave Worship: Revolution in Religion



## A lecture presented by Terrie Dopp Aamodt Thursday, February 21 at 7:00 p.m. – ADM 117

Christianity had multiple meanings for slave populations in the United States. Slave owners claimed moral high ground for importing Africans as slaves and bringing them in contact with the Christian religion. The institutionalized Christianity owners presented to their slaves was intended to keep them firmly placed in the subservient role white Christians believed was the permanent legacy of the sons of Ham. Slave owners sought to control slave religion by forbidding slaves to meet separately and by planning religious services that emphasized obedience.

However, examination of the accounts of slave religion as practiced in the quarters and in clandestine religious services indicates that it was deeply subversive of the institutional forms of Christianity imposed by slave owners. Slave narratives and records of observers indicate that slaves were drawn to the Exodus narrative and to the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, portions of the biblical text that never appeared in owner-controlled worship services. This militant framework helped shape both the Denmark Vesey and the Nat Turner rebellions. Slave religion as expressed in slave songs and spirituals provided a source of hope for eventual freedom and created an interpretive context for black troops as they were assembled into regiments after the Emancipation Proclamation. As slaves watched former slaves, now Union soldiers, marching into southern cities in the closing days of the Civil War, they glimpsed the realization of apocalyptic biblical passages that had sustained their religious practices when they saw no hope of deliverance.



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