

**SOCIOLOGY
ARTS AND SCIENCES****SUMMER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNDERGRADUATE students****FOR APPLICATION YEAR: 2026****PROJECT TITLE: Abriding the Text: Narratives of Liberation in Gigachurch Sermons**

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Project Description

Biblical narratives of liberation feature in prophetic preaching traditions and have been the driving force behind social movements, including the Civil Rights Movement (Morris 1984). But what happens when those narratives of liberation are absent? In the early 1800s, British missionaries created a Bible designed for enslaved people. The “slave Bible” excluded all references to freedom and justice, resulting in a length less than half that of the Protestant Bible (Shepherd 2019). While this version of the Bible is considered a relic, only suitable for museums, we hypothesize that its impact may still be evident today. We ask: To what extent does the “slave Bible” reflect what is considered legitimate in American Christianity today, and what does the inclusion or exclusion of certain texts mean for what religious people believe, how they vote, and their cross-racial interactions?

In this study, we examine church sermons to determine whether the religious texts used during Sunday morning gatherings would have been included or excluded from the slave Bible. To do so, we examine sermons preached within gigachurches during 2025. Gigachurches are particularly large churches numbering over 10,000 members. These churches matter, not only because they reach a disproportionate share of church- attenders, but also because they exemplify what is considered legitimate in the religious field in which they operate, influencing religious organizations of all sizes.

The student working on this project will engage in data collection and content analysis of sermons gathered from gigachurch websites. They will also gain experience in understanding sociological theory related to their project and how to present their research. It is expected that at least one academic publication will result from this project. A successful student may be eligible for publication co-authorship as well as academic conference

presentations. The student will receive mentorship from both a faculty member and a graduate student through weekly meetings and targeted feedback. This project would be particularly appropriate for a student considering graduate studies in the social sciences.