UNDERAPPRECIATED

The African American Church in the United States

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Underappreciated:
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For Ara and Jeremiah

May you appreciate the beauty and diversity of the Body of Christ.

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THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

The African-American Experience

One of the most inspiring and least publicized chapters of church history is the story of the African American church in the United States. This is largely due to the fact that European ethnocentrism has shaped how the history of the nation has been taught. The African-American scholar, Carl Ellis has reflected on his educational experience and has noted "What was palmed off as 'objective' history was in reality 'White' history. Black history was almost completely glossed over as if we did not exist."[i] This approach has left African-Americans without the cultural moorings upon which to build a stable community. Malcolm X addressed this problem in his critique of the popular usage of the term "Negro."

> Negro doesn't tell you anything. I mean nothing, absolutely nothing. What do you identify it with? Tell me. Nothing. . .The land doesn't exist, the culture doesn't exist, the language doesn't exist, and the man doesn't exist. . .Just as a tree without roots is dead, a people without history or cultural roots also becomes a dead people. And when you look at us, those of us who are called Negro, we're called that because we are like a dead people.[ii]

At the same time, Anglos have been hindered by the omission because it has left them without a sufficient appreciation of the richness of the African-American culture and its contribution to this nation and, from a Christian perspective, the Kingdom of God.

African-Americans: African Antecedents

"An African should not have to find it necessary to make apologies for his civilization."[iii] History reveals that the African continent has been the site of a rich and multi-faceted cultural development. One of humankind's earliest and most influential civilizations arose in Egypt. Increasingly, historians are recognizing that this great civilization consisted of people who

would be categorized as Black within the cultural context of the United States.[iv] The book of Exodus notes that it was within the context of this culture that the Hebrew people grew to be a nation, suffered their initial travail, and witnessed the mighty acts of God's salvation on their behalf.

Subsequent books of the Bible also identify Egypt and other African peoples as active participants in the life of the ancient world and in the concerns of God. The prophets recognize the allure of Egypt as they warn Judah against political alliance with that country, a union which ultimately proved to be a stumblingblock to God's people (Jer. 2:36, 42:14-19; Eze. 29:3-16). The psalmists name Ethiopia among those who would share in the blessing of God's kingdom (Ps. 68:31; 87:4). Ellis also notes that Africa figures prominently in God's workings in the New Testament.

> As Jesus was carrying his cross through the streets of Jerusalem, he stumbled under its weight. Simon, a Black man from Cyrene, Africa, was grabbed to carry the cross the rest of the way (Lk. 23:26). On the day of Pentecost, people from every nation (including African nations) heard the gospel and were converted (Acts 2:5-12). the Ethiopian government official was converted on his way home (Acts 8:26-39). The church at Antioch had several African members, among them two prophets or teachers, Simeon called the Black man, and Lucius the Cyrenian (Acts 13:1). . .It is out of that Antioch church that Paul and Barnabas were sent to evangelize Turkey, Greece, and Italy. The European church has the African church to thank for its missionary faithfulness.[v]

Ellis also notes that African played a conspicuous role in the advancement of the ancient church. Alexandria, and Carthage were important centers of Christian influence during the early Christian centuries and powerful church fathers such as Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius, and Augustine were of African descent.[1]

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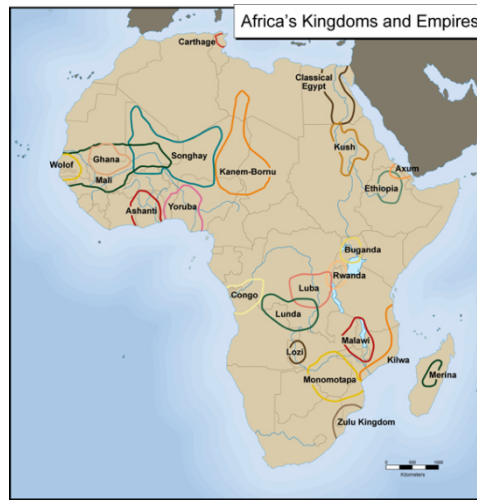
[1]Ellis recognizes that each of the church fathers mentioned were north Africans and not sub-Saharan Africans. He notes however, that under the restrictive color definitions of the ante-bellum South, they would have been considered Black. See: Ibid., 36, 192.

During the European medieval period, West Africa, the area from which the majority of slaves were taken, developed several highly advanced cultures. The empires of Ghana (c500-c1200), Mali (1235-1400), and Songhay (1355-1591) dominated the region.



[vi]

They were by no means, however, the only cultural groups in the district. Numerous smaller kingdoms also thrived in the period preceding European incursions. Each of these civilizations developed engaged in trade among themselves and with the arabic world across the Sahara Desert which, at that time was considerably smaller. They fashioned social, political, and religious structures which maintained order among their citizenry, established centers of learning in cities such as Gao and Timbuktu, and encouraged the arts and an oral tradition of literature.[vii] Coombs notes "Many of the early European visitors, in fact, were impressed by the luxury, power, trading practices, skilled crafts, and in the complex social structure which they found in Africa."[viii]

This overview underscores the criminality of the slave trade which followed the demise of the West African empires and raises questions concerning the extent to which African culture was retained by kidnapped slaves. Franklin and Moss summarize the basic conclusions of scholars.

> The acculturative process varied in different places and under different circumstances. In some places it was all but stymied where there was sufficient consensus of experience among the African to take the Western culture and reinterpret it almost wholly in terms of their own experiences. In other places, mainly Brazil and some Caribbean islands, successful revolts made possible the transplantation of an African way of life to a considerable degree. Elsewhere, the normal or gradual development of the process can be observed, but always at least some survival of African culture in the New World.[ix]

These conclusions, though brief, are indicative of the strength of the Black culture and suggest that the Black church provides an informative case study in the process of contextualization.

African-Americans 1619-1775: An Economic Tool

European exploration and exploitation of the wealth of the New World involved slave trade from the start. In 1517, twenty-five years after Columbus discovered America, the Catholic church permitted the importation into Spanish colonies of Africans who by their skin color were ideally suited for use as slaves.[x] Very quickly, Dutch and English traders took up the business. The English, led by Sir John Hawkins, entered the business in 1563 and rapidly established the practices which characterized trans-Atlantic slave trade throughout its existence.[xi] The first African slaves to appear in Virginia did not arrive until 1619. These initial workers were indentured servants who were freed and given colonial land when their term of service expired.[xii] Within years the example of the Caribbean islands convinced those who were responsible for the economic development of Virginia and the other English colonies that lifetime servitude would be more profitable. In 1661, Virginia legalized life-long slavery. Other colonies followed and slave trade in North America began in earnest with slaves being imported into all of the colonies.[xiii]

Throughout its entire existence slavery was viewed as an economic necessity by slaveholders. Accordingly, slaves were viewed as nothing more than an economic tool. Treatment of slaves was predicated upon its effect on profits. This attitude

spawned the well-documented inhumanity of slavery. James Cone describes what the cruelty of slavery meant to Blacks.

> Slavery meant being snatched from your homeland and sailing to an unknown land in a stinking ship. Slavery meant being regarded as property, like horses cows and household goods. For blacks the auction block was one potent symbol of their subhuman status. The block stood for "brokenness because on sale days no family ties were recognized. . . Slavery meant working fifteen to twenty hours a day and being beaten for showing fatigue. It meant being driven into the field three weeks after delivering a baby. It meant having the cost of replacing you calculated against the value of your labor during peak season, so that your owner could decide whether to work you to death. It meant being whipped for crying over a fellow slave who had been killed while trying to escape.[xiv]

In contrast to later periods, slavery and its excesses did not produce any significant pangs of conscience among the general populace. With the exception of protests that were voiced by the Quakers, the vast majority of colonists failed to concern themselves with the inconsistencies that existed between the general practice of slavery and their profession of Christianity. Franklin and Moss note "Although the New Englander took his religion seriously, he did not permit it to interfere with his appreciation of the profits of slavery."[xv] Among slaveholders themselves the concerns of Christianity were clearly subordinate to the affairs of business. As a result, there was a great deal of initial hesitance on the part of Christian slaveowners to evangelize their slaves. Wilmore discusses the fears of slaveholders.

> They knew instinctively that any attempt to educate or indoctrinate their workers would in the long run change the precarious relationship between master and slave. For this reason many of them opposed any kind of religious instruction.[xvi]

As a result, a number of rationalizations were developed to excuse the Christian colonialist's inattention to the great commission as it applied to Africans. Excuses included assertions that Africans had no souls, or were too stupid to receive Christian teaching.[xvii] In addition, certain legal barriers initially prevented planters from simultaneously evangelizing and

enslaving Africans. Salley and Behm describe this seeming dilemma for the slaveholder.

> Christianity was a major barrier to be hurdled on the way to chattel racial slavery. There was an unwritten law that a Christian could not be held as a slave. Therefore, if Blacks were allowed to be converted, they could no longer be slaves, and baptism would be tantamount to emancipation. . . . To settle any doubt, the leading colony of Virginia in "a series of laws between 1667 and 1671 laid down the rule that conversion alone did not lead to a release from servitude.[xviii]

Despite these reservations, many, but not all, masters eventually permitted their slaves to hear the gospel. Some did so out of Christian concern, others in hopes that their slaves would become more submissive as they became Christians. They did so by allowing White missionaries to preach to their Blacks, by allowing Blacks whose conversion was notable to preach under the supervision of a White preacher, or by permitting slaves to worship with them in a segregated section of the church.[xix] Franklin and Moss note that the earliest evidences of segregation are found in this practice of separating Whites and Blacks in worship.[2] Whatever approach was taken, planters took great care to maintain White dominance over the religious lives of slaves and to use religion to solidify their control over their bondmen and women.[3]

Despite the oppressive nature of their introduction to religion of their masters, the religious longings of African-Americans drew them to Christianity.

> Despite the deliberate distortion of Christian doctrine and stringent restrictions upon religious activity, a distinctive African-American

[2]They also note that in at least one congregation a partition was built to separate slaves from masters. Franklin and Moss, From Slavery to Freedom 124-125.

[3]Wilmore notes that a favorite text of White preachers was Ephesians 6:5, "Servants be obedient to them that are your masters." In addition, he cites an early catechism which was designed to make slaves docile. It read: "'What did God make you for?' The answer: 'To make a crop.' 'What is the meaning of Thou shalt not commit adultery'? The answer: 'To serve our heavenly father, and our earthly master, obey our overseer, and not steal anything.'" Wilmore, Black Religion 24.

> form of Christianity -- actually a new religion of an oppressed people -- slowly took root in the black community. This black folk religion contained a definite moral judgment against slavery and a clear legitimization of resistance to injustice.[xx]

When masters prohibited their slaves from meeting for religious purposes or required that any gatherings be supervised by a White preacher, Blacks were undaunted, meeting secretly at night away from white surveillance. It was in these secret meetings that many of the practices which are part and parcel of contemporary Black worship had their beginning.[xxi] It is probable that the leaders of these meetings were "former priests or religious specialists of one sort or another" in the traditional religions.[xxii] With the Great Awakening, large numbers of Blacks as well as Whites experienced conversion and a contextualized Christianity developed which gave slaves emotional support as they endured their everyday lives, and gave them hope of liberation in the present age as well as in eternity.

African-Americans 1775-1787: Are These Truths Self Evident?

"We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights; that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."[xxiii] While the framers of the Declaration of Independence indisputably upheld the "unalienable Rights" of their countrymen of European descent, the prerogatives of African-Americans were much less certain. The retraction of the paragraphs in the Declaration which condemned slavery were clear indication that slavery was solidly entrenched in the fabric of American society.[xxiv]

Despite their continued second-class status, Blacks took the American ideal seriously and participated in significant numbers in the Revolutionary War. Crispus Attucks, a runaway slave, was one of the first killed in the Boston Massacre. Peter Salem was one of the heroes of the Battle of Bunker Hill. these are only two of the most prominent of many Blacks who fought in the war for independence. Many free Blacks and slaves enlisted in the

Continental armies. The latter were often promised and received their freedom at the conclusion of the war.[xxv]

The idealism of the independence movement raised questions about the practice of slavery in the colonies. The sentiments Abigail Adams shared with her husband were typical of many in the soon-to-be United States. "It always appeared a most iniquitous scheme to me to fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have."[xxvi] The years before the war saw a number of manumission societies develop and the years following the war witnessed the New England and Middle States abolish slavery in their territories. However, slavery was still an integral part of the economy of the South and that region resisted any movement toward the abolition of their peculiar institution. The decisions of the Constitutional Convention to extend slave trade for twenty years and to ratify the three-fifths compromise effectively denied Blacks the freedom for which many of them had fought during the Revolutionary War.[xxvii]

African-Americans 1787-1829: Cotton Is King

The invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney injected new vitality into the economic life of the South and the practice of slavery. Cotton became a lucrative crop, replacing tobacco, rice and indigo as the most profitable harvest of the plantations of the South. The farms of the eastern seaboard were rejuvenated, and new estates in the Deep South were established as the textile factories of the North and England demanded an unending supply of cotton. To supply the demand, southern plantations became more dependent on slave labor than they had ever been in previous decades.[xxviii] As a result, the mechanisms of the slave machine were polished. Despite the abolition of international slave trade in 1807, transatlantic importation continued as laws went unenforced. Domestic slave dealers made handsome profits supplying the demand for slaves in the new territories. Masters bred their slaves for increased productivity and profitability. Fugitive slave laws were enacted, and slave codes legalizing oppression were established.

The consequences of these actions on the life of could be anticipated. Family life in the Black community was particularly harmed. The owner's economic interest not family relationships among slaves determined whether the master would sell or keep an individual slave. As a result, Black families were often broken up at the whim of the slaveholder. Traders justified such actions by suggesting that family ties were not important to Blacks. Repeated attempts by slaves to escape new masters and return to their families seems to suggest otherwise. The deleterious effects in other areas of the slave's life were equally pronounced.[xxix]

Slaves were not entirely docile in accepting increased repression. Slaves fought the system by running away, mutilating or killing themselves, loafing on the job, poisoning their masters, and, on several occasions, planning full-scale rebellions.[xxx] The success of the Black revolution in Haiti under Toussaint L'Ouverture in 1794 encouraged Blacks in the United States that they could throw off the yokes of their oppressors.

Toussaint L'Ouverture[xxxi]

Two of the most notable slave revolts were those led by Gabriel Prosser in Virginian during 1800, and by Denmark Vesey in South Carolina during 1822. Both revolts were crushed and their leaders executed.[xxxii]

James Cone notes that Blacks were undergirded in their resistance by their faith. In his analysis of slave music, he notes that the otherworldliness of Black spirituals was not totally otherworldly. Quoting Frederick Douglass, he observes:

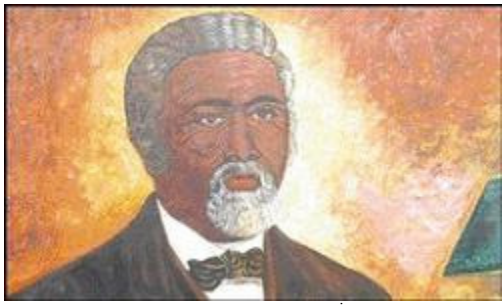
> We were at times remarkably buoyant, singing hymns, and making joyous exclamations, almost as triumphant in their tone as if we had reached a land of freedom and safety. A keen observer might have detected in our repeated singing of
>
> O Canaan, sweet Canaan,
> I am bound for the land of Canaan,
>
> something more than a hope of reaching heaven. We meant to reach the *North*, and the *North* was our Canaan.[xxxiii]

While the hope of heaven in slave music cannot be reduced to little more than temporal deliverance, neither can it be detached from historic realities. "Enslaved blacks believed that there was an omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient power at work in the world, and that he was on the side of the oppressed and downtrodden."[xxxiv] This realization energized many Blacks as they faced the realities of their existence. "Christianity did not dull the drive for liberation among all black slaves, and there is much evidence that slaves appropriated the gospel to their various styles of resistance.[xxxv]

Free Blacks in both the North and South did not enjoy appreciably better circumstances than their slave brothers. Free Blacks in the South were restricted in their travel and opportunities for economic advancement. They also faced the threat of being sold back into slavery for the most minor legal offense.[xxxvi] Blacks in the North also had to endure personal racism and statutory discrimination. They were prohibited from delivering the mail, refused recognition of their American citizenship, and denied the franchise.[xxxvii] Despite these impediments, many African-Americans moved towards self-sufficiency. Gustavus Vassa became a popular writer. Benjamin Bannaker helped to lay out the streets of Washington D.C. Paul Cuffe was a shipbuilder who helped initiate the colonization

movement which sought to relieve racial tensions by repatriating Blacks to Africa.[4]

At this same time, many Black Christians were establishing independent churches. Throughout the nation a number of autonomous Black Baptist congregations were established during and immediately after the Revolutionary War. David George established what may have been the first Black Baptist church in Silver Bluff, South Carolina in 1775. George Liele and Andrew Bryan founded the First African Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia in 1788.[xxxviii]



George Liele[xxxix]

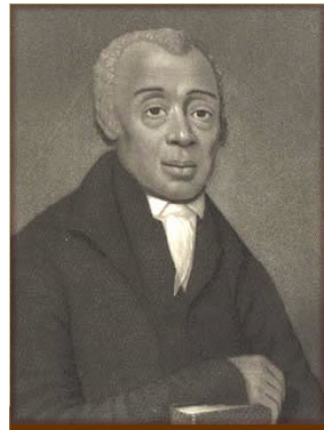
In 1809, Reverend Burrows organized a Black church for Baptists in Philadelphia, and Thomas Paul helped start congregations of African-Americans in Boston and New York City in that same year.[xl] These congregations while possessing many commonalities did not organize themselves in formal denominational ties.

The first Black denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, was established as a result of White racism and the efforts of Richard Allen. Allen was a Methodist preacher in Philadelphia who worked among Blacks on behalf of the St.

[4]Franklin and Moss, From Slavery to Freedom 88-91. Vassa was particularly pointed in his condemnation of Christians for their involvement in the slave trade. "O, ye nominal Christians! might not an African ask you -- Learned you from your God, who says unto you, Do unto all men as you would men should do unto you? Is it not enough that we are torn from our country, to toil for your luxury and lust of gain? Must every feeling be likewise sacrificed to your avarice?"

George's Methodist Episcopal Church, a White congregation in that city. Because of the segregated seating of the church and differences concerning worship style, Allen ultimately was moved to form an autonomous congregation. He describes the incident which affected the separation.

> We had not been long upon our knees before I heard considerable scuffling and low talking. I raised my head up and saw one of the trustees, H----- M-----, having laid hold of the Reverend Absalom Jones, pulling him up off his knees, and saying, "You must get up -- you must not kneel here." Mr. Jones replied, "Wait until prayer is over." Mr. H----- M----- said, "No, you must get up now, or I will call for aid and force you away." Mr. Jones said, "Wait until prayer is over, and I will trouble you no more." With that he beckoned to one of the other trustees, Mr. L----- S----- to come to his assistance. He came, and went to William White to pull him up. By this time prayer was over, and we all went out of the Church in a body, and they were no more plagued with us in the Church.[xli]



[xlii]

The result of this walk out was the organization of the Bethel Church in 1794. Other congregations followed the lead of the Bethel Church until a formal denomination was established in 1816. Another major Black denomination was initiated in 1822. The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church was created in New York out of circumstances similar to those in Philadelphia as Blacks sought to escape White paternalism in their life before God.[xliii] All of these related incidents mark the genesis of a self-

governing Black church which as cone observes was "the only sphere of black experience that was free of white power."[xliv]

African-Americans 1829-1860: A Time Bomb

The year 1829 witnessed the publication of one of the most meaningful documents of ante-bellum Black literature. David Walker's "Appeal in Four Articles, Together with a Preamble to the Colored Citizens of the World, But in Particular and very Expressly to those of the United States of America" contains the most scathing denunciation of slavery to come from the pen of a black man up to that time. In this work, Walker asserts that the enslavement of the African is unprecedented in the history of oppression. He further declares that White Christianity stands under the judgment of God for their complicity in the practice of slavery. He concludes with a call for Blacks to overpower their oppressors and free themselves from their bondage.

> They want us for their slaves, and think nothing of murdering us in order to subject us to that wretched condition -- therefore, if there is an *attempt* made by us, kill of be killed. . . . Look upon your mother, wife and children, and answer God Almighty! and believe this, that it is no more harm for you to kill a man, who is trying to kill you, than it is for you to take a drink of water when thirsty.[xlv]

Walker's plea was taken up by Nat Turner. Whether Turner came into contact with Walker's writings is a matter of conjecture. However, there can be no doubt that the fears slaveowners felt when "Walker's Appeal" was published were compounded by Turner's actions. Viewing himself as a Black deliverer, Turner planned a slaves' rebellion in August 1831. His coup was far bloodier than any of its predecessors. Turner and his fellow insurrectionists killed 60 Whites in Virginia before the rebellion was crushed.[xlvi] As news of the uprising spread throughout the South, planters and their families were terrified at the thought of being murdered in their beds and they took what they deemed to be appropriate action. The slave code and laws restricting free blacks were made more stringent, unsupervised Black gatherings, including church services, were banned, Black preachers were proscribed, fugitive slave laws were strengthened, citizen militia were strengthened, and the apologetic for slavery

was refined.[xlvii] Arguments for slavery revolved around four premises. Franklin and Moss summarize them as follows:

> (1) Slave labor was absolutely essential to the economic development and prosperity of the South.
> (2) The Negro race was inferior and destined to occupy a subordinate position.
> (3) The church sanctioned slavery as a means of converting the heathen.
> (4) The white race had not degenerated because of slavery but had developed a unique and high degree of culture.[xlviii]

At the same time, significant segments of the population throughout the country were becoming sensitized to the evils of slavery[5] and were beginning to work for the abolition of it. The Abolitionist movement, led by Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, Samuel Cornish, and Harriet Beecher Stowe called for the total eradication of slavery. The Underground Railroad with individuals such as, Harriet Tubman and John Fairfield serving as conductors, spirited numerous runaway slaves out of the South.[xlix] This, in turn, increased the defensiveness of slaveowners who enacted still more rigid constraints on Blacks in the South.

All of this indicates that the slavery question was a time bomb waiting to explode on the American people. With the continued westward expansion of the nation, John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, and the election of Abraham Lincoln as President, the land erupted in civil war.

African-Americans 1860-1865: The Civil War

Despite high-sounding explanations which characterized the Civil War in terms of the need to save the union or to defend states' rights, the War Between the States was fundamentally a fight over slavery. All other interpretations provided secondary reasons for the conflict. President Lincoln eventually recognized this fact

[5]This should not be taken to mean that there was anything approaching consensus regarding slavery or the question of race in the North. Blacks still had to endure racial outbursts in the North and even within the abolitionist societies there were indications that racial prejudice was not entirely absent. See: Coombs, The Black Experience 77.

publically with the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation. This war document which freed all of the slaves in those states which continued their rebellion against the United States as of January 1, 1863 made the war an overt battle for freedom, doomed the Confederacy's efforts for foreign recognition and intervention, and ensured substantial Black support of the Republican Party until the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.[l]

Blacks recognized the true nature of the war more rapidly than Whites and almost immediately after the first shots of the war were fired they expressed their willingness to personally fight for their freedom. They were not permitted to enlist in the Union armies until the autumn of 1862 for fear that the border states would be alienated by such an action. Once they were allowed to join the armed forces, they responded enthusiastically. Approximately 186,000 Blacks served and fought well in the Union armies by the end of the war.[li]

The victory of the North was a momentous triumph for all Blacks. However, even before the war was over the specter of future problems cast their shadow on the victory. Segregation and racism replaced slavery as the obstacles between Blacks and full equality in their homeland. Coombs notes that while Blacks served in the Union forces, they served in segregated units.

> For the first time in American history, however, they were forced to serve in segregated units and were usually commanded by white officers. One of the ironies of the conflict was that the war which terminated slavery was also responsible for initiating segregation within the Armed Forces. In a way this fact became symbolic of the role which racial discrimination and segregation eventually came to play in American society.[lii]

At the same time, racist feelings among Whites in the North actually increased as White industrial workers, facing unemployment, saw Blacks as potential competitors for their jobs.[liii] The draft riots which occurred in the North during the war were the foreshadowing of subsequent race-oriented troubles.

African-Americans 1865-1877: Reconstruction

Coombs observes that three major questions confronted the reunified nation at the conclusion of the Civil War. "How should sectional strife be healed? What should be the status of the ex-slave? Who should determine that status?"[liv] The manner in which these questions were addressed by differing factions within the nation shaped the struggles of the African-American community in the next century.

How should sectional strife be healed? In regard to the first question, President Lincoln and his successor, Andrew Johnson, favored a compassionate approach to reconstruction. Republicans in Congress, sensing that the South was not reconciled to the outcome of the war and seeing an opportunity to extend their party's control over the South, demanded that abject submission be required of the former Confederacy. When under the lenient conditions established by Lincoln and Johnson, the newly restored states elected and sent to Washington a preponderance of Confederate officials, it became obvious to those favoring a hard line that a gentle approach would not suffice. Congress seized control of the Reconstruction process, reorganized the South into five military districts, and placed upon the individual states more stringent requirements for readmission to the union. Franklin and Moss comment on the significance of these actions.

> The victory of congress marked not only the beginning of a harsh policy toward the South; it also signified the triumph of a coalition of interests -- crusaders, politicians, and industrialists -- all of whom hoped to gain something substantial through congressional reconstruction. It produced new conflicts, more bitter than preceding ones, and created so much confusion and chaos in almost every aspect of life that many of the problems would persist for more than a century.[lv]

What should be the status of the ex-slave and who should determine that status? Coombs' second and third questions are related and elicited radically different answers from the opposing factions. White supremacists wanted Blacks to remain "in their place." They sought home rule for southern states and attempted

to enact legislation which placed African-Americans in essentially the same state they found themselves as slaves. The "Black Codes" strangely paralleled the slave codes of ante-bellum years.[lvi] When these laws were nullified in congressional reconstruction, Whites resorted to extralegal means to suppress Blacks. The Ku Klux Klan first appeared during this period. It and similar organizations attempted to intimidate Blacks into submission.[6] Patterns of coercion were established during this time which have continued for better than a century. At the same time, less vicious but equally effective actions were taken in the industrialized north to protect White interests. With the perception that Blacks were a threat to White jobs, the newly formed labor unions usually excluded Blacks from membership. On occasion, White workers in the North also resorted to violent means to suppress Blacks.[lvii]

Blacks and many northern Republicans desired federal control of reconstruction and full equality for Blacks within the society. The Reconstruction Act of 1867 required that states give evidence that they would respect the rights of Blacks prior to their readmission to the union. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments legally secured the citizenship and voting rights of Blacks, and agencies such as the Freedman's Bureau worked to solidify the political and economic status of Blacks.[lviii] As a result of all of this, Blacks were able to participate fully in the political processes of the nation.

> The end of slavery was no longer a dream but reality. The remarkable political and social progress made by Blacks during Reconstruction gave our people hope that the scars of slavery would soon be eliminated from our collective psyche. An ex-slave Blanche Kelso, was representing Mississippi in the United States Senate. . . In Mississippi, in South Carolina, in Louisiana, Negro lieutenant governors were sitting at the right hand of power. . . Negroes were superintendents of education, state treasurers, adjutant generals,

[6]The Klan and other such groups "used intimidation, force, ostracism in business and society, bribery at the polls, and even murder to accomplish their deeds. . .Negroes were run out of communities if they disobeyed orders to desist from voting and the more resolute and therefore insubordinate blacks were whipped, maimed and hanged." Ibid., 227.

> solicitors, judges and major generals of militia. . . Seven Negroes were sitting in the House of Representatives.[lix]

This halcyon period of Black history was brought to a halt with the election of Rutherford B. Hayes as president. In a confused victory over Samuel Tilden, Hayes agreed to remove federal troops from the South in exchange for the disputed electoral votes of Oregon, South Carolina, Louisiana, and Florida. Once the troops were withdrawn, Whites in the South began the process of turning the political and social clock back. In the following years, Blacks faced disenfranchisement, and economic marginalization as the Jim Crow[7] era began.[lx]

Throughout this turbulent period, the Black church grew. A particularly important development was the formal organization of a number of Black Baptist denominations.[8] The foremost of the Reconstruction era associations was The Baptist General Association of the Western States and Territories (organized 1873).[lxi] The work of this group underscored the importance of cooperation among Blacks and foreshadowed the development of the National Baptist Convention U.S.A. The actual development of the Convention was occasioned by the continued missionary zeal of Black Baptists. In 1880, William W. Colley, discouraged by the lack of success by White missionaries among the Africans with whom they worked, encouraged Black churches to band together to for an association to send missionaries to Africa.[lxii] His work led to the establishment of the Foreign Mission Convention of the United States of America. As the

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[7]"'Jim Crow' was the name of a minstrel routine (actually 'Jump Jim Crow') performed beginning in 1828 by its author, Thomas Dartmouth ('Daddy') Rice, and by many imitators, including Joseph Jefferson. The term came to be a derogatory epithet for blacks." See: Encyclopaedia Britannica 15th ed., s.v. "Jim Crow laws."

[8]Previously, numerous Black groups organized themselves so that they could better cooperate in the spreading of the Gospel. Among these were: The African Baptist Missionary Society (organized 1815); The American Baptist Missionary Convention (organized 1840); and The Western and Southern Missionary Baptist Convention (organized 1864). These organizations made positive contributions to the missionary work of the church despite the restrictions which Blacks found themselves under at that time. Lott Carey and other Blacks sponsored by these groups were among the first to preach the gospel in Liberia. See: Shipley and Shipley, Black Baptists in Missouri 30.

work of the Convention progressed, Blacks saw the need for further expressions of the cooperative spirit. This led to the founding of the American National Baptist Convention (organized 1886) and the National Baptist Educational Convention (organized 1893). These two groups merged with the Foreign Mission Convention in 1895 to form The National Baptist Convention U.S.A.[lxiii]

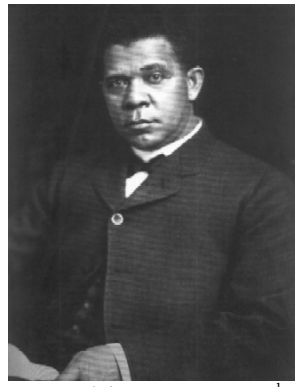
African-Americans 1877-1955: Separate But Equal?

The Supreme Court's landmark decision in the Plessy vs. Ferguson case is the fulcrum around which the fortunes of African-Americans revolved during this period. This decision which upheld the concept of "separate but equal" and institutionalized segregation in the South was the culmination of White efforts since the demise of Reconstruction to disenfranchise Blacks and was the basis upon which society at large continued its oppressive treatment of African-Americans. Blacks were segregated from Whites in classrooms and public facilities. They were refused service by many White-owned businesses[lxiv] and were often excluded from the benefits of membership in the country's rapidly growing labor unions.[lxv] These actions and the racist attitudes which fostered them in both the South and the North[9] left Blacks economically marginalized, politically vulnerable, educationally handicapped, psychologically damaged and in danger physically on many occasions. Actual and rumored crimes by Blacks often resulted in mob action by Whites. Lynchings were commonplace throughout this period. Coombs notes that between 1900 and

[9]Due to problems with the Boll Weevil and the mechanization of the cotton industry, Blacks found it increasingly difficult to survive in the South. Beginning with World War I, Blacks began to migrate to northern cities to take factory jobs vacated by men going to war. Black migrations continued after the war was over and more restrictive immigration laws were set in place. They slowed during the depression but were renewed once again during World War II. Generally speaking, Black migrations flowed along three major streams. Blacks from the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida migrated to the industrial cities of the Northeast. Blacks from Mississippi, Alabama and Arkansas moved to the cities of the Midwest, such as St. Louis and Chicago. Blacks from Texas and Louisiana migrated to California. See: Palen, Urban World 221.

1910, 846 hangings occurred in the United States. Of these, 754 of the victims were Black.[lxvi] In extreme situations, violence against Blacks developed into full-scale riots. One of the most serious outbursts against Blacks took place in Springfield, Illinois in 1908. After a White woman claimed to have been raped by a Black, an irate crowd of Whites vandalized the Black section of the city, lynching several Blacks in the process. Eventually, the state militia had to be called in to subdue the crowds. Later this woman admitted that she had been attacked by a White man.[lxvii] This riot, occurring in Lincoln's hometown, highlighted America's race problem in a particularly poignant manner and led to the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.[10]

Despite these impediments, Blacks contributed to the extent that they were permitted in the larger culture. They served in the armed forces, expressed themselves in the arts, music, and literature, and contributed to the technological advancement of the nation. Still as a group they were dissatisfied with their underclass status and developed among themselves several strategies for group advancement.



Booker T. Washington[lxviii]

[10]This writer was raised in Springfield, Illinois and finds it very interesting that this incident was never mentioned either formally or informally during his education in the Springfield public schools.

Booker T. Washington was easily one of the most influential Blacks of this age. From the time that he went to the Tuskegee Institute in 1881 to his death in 1915, he was recognized by Whites as the spokesman for the Black community. He espoused a policy of conciliation with Whites.

> Any movement for the elevation of the Southern Negro, in order to be successful, must have to a certain extent the cooperation of the Southern whites. They control government and own the property -- whatever benefits the black man benefits the white man. . . Brains, property and character for the Negro will settle the question of civil rights. The best course to pursue in regard to the civil rights bill in the South is to let it alone; let it alone and it will settle itself.[lxix]

Accordingly, Washington advocated vocational education for Blacks as the best means by which they could develop skills which would make them economically viable, enable them to provide indispensable services for Whites and thereby earn their respect. To a great extent, the Black church in the late nineteenth century adopted the same tactic.

> The Black church was utterly bewildered at the sudden abortion of Reconstruction and the onslaught of the Jim-Crow backlash. By the 1880s and'90s it had yet to apply Black theology to deal with the realities of disenfranchisement. . . . So the Black church became an "accommodative church." "The preachers in these churches oriented their members to White domination in society". . . . The attempt to apply the theological dynamic to accommodation temporarily crippled the Black church. But that did not stop the quest for freedom and dignity. It continued, but no longer within the bounds of church culture.[lxx]

While the Black church did not serve in a prophetic function as fully as it had in previous generations, it continued to have a significant impact on its community. In this regard, the Birchett's comments are enlightening.

> Through these churches, social services were provided for the membership and for the African American community at large. Ministries such as burial societies, benevolent societies, centers for seniors and mutual aid societies were organizations of the church. Churches formed hospitals, employment ministries, political action groups, orphanages and retirement centers. Churches also

> cooperated with the Freedman's Bureau and other community groups to offer tutorial programs and Christian education programs.[lxxi]

While Washington's strategy was understandably popular with Whites, it faced meaningful critique from Blacks at the turn of the century. The most prominent of Washington's critics was W.E.B. DuBois, one of the founding officers of the N.A.A.C.P.

> In contrast to Washington's policy of conciliation and compromise, W.E.B. Dubois believed that it was necessary to act like men in order to be accepted as men. Speaking the truth as he saw it, loudly, clearly, and fearlessly, was to him the minimum criterion for manliness. . . . DuBois was self-assertive and, frequently, aggressive. Where Washington had tried to win the trust of white bigots, DuBois insisted on confronting them with the truth as he saw it.[lxxii]

Dubois advocated the development of an educated elite, "the talented tenth," to lead the Black community towards equality. Later in life, he championed Black solidarity as the only effective means of confronting a hopelessly prejudiced White society. With these emphases, he laid the groundwork for many of the foundational tenets of the black power movement and a number of the characteristic assertions of black theology.

Other notable Black leaders of this era were Marcus Garvey and A. Philip Randolph. Garvey was the herald of Black pride and his Universal Negro Improvement Association though short-lived (1914-1940) was one of the largest and most important mass black movements to date. "Although his movement disintegrated rapidly, the interest in black identity and black pride which he had sparked, lingered on."[lxxiii] Randolph was a labor leader who worked relentlessly to establish equal rights for Black workers. In 1941, he proposed that Blacks march on Washington to protest discrimination in hiring in defense plants. The march was cancelled when President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 which prohibited bias by companies fulfilling government contracts. His tactics were later used effectively in the civil rights movement.[lxxiv] During this same time period, the Black church became more aggressive in asserting the rights of its members. A case in point is the work of Pastor Adam Clayton Powell and Pastor John H. Johnson who organized the Greater New York

Coordinating Committee in 1933 which encouraged Blacks to picket businesses which practiced discrimination. The Committee's ability to mobilize the Black community won concessions from a number of companies.[lxxv] Ellis quotes Salley and Behm on this shift.

> "The Black church, which had given Black people a survival style in a hostile White world, responded to urbanization and White withdrawal by developing a new mental outlook concerning its role in American society. The increasing economic diversity of the Black community in the city transformed the accommodative Black church" into a political church.[lxxvi]

This period also witnessed the establishment of two religious groups that would have a meaningful impact on the African-American community. The first of these was the Nation of Islam. W.D. Fard is recognized by Coombs as the founder of the society. He established Muslim Temple Number One in Detroit in 1930.

> Fard . . . taught that the American Negro was Islamic in origin and that he should return to his ancestral faith. . . . [He] insisted that the first man had bee a black man and that whites were a corruption of humanity. The days of the White Devil, he said, were numbered. Blacks should deliberately withdraw from white society in order not to be caught in its final destruction.[lxxvii]

He imposed a strict discipline upon his followers and instituted the practice of substituting the letter X since most Blacks had their last names given them by Christian overlords. Fard disappeared in 1934 and was replaced by Elijah Muhammad, who moved the headquarters of the group to Chicago. It continued to grow, gaining stature through the work of Malcolm X. It remains a major challenge to Black Christianity.[lxxviii]

The second group developed into one of the major Black denominations, the Church of God in Christ. This denomination was founded in 1897 by Charles H. Mason and Charles P. Jones, two Baptist preachers who left the Baptists because of differences over the doctrine of holiness.[11] In 1906, Mason came under the

[11]Mason and Jones adhered to a Wesleyan theology of sanctification.

influence of William Joseph Seymour[12] at the Azuza Street Mission in Los Angeles.

William Joseph Seymour[lxxix]

During his time there he received the gift of tongues and became convinced of the necessity of this gift. This caused a rift between he and Jones. Jones and his followers organized the Church of Christ (Holiness) U.S.A. while Mason remained with the Church of God in Christ. Since its inception, this denomination has grown to a membership of over four million and serves as the primary representative of the Pentecostal tradition within the Black church.[lxxx]

African-Americans 1955-1968: We Shall Overcome

When Rosa Parks refused to surrender her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama bus to a White man, the history of African-Americans entered a new era. Ms. Parks was arrested for her actions and the bus boycott which protested her incarceration marked the beginning of the heyday of the civil rights movement.[lxxxi] Previous decades had seen Blacks take a number of significant steps to secure the civil rights which were long

[12]It is significant that the Azuza Street Revival "from which nearly all the Pentecostal groups (both black and white) flowed," was led by Seymour, an African-American preacher. This fact is not highlighted in most church histories. See: William C. Turner Jr. "Movements in the Spirit: A Review of African American Holiness/Pentecostal/Apostolics," in Directory of African American Religious Bodies 12 ed. Wardell J. Payne (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1991), 250.

overdue,[13] however the situation in Montgomery energized Blacks in protest and contributed to the emergence of Dr. Martin Luther King, the leader who would dominate the civil rights movement until his death.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.[lxxxii]

Dr. King applied the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount and the tactics of Mahatma Gandhi to the condition of Blacks in the South. The result was systematic nonviolent protest. King explained his approach at one of the organizational meetings of the bus boycott.

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[13]The legal battles surrounding the admission of Lloyd Gaines, Ada Sipuel, and G.W. McLaurin to graduate schools at state universities in Missouri and Oklahoma seriously undermined the "separate but equal" dogma. The May 17, 1954 Supreme Court decision in the N.A.A.C.P. sponsored case, Brown vs. Board of Education finally overturned legalized segregation in schools. See: Franklin and Moss, From Slavery to Freedom 365-367. In addition, the role which the United States played in the foundation of the United Nations and the country's desire to gain the support of less developed countries in the battle against communism increased her sensitivity to questions of race. During his administration, President Truman initiated a number of measures which were designed to promote equality in higher education and in fair employment practices. Ibid., 410-412. At the same time, Black leaders such as A. Philip Randolph were suggesting that civil disobedience be used by Blacks to achieve their goals. See: Coombs, The Black Experience 185. All of these streams came together subsequent to Rosa Parks' experience.

> Our method will be that of persuasion, not coercion. . . . Our actions must be guided by the deepest principles of our Christian faith. Love must be our regulating ideal. Once again we must hear the words of Jesus echoing across the centuries: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you." If we fail to do this our protest will end up as a meaningless drama on the a stage of history, and its memory will be shrouded with the ugly garments of shame. In spite of the mistreatment that we have confronted we must not become bitter and end up hating our white brothers. As Booker T. Washington said, "Let no man pull you so low as to make you hate him."[lxxxiii]

King provided the leadership for many, if not the great majority of the most significant and highly publicized civil rights initiatives of the 1950s and 1960s. The Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Birmingham demonstrations of 1963, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, and the Selma-Montgomery March in 1965 were among the foremost.[lxxxiv] These rallies, characterized by a strong emphasis on love and justice, created a dynamic which along with the assassination of President Kennedy produced the strongest civil rights legislation since the time of Reconstruction.[14] Despite intense opposition from Whites, the efforts of King strengthened the legal basis upon which Blacks could claim equality and brought those aspirations closer to reality. It is also worthy of note that King's work flowed from an avowedly theological base, and that his activities also highlighted the conspicuous role which the Black church was playing in leading Blacks in this struggle.

Opposition to King came from others besides admitted racists. Most White evangelicals and fundamentalists approached King and his work with a spirit of apathy or antagonism. Because their theological base was not comprehensive enough, they failed to see that his work was a manifestation of the Kingdom of God. As a result of his education in non-evangelical seminaries, he was labeled as a theological liberal. Since many Americans, Christian and non-Christian alike, viewed developments in the world in

[14]Two of the most meaningful acts were: The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which eliminated discrimination in federally funded programs, and The Fair Housing Act of 1968. Ibid., 420, 449.

terms of East-West confrontation, his activities branded him as a communist sympathizer.[lxxxv]

King also encountered opposition from within the Black community. The passage of civil rights legislation did not erase prejudice from society. In many cases it only aggravated it. These laws also did little to enhance the economic conditions of African-Americans. The result was heightened frustration among many Blacks.[15] The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was followed a year later by the riots in Watts and by the growing sense among many Blacks that power, not equality, was the main issue. In 1966, Stokely Carmichael coined the phrase, "black power," and declared that the Black community must close ranks to combat the power Whites held over them.[16] The intellectual godfather of this concept was Malcolm X, the only individual in the Black community at this time to rival Dr. King. The son of a Baptist preacher, Malcolm Little grew up in Nebraska and moved with his family to Michigan after they were run out of Nebraska by the Ku Klux Klan. The murder of his father and the seemingly pervasive racism of Whites caused Malcolm to reject Christianity as a white man's religion. He became thoroughly anti-religious until he experienced spiritual awakening through contact with citizens of the Nation of Islam. He came to recognize Islam as the instinctive faith of the Black man. He also attracted by Elijah Muhammad's teaching that the White man was a devil, something that his experiences confirmed for him. He

[15]Typical of the attitude of some Blacks are the comments of James Cone. "One cannot help but think that most whites "loved" Martin Luther King, Jr., not because of his attempt to free his people, but because his approach was the least threatening to the white power structure. Thus, churchmen and theologians grasped at the opportunity to identify with him so that they could keep blacks powerless and simultaneously appease their own guilt about white oppression." Cone, Black Power and Black Theology 56.

[16]Ellis notes: "Those in the Black Power movement advocated five things: (1) that we deal with the melting pot system not on a moral base, but on a power base from a position of strength (because by this time White America was considered amoral); (2) that we form coalitions with other groups only at points of agreement and not as allies; (3) that we maintain control in our own Black communities -- economically, politically, and socially; (4) that we develop a Black melting pot; and (5) that we form new institutions to express the new realities of a Black-conscious people." Ellis, Beyond Liberation 104.

adopted Fard's practice of using the letter X instead of his last name, devoted himself to the study of the Nation of Islam, and quickly became Elijah Muhammad's chief disciple. He served as the minister of the Muslim temples in Detroit and New York, and he used those settings to preach Islam and Black nationalism.[lxxxvi] He urged Blacks to unite and work together to advance their cause "by any means necessary." In a telegram sent to the leader of the American Nazi party shortly before his assassination in 1965, Malcolm wrote.

> To George Lincoln Rockwell: This is to warn you that I am no longer held in check from fighting white supremacists by Elijah Muhammad's separationist Black Muslim movement, and that if your present racist agitation against our people there in Alabama causes physical harm to Reverend King or any other Black Americans who are only attempting to enjoy their rights as free human beings, that you and your Ku Klux Klan friends will be met with maximum physical retaliation from those of us who are not handcuffed by the disarming philosophy of nonviolence, and who believe in asserting our right of self-defense -- by any means necessary.[lxxxvii]

While not willing to initiate violence, Malcolm was not committed to King's philosophy of non-violent protest. In fact, he believed that King's approach was flawed because it proceeded to ask for rights instead of asserting them. While a pilgrimage to Mecca caused him to moderate his conviction that all Whites were devils, he continued to contend for black solidarity until his murder.[lxxxviii] In doing so, he laid the groundwork for the advocates of the Black Power movement, such as Stokely Carmichael, for African-American revolutionaries like the Black Panthers, and for many of the affirmations of the Black theologies of James Cone, Gayraud Wilmore and others.

African-Americans 1968-Present: The Clock Is Turned Back

The murders of Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X robbed the African-American community of its most dynamic leaders and of much of its momentum in the movement toward its goals as a people. The controversy over the war in Vietnam, and the Watergate scandal diverted the attention of the nation in the early 1970s. The issues of abortion, feminism, AIDS, and gay rights

have dominated the country's social agenda in more recent years. As a result, although questions regarding race relations have not been totally overlooked in a country which is increasingly multicultural, other concerns have consumed the nation's emotional energy.

At the same time, Ronald Reagan entered the White House with a seemingly different civil rights agenda than his predecessors. Federal agencies were not as enthusiastic in promoting non-discrimination as they had been previously.[lxxxix] In some cases, attempts were made to move federal policies in a distinctively conservative direction. Franklin and Moss make note of one particularly controversial policy.

> In January, 1982, the Reagan administration reversed an eleven year olf policy that denied tax-exempt status to private educational and certain other nonprofit institutions that practiced racial discrimination. Apparently, the two institutions for which the benefit was intended were the Bob Jones University in South Carolina that admitted Negro students but forbade interracial dating and racial intermarriage, and the Goldsboro Christian School in North Carolina that barred the admission of Negroes.[xc]

Although the schools were denied tax-exempt status, the policy was indicative of a trend that concerned and frustrated Blacks. Despite the progress that Blacks made in securing political office, the economic and social advancement of Blacks was negligible and the similarities between the post-Reconstruction era and the post-civil rights period were too sharp to be ignored. This has left many Blacks resentful and disheartened. Once again, Franklin and Moss capture the feelings of many Blacks.

> The dissatisfaction with conditions was so deep in the black community that few developments, however significant, seemed satisfactory or even noteworthy. Many Negroes had become so embittered that they were inclined to interpret individual advancement in the public and private sectors as nothing more than cunning designs of whites to buy off and thus to silence, their most talented and influential leaders.[xci]

Throughout this period, as in every other era of Black history, the church has continued to serve as the rallying point of the community and one of the most intriguing untold stories of church history.

> In spite of today's dismal local and international realities, apparently African Americans still attend church in higher percentages that white Americans do. According to a survey of the national Research Council in Washington D.C., in 1984, 57.3% of Black Americans reported attending church, compared to 42.9% of white Americans.[xcii]

Reflections on the African-American Experience

This survey has identified several themes which are critical to the formation of a sensitive understanding of the African-American community and which impact the Christian's appreciation of the contributions of the Black church.

"Is This a Man or a Thing?" The Desire for Self Determination

In the heyday of the abolitionist movement, Frederick Douglass was a very popular and effective speaker. At the conclusion of one particularly moving speech, the abolitionist, William Lloyd Garrison arose and posed the rhetorical question, "Is this a man or a thing?"[xciii] While Garrison intended the question to be rhetorical, his inquiry has been answered in various ways throughout American history. Planters viewed black men and women as property, a thing. Segregationists have viewed Blacks as "boys." There has never been a period in the history of the African-American experience where the right of Blacks to self-determination, to be men, has been unquestioned. The desire that their humanity, their manhood, be recognized is a recurrent theme throughout Black literature. Writers across the spectrum of Black culture have expressed this concern. David Walker was among the first to voice this concern in the conclusion of his "Appeal." He entreats White readers saying: "Throw away your

fears and prejudices then, and enlighten us and treat us like men, and we will like you more than we do now hate you. . . . Treat us then like men, and we will be your friends."[xciv] Booker T. Washington also voiced this theme in his famous Atlanta Exposition speech as he exhorted his fellow Blacks, "Cast down your bucket where you are -- cast it down in making friends in every *manly* way of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded."[xcv] W.E.B. DuBois, in his critique of Washington's approach, used this same motif. "If we make money the object of man-training, we shall develop money-makers but not necessarily men; if we make technical skill the object of education, we may possess artisans but not in nature, men. Men we shall have only as we make manhood the object of the work of the schools."[xcvi] More recently, James Cone has continued the theme by defining the Black Power movement in terms of the African American's aspiration toward self-determination.

> A further clarification of the meaning of Black Power may be found in Paul Tillich's analysis of "the courage to be," which is "the ethical act in which man affirms his being in spite of those elements of his existence which conflict with his essential self-affirmation." Black Power, then, is a humanizing force because it is the black man's attempt to affirm his being, his attempt to be recognized as "Thou," in spite of the "other," the white power which dehumanizes him. The structure of white society attempts to make "black being" into "nonbeing" or "nothingness." . . . The courage to be, then, is the courage to affirm one's being by striking out at the dehumanizing forces which threaten being.[xcvii]

From an evangelical perspective, John Perkins has developed this thought as he has discussed the importance of the stand which he and other Blacks have taken in Mississippi.

> In situations of inequality or oppression, the oppressed group *must* take a stand somewhere, sometime. For until the people take that stand, there is no development possible for them. Yet when they take that stand in the face of clear injustice, an oppressed people are once again humanized. And they become capable of a level of development -- spiritual, economic, social or other -- not psychologically possible for a people still in a passive, dependent state. . . . Too many white church people do not recognize that. They teach their own sons to "stand up and be a man," teach them to be

> confident. Then they go all to pieces when an oppressed minority starts doing just that.[xcviii]

If biblical reconciliation is to occur, it is extremely important that Whites recognize the manhood of African-Americans and relate to them in such a manner that the Black person's right to self-determination is acknowledged.[17] Any dialogue between Black and White Christians must be conducted on the basis of brotherhood, not paternalism, with Whites demonstrating a healthy respect for Black personhood and a genuine regard for their aspirations.

The Myth of Cultural Inferiority

The southern defense of slavery in the years before the civil war was largely based on a belief in innate inferiority of the Black. George Sawyer expressed this prejudice when he alleged:

> The social, moral, and political, as well as the physical history of the negro race bears strong testimony against them; it furnishes the most undeniable proof of their mental inferiority. In no age or condition has the real negro shown a capacity to throw off the chains of barbarism and brutality that have long bound the nations of that race.[xcix]

While few, if any, would be as overt in advocating this theory of racial incompetence, the myth of the inferiority of the Black is still espoused in subtle ways. William Pannell addresses this issue.

> It is clear that the majority race has believed, and to a large extent, continues to believe in Negro inferiority, that black is inferior. How else account for the stories we teach children, the identification of black with sin in our preaching and the ad slogans that "good guys wear white hats." The Negro has come to believe all this. Ignorant of his past and forbidden to create a proud future, he has succumbed

[17]Malcolm X stressed this point in one of his final speeches. "The man can't give you the solution. You never will get the solution from any white liberal. Let you and I sit down and discuss the problem, come up with what we feel the solution will be; and then if they want to help it, then let them help in their way, in a way that they can help. But don't let them come and tell us how we should do to solve our problem." Malcolm X, On Afro-American History 55.

> to the majority opinion of himself. He has become a psychological cripple, his "section of town" a study in group paralysis. I remember the humor I felt as I passed a Negro establishment advertising a certain hair rinse. Surely, I thought, our Negro women didn't believe that "only her hairdresser would know." Yet there are Negro "blondes.". . . The impact of slavery is still with us, white and black alike.[c]

Cone affirms Pannell's assessment when he notes, "Any careful assessment of the place of the black man in America must conclude that black self-hatred is the worst aspect of the legacy of slavery. 'The worst crime the white man has committed,' writes Malcolm X, 'has been to teach us to hate ourselves.'"[ci]

These observations are also quite meaningful for Christian educators because the culture's propaganda has unconsciously influenced both Black and White Christians on many occasions. White Christians, while professing their admiration for Black culture and contributions to the Kingdom of God, have often subconsciously adopted the plantation mentality. On the other hand, Blacks while attesting to their pride in their people have acted out their self-hate in matters more serious than dress and hairstyle. If Black-White cooperation is to be constructive, the affirmation of individual Black self-worth of Black cultural validity[18] must be apparent at every stage of the process.

Cultural Distinctives Such affirmation can occur only as Whites possess an awareness of and respect for the distinctives of the African-American culture. Thomas Kochman's book, Black and White: Styles in Conflict contains many insights into these characteristics and into potential areas of misunderstanding between Blacks and Whites. He enumerates eight areas where there is polarity between the Black and White styles. The

[18]Kraft defines cultural validity as follows. "Any given culture shapes a way of life that must be seen as valid for those immersed in it. Cultures are therefore both as good as each other and as bad as each other in shaping that way of life. None is anywhere near perfect, since all are shaped and operated by sinful human beings. But none in its healthy state is to be considered invalid, inadequate, or unusable by God and humankind. . . . This doctrine is, on the cultural level, what personal acceptance (the Golden Rule) is on the individual level. Kraft, Christianity in Culture 49.

following is a summary of observations which have been gleaned from his work and the works of other Black authors.

Fighting vs Talking Kochmann notes that Blacks and Whites have different conceptions of what constitutes reasoned discussion and what constitutes an argument. Among Whites, it is expected that discussion will be low-key, and objective. Any show of emotion in the course of the discussion will be taken as an indication that the individual is out of control. On the other hand, Black view any discussion in terms of struggle. Argument is to be passionate, with each participant in the role of an advocate who should be ready top defend his position. Verbal demonstration of emotion is not an indication of loss of self-control. Rather it is a sign of how deeply the individuals involved feel about the matter. Among Blacks, a person has not lost control until there is some evidence that he is about to be physically violent. These differing concepts regarding hold the potential for misunderstanding.[cii]

Style vs Restraint Blacks and Whites also differ on the degree to which self-expression is permitted and encouraged. Kochman notes that Blacks expect greater demonstrations of individual style. This is particularly evident in the field of athletics. White athletes on the whole are restrained, fearing that they might show up their opponent. A greater number of Black athletes use their sport to showcase their personal style. Reggie Jackson was the first to demonstrate individual style in hitting home runs by standing at home plate watching the ball as it left the park. In the same way, Julius Erving and Michael Jordan have used the basketball court as their personal stage. The Black culture expects such demonstrations in sports and elsewhere and encourages such by its "call and response" mechanism. Kochman concludes that Whites give priority to restraint lest someone offend another's sensibilities, while Blacks place priority upon expression, not wanting to suppress anyone's feelings.[ciii]

Defensiveness vs Vulnerability One of the first lessons this writer learned about the Black culture was, "Never ask a Black person where they work." Kochman underscores that observation. Because they view a person's being as more important than his

doing; because they fear that someone will use the information requested against them, "fronting them off;" and because they view such information as the possession of the individual to be dispensed at his discretion, Blacks discourage open questioning. They prefer the use of "signifying," using indirect comments as tacet requests for information. He further notes.

> Whites typically miss this most powerful implication of their inquisitiveness; that a response to a direct question might well increase the social vulnerability of blacks and members of other minority groups. Holt chides teachers for being especially insensitive to this regard as they probe the most intimate details of the lives and relationships of black students. . . . Whatever way the black students choose to respond they lose. Were blacks -- as well as other socially vulnerable population -- better able to influence or control the way information about tham is officially interpreted and used, this would not be the case.[civ]

Ecclesiastical Distinctives It has been very interesting to compare Black and White church styles. The following will highlight two major contrasts.

Celebration vs Quietude Participation in the Lord's Supper is one of the highlights of worship in the African-American Church. Of particular interest has been the music which the Black church used during Communion. In contrast to the White church which generally uses very solemn music to prepare worshippers for Communion, the Black church uses very joyful music. If anything, the music at communion is more celebratory than the music used throughout the rest of the service. The Lord's Supper and the entire worship of the African-American Church is a celebration of the mighty acts of God. Music is joyful and upbeat, with a particular emphasis upon eschatology. Preaching is emotionally forceful. The congregation encourages the pastor in the "call and response pattern," and the service reaches an emotional peak as the pastor "tones" the final portion of his sermon and calls for a decision. Several factors seem to contribute to the celebratory nature of Black worship. The cultural emphasis on style has been carried over into the church. In addition, historic oppression of Blacks has created a need for

emotional release and has caused Blacks to focus worship on eschatalogical deliverance.

In contrast, many of the Christian Churches with which this writer has been associated place a greater priority upon reverence before God in worship. While desiring a friendly atmosphere, a respectful attitude is to be maintained in worship. Silent meditation during the prelude, a worship format in which everything is done decently and in order, quiet and attentive listening to the sermon constitute the decorum which is expected. The emotional force of the service is of a quiet sort.

These general observations depict each worship style in bold relief. Specific exceptions to each model can be pointed out. However, these models outline the general orientation of each church type.

Informality vs Formality Considering the above observations, it is surprising that in many ways the White church is more informal than the Black church. In manner of dress, this is true. The average member of a White Christian Church in St. Louis would not feel terribly out of place dressing casually for worship. Members of a neighboring Black church are expected to dress for church.

Even more striking is the significance which is placed upon each individual's office in the church. There is a much more formal and visible leadership structure in the Black church than in its White counterpart. The office of Pastor is held in high esteem. Due acknowledgement is given to the pastor by every member speaking publically in the worship service. Visiting ministers are escorted to the pulpit to sit with the pastor. Others visitors, when recognized, are sure to mention the name of their home pastor. In addition, other officers in the church are given places of honor. The Deacons and Mothers of the church are given special seating in the front of the church. Ushers and Nurses have special uniforms and carry out their functions with an air of dignity. In addition to biblical emphases, several factors may lie behind this facet of Black church life. Some elements of African social structure may lie at the base of the esteem given the pastor.

Also, the fact that Blacks have often been powerless in the larger society and have seen the church as the one institution where they are genuinely empowered may have contributed to the quality of Black church life.

Cultural Superiority The preceding observations provide a starting point for White as they seek to understand and appreciate African-American culture. Developing a genuine appreciation for Black culture is especially important for any White who would work with African Americans. In contrast to historic patterns, Whites must come to realize that in many respects, the Black culture is superior to the dominant Anglo culture. A case in point is the relative force of the two cultures. The Black culture in general and the Black church specifically are much more forceful in terms of emotion and expression than their White counterparts. Whites stand to learn a great deal from Blacks in this regard. On several occasions this writer has had opportunity to preach at Black churches. During those opportunities, the call and response pattern of the Black church has contributed significantly to the impact of the sermon. In addition, many elements of the Black style of preaching; storytelling, recurrent use of a thematic phrase throughout the sermon, contributes significantly to the effect of the sermon in both Black and White congregations. In addition, the Black confrontation approach to discussion while somewhat intimidating is in many ways more honest and constructive to problem solving than the understated White mode.

The Church: Only by the Grace of God

One of the strongest evidences of the continuing grace of God is the existence of the African-American church. Despite its having to deal with circumstances throughout its history which have been unfavorable at best, the Black church has established itself, ministered in the spirit of Christ and grown to the glory of God. At virtually every juncture of the African-American experience, the church has played a central role in the survival and development of Blacks. In the ante-bellum period, Blacks saw the truth in Christianity and accepted its teachings which gave them transcendent hope and energized them to resist the tyranny

of slavery. As they established independent churches African-Americans have had opportunity to develop leadership skills and to confront forthrightly the issues which have pressed on them in every age. Ellis has underscored the importance of the Black church.

> The historic Black church has produced the only unified soul dynamic in the Black community. In fact, history shows us that no black movement has survived for long apart from the church and its theological dynamic. The secular and Islamic Black intellectuals have failed to produce it, and no cultural identity is possible without it. A de-Christianized Black culture will always lack theological and cultural unity. Black people will simply never achieve this unity without the Black church.[cv]

The prominence of the church within the Black community is made more striking by the fact that it has had to live down being a White person's institution. At every stage of the African-American experience, White Christians have perverted their faith through their overt or tacit support of racism. White slaveholders were hesitant to share Christ with Blacks until they were assured that such actions would not interfere with their property rights.[19] Even then, they made sure that Blacks Christians were under the surveillance of White preachers and they used the scripture to argue for the maintenance of their cruel practices. Free Blacks both before and after the Civil War have had to deal with racism in Christian garb as segregation was first

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[19]In his defense of slavery, James H. Hammond observed that slavery served an important economic function in the South. "In all social systems there must be a class to do the menial duties, to perform the drudgery of life. . . . Its requisites are vigor, docility, fidelity. Such a class you must have or you would not have that other class which leads progress, civilization, and refinement." See Franklin and Moss, From Slavery to Freedom 174. These words are strikingly similar to those describing contemporary economic conditions in this country. Herbert Gans suggests that society as a whole has a vested interest in maintaining an underclass, which in this country is often Black. He notes that the presence of the poor provides society with workers who will perform the menial tasks of the society, enhance the profits of their employers by accepting low wages, serve as the clientele for various welfare agencies and the more poorly qualified of various professions, and furnish society with a reference point for its cultural norms. See: Spates and Macionis, Sociology of Cities 367-368. White Christians need to seriously consider whether or not the materialistic mindset of contemporary American society is fostering patterns of oppression similar to those of the slave days.

practiced in the church, as the Ku Klux klan and other groups of White supremacists have placed a veneer of Christianity over their hatred, as otherwise well-meaning Whites have used the church and other cooperative endeavors to subtly try to extend White cultural control over Blacks, and as African-Americans have often been prevented from taking part meaningfully in the affairs of the church universal. William Pannell writes of contemporary manifestations of these historic trends in Evangelism From the Bottom Up.

> Perhaps no other issue exposes American evangelical chauvinism more than the near total absence of African-American participation in these discussions at the very time that Western influence is up for grabs in much of the non-West. The outlook is not total. There are several individuals who are recognized dutifully by the leadership of the movement. They are usually employed on platforms during plenary sessions. They are often not the ones engaged in serious discussions. Other prominent African-American evangelicals who are not invited are often perceived to have an agenda the old guard finds objectionable. . . . Some black thinkers suspect that white leadership fears that the agenda they (the white leadership) outline would be undermined by enlarging participation.[cvi]

Given this history, it is understandable that Blacks would be suspicious of proposals of cooperation by Whites. The lessons of the past suggest to them that there is some kind of hidden agenda involved. Whites should not be surprised by Black misgivings when they arise.

Conclusion

John Perkins prefaces his account of the work of Voice of Calvary Ministries with these words.

> Ours is not a story of bitterness -- it is a story of love and the triumphs of the God of love. But it is a story carved out of the realities of violence and poverty, ending not in some sugar-coated sense of brotherly love but in the deep conviction that only the power of Christ's crucifixion on the cross and the glory of His resurrection can heal the deep racial wounds in both black and white people in America.[cvii]

To a great extent, Perkins story is that of the Black culture and the church which has done much to sustain it. Any person or institution that would work within that context must know and esteem both the struggles and successes to be effective.

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[viii]Coombs, The Black Experience 23.
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[xxii]Wilmore, Black Religion 6.
[xxiii]Greer, A Brief History 401
[xxiv]Franklin and Moss, From Slavery to Freedom 67.
[xxv]Ibid., 64-74.
[xxvi]Ibid., 66.
[xxvii]Ibid., 77.
[xxviii]Ibid., 82.
[xxix]Ibid., 104-116.
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[liii]Franklin and Moss, From Slavery to Freedom 186.
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