

AFRICAN-AMERICAN PASTORS AND THEIR EFFECT ON THE
CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

by

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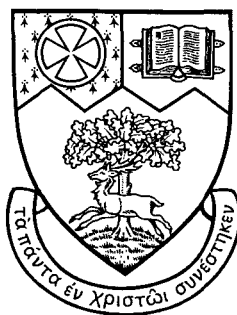
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ABSTRACT

African-American Pastors and their Effect on the Civil Rights Movement in the United States

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The civil rights movement could have been easily called the civil rights ministry due to its principle leader, the African-American pastor. It was a movement based on the precepts and tenets of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. The African-American culture and church are quite often indivisible; this is primarily due to their formation. The leader of the African-American church and culture is often the pastor; they played a principle role in setting the tone and direction of the American civil rights movement. This thesis will show how the African-American pastor's role has been central to the community and how that role has been fluid and adaptive to respond to the adversity and changes within the community and culture.

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To my father, Leslie Lexington Brown

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Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	1
Chapter One: African Slave to the African-American Church	11
Chapter Two: Chief, Mystic, Healer	23
Chapter Three: African-American Pastors as a Force in the Community	39
Chapter Four: A Shift in Ideologies	49
Chapter Five: A Time to Act	70
Chapter Six: The Children of Light	92
Conclusion	102
Appendix A	109
Bibliography	110

INTRODUCTION

The Civil Rights Movement

Love is one of the pivotal points of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth; he sought to accomplish great change using the weapons of love and knowledge.¹ Although Jesus used healings, exorcisms, miracles and even violence his emphasis was on love.² When asked by the Pharisees what is the most important law he answered, love God and love your neighbour (Mark 12:30-31); at the centre of this love is justice for the marginalized and the oppressed.³ Christ reminded humanity of the rights and freedoms possessed by the children of God when he stated, “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, to set free the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19).⁴

In Montgomery, at Alabama’s Holt Street Church a young African-American pastor rose and stood before the pulpit to say, “We must keep God in the forefront. Let us be Christian in all our actions.”⁵ The movement he presided over would see the promise of a unity of humanity that transcended race, religion, creed, colour and international borders.⁶ The civil rights movement in the United States had a very distinctive tone and direction; its mission statement was taken from the earthly ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.⁷ The movement was inchoate during a young African-American woman’s arrest for her refusal to sit in the “colored” designated section of the

¹ Jelks, “Benjamin,” §132; Foster, *Streams*, 1; Powell and Bauer, *Who*, 237-38.

² Powell and Bauer, *Who*, 237-38; Jelks, “Benjamin,” §132; Foster, *Streams*, 1.

³ Pinnock, *Flame*, 88-89; Powell and Bauer, *Who*, 237-38; Borg and Wright, *Jesus*, 36.

⁴ Cone, *Black Power*, 35; Pinnock, *Flame*, 88-89; Powell and Bauer, *Who*, 237-38; Borg and Wright, *Jesus*, 36.

⁵ Carson, *Autobiography*, 59-60; Dillman, Review of *Becoming King*, 246.

⁶ Gadzekpo, *Black Church*, 104.

⁷ Dickerson, “African-American,” 229.

public transit system.⁸ Its direction and tone were one of love and nonviolent protest; the protest's goal was to create awareness and increase the knowledge of the people of the United States to the condition of their fellow citizens.⁹ The hope was that the love of humanity would weigh upon the souls and minds of the nation. It was an attempt to appeal to the conscience of a nation to live up to its founding principles; that all people are created equal endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.

The African-American Church and Community

The African slaves in the United States quickly understood that there was little possibility that their masters would one day be so kind as to consider them as brothers and/or sisters.¹⁰ The inconsistency between the master's claims about their external salvation and the powerlessness and wretchedness of their condition, imposed and directed by their Christian masters, was too great; at this juncture it was clear that the religion of the slave master would not be the religion of the slave.¹¹ They were compelled to find a language that would unmistakably express their hopes of a reversal of their fortunes and at the same time conceal the message from slave owners; the language found in the Bible was a ready vehicle.¹² It became the cornerstone of African-American Christian discourse because it put God firmly in charge; was consistent with the interests of an oppressed people; was an expressive vehicle for the imagination of a people convinced of their future liberation.¹³ Slaves gravitated to the liberation eschatology of the gospel because it was based on the Spirit of God as redeemer of the poor and oppressed; prayer

⁸ Gadzekpo, "Black Church," 95; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 51.

⁹ Chappell, *Agitators*, 81; Manis, "Birmingham's," 68.

¹⁰ Bennett, "Biblical Theology," 39.

¹¹ Bennett, "Biblical Theology," 39; Bennett, "Hermeneutics," 39; Cone, *Black Power*, 93.

¹² Evans, *Believers*, 146; Bennett, "Hermeneutics," 39.

¹³ Boesak, *Innocence*, 17; Bennett, "Hermeneutics," 39.

and plotting uprisings went hand in hand as African-American religion became a religion of protest and future hope.¹⁴

After the civil war, emancipation, and reconstruction came the Supreme Court approval of segregation in 1892; “separate but equal” came into being and the long series of “Jim Crow” laws saw African-Americans that formerly attend white churches encouraged to leave.¹⁵ This gave rise to the African-American church, the single most important institution in the African-American community. It is the oldest and most independent African-American organization; its importance is so great that some scholars say that the African-American church is the African-American community with each having no identity apart from the other.¹⁶ The two most important denominations, the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, separated from the white church community and played a key role in the march to equal rights.¹⁷

The African-American Pastor

The slave came from a social environment characterized by a polygamous clan life under the authority of the chief and the priest.¹⁸ Their forced slavery broke the old ties of blood relationship; kinship disappeared as families were scattered all over the West Indies and southern United States.¹⁹ The chief disappeared but the “medicine man” or “priest” remained in their midst; they became the healer of the sick, the comforter of the sorrowful and the one who most eloquently expressed the bitter resentment and longing of an oppressed people.²⁰ The African “priest” became the African-American pastor and it was under their tutelage that the first

¹⁴ Bynum, *A. Philip*, 29; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 33; Bennett, “Hermeneutics,” 39; Boesak, *Innocence*, 17.

¹⁵ Bynum, *A. Philip*, 25; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 84-86.

¹⁶ Gadzekpo, “Black Church,” 95; Bennett, “Hermeneutics,” 39.

¹⁷ Cone *Black Power*, 96; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 89.

¹⁸ Bascio, *White Theology*, 40-41; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 3.

¹⁹ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 3; Bascio, *White Theology*, 40-41.

²⁰ Bascio, *White Theology*, 40-41; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33.

African-American institution, the church, began to grow.²¹ African-American pastors inculcated their vision into the African-American church and community.²²

The pastor is an African-American institution that has been largely ignored as a pivotal character in the African-American community and specifically in the civil rights movement. Noted works from venerated white and African-American theologians have primarily focused on the experiences of the people in and the events of the movement. This includes the works of authors such as Carter G. Woodson and his *Negro History*, depicting the lives of African-Americans before slavery.²³ In *The Souls of Black Folk* W.E.B Dubois talks of the importance of the African-American church and its foundation on the Holy Bible; this is echoed by Howard Thurman's, *The Negro's Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death* and *Deep River*, and reaffirmed by James Cone's (considered the father of black theology), *A Black Theology of Liberation and Spirituals and the Blues*.²⁴

Joseph Washington's, *Politics of God*, explains black suffering in terms of its redemptive qualities as laid out in Isaiah 53:5-12.²⁵ J. Deotis Roberts', *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology*, and Major Jones', *Black Awareness: A Theology of Hope*, proclaim the New Testament's universal themes of one God as the source of well-being for all humanity and human participation in the redemptive process.²⁶ Vincent Harding carries on the theme of God as the Lord of creation as well as history in *The Gift of Blackness*. Gayraud Wilmore's classic study

²¹ Dickerson, "African-American," 218; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33.

²² Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33; Dickerson, "African-American," 218.

²³ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 4; Bynum, *A. Philip*, 28; Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's*, 5.

²⁴ Bennett, "Hermeneutics," 39; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 3-4; Bynum, *A. Philip*, 28; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 307.

²⁵ Bennett, "Hermeneutics," 39.

²⁶ Bennett, "Hermeneutics," 39.

Black Religion and *Black Radicalism* remains the best historical overview of the involvement of African-American religious groups' efforts in political and social change in the United States.²⁷

Benjamin May's *The Negro's God* and E. Franklin Frazier's *The Negro's Church in America* are adroit critiques of African-American preaching, seeing it as other-worldly and too individualistic.²⁸ Black theology's discourse about God from the perspective of the African-American is espoused by William Jones in *Is God a White Racist*; Albert Cleage's *Black Messiah* takes his black theological perspective from Genesis 1:26-27 where God reflects the image of (color) black humanity.²⁹ James H. Cone's *Black Theology-Black Church* uses Exodus 3-15 as the lens to focus his view of black theology.³⁰

Other great works include James H. Evans Jr., *We Have Been Believers*, David Chappell's *Stone of Hope* and *Prophetic Black Religion*, James Farmer's *Bare the Heat* and Clayborne Carson's *In Struggle* and *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*³¹ Although great works, they do not primarily focus on the unique role of the African-American pastor and their profound place in the community.³² They are an entity that is hard to isolate from the African-American church and the African-American culture. All three of these entities evolved in concert but to truly understand African-American pastors one must understand them separately.³³

Pastors hold a venerable position in the African-American community; this role has seen very little change in the last century. Their role in the African-American community often transcends the role of spiritual/religious leader. In many instances they are in fact the undisputed

²⁷ Bennett, "Hermeneutics," 39; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 201.

²⁸ Evans, "Urbanization," 808; Bennett, "Hermeneutics," 40; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 167.

²⁹ Bennett, "Hermeneutics," 38.

³⁰ Bennett, "Hermeneutics," 38-39.

³¹ Dickerson, "African-American," 218.

³² Washington, Review of *Black Apostles*, 603.

³³ Cone and Wilmore, "Black Theology," 4.

leader of the community; this includes social, political and educational arenas.³⁴ The church and its leader often dictated how the African-American community related to the wider, white community in which it exists; it was a community that, subordinated, patronized and was often openly hostile towards African-Americans.³⁵

This thesis will demonstrate how the African-American pastor's role has been central to the community and how that role has been fluid and adaptive to respond to the adversity and changes within the community and culture. This study will not focus on the specific tenets or history of black theology, the civil rights movement and the overall African-American struggle for equal rights. Although these issues are dynamic on their own and will be intricate to understanding the role of the pastor, they will not be the central focus. However, in order to understand the African-American pastor one must understand the environment that birthed them and the community/church that sustains them. The proposed research will examine the ecclesiastical nature of the civil rights movement and its orchestrator, the pastor. The study will lean on primary source material to assess the tone and direction of the movement; it will also assess the eschatological nature of the different African-American theologies that the pastor had to navigate in order for the civil rights movement to have its ecclesiastical tone. It is also important to look at the brief schism that occurred between the delayed eschatology of the old theology versus the realized eschatology of new theology. This period saw the first challenge to the leadership of the pastor summed up in the tenets of black theology.

This study will assess how the institution of slavery and a "separate but equal" environment affected the African-American pastor's role and influence in the community. The relationship between the pastor and the look, tone and success of the civil rights movement has

³⁴ Madkins, "The Leadership Crisis," 102-3.

³⁵ Gadzekpo, "The Black Church," 95.

been largely ignored due in large part to the size and scope of the movement. As noted above this thesis will demonstrate how the African-American pastor's role has been central to the community and how that role has been fluid and adaptive to respond to the adversity and changes within the community and culture. To understand the pastor one must conceptualize their inextricable link to the African-American institution they were so instrumental in orchestrating. Pursuant to this a journey through the history of the African-American church would be prudent, paying close attention to the environmental stresses that fueled the journey that led to its formation.

Research Methodology/Model/Framework

Unless it is the title of a literary work the term African-American will be used throughout this paper instead of the term "black" to denote the group of people that belong to the Negro race.³⁶ This study encompasses the world of the American slave before the American Revolution and concludes with the death of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. In order to see the American civil rights movement from the pastor's perspective it would be advantageous to get first hand accounts from the pastors that were at the start and end of the movement. This would include the writings of Reverend L. Roy Bennett, pastor of the Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal church, Reverend Ralph Abernathy of the First Baptist Church, the Reverend E. N. French of the Hillard Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Zion church and Martin Luther King Jr., Reverend of the Dexter Avenue Baptist church to name a few. The two very important church denominations, the African Methodist Episcopal and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion, are represented in these pastors. These two denominations were the first to separate from the white

³⁶ Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 167.

denominations, which led to the creation of an African-American theology; they were instrumental in the civil rights movement.

These perspectives will allow one to view the world of African-American pastors; being privy to their theology and influence on the African-American church and community. The eschatology and tone of the civil rights movement will also be brought to the fore. The proposed study will rely on primary and secondary sources for the pastor's role in the movement.

In the African-American church women could only be secondary leaders, mainly assuming the role of Christian educators and wives, not pastors.³⁷ In large urban centers like Chicago women became principal agents of change in the conceptualization of religious authority, worship and social outreach.³⁸ Women made up the majority of the parareligious organizations (62%) and 87% of the average church congregation.³⁹ In the African-American church they served as mission leaders, deaconesses, choir members, ushers and pastor aide leaders; they had an intricate and supportive relationship with the pastor.⁴⁰

The African-American view expressed in African-American church publications such as the *African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church Review* will be used to gain insight into how the pastor was viewed by their congregants and their role in the civil rights movement. Also African-American papers such as the *Chicago Defender*, *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *Atlanta Daily World* will be cross-reference with the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times* allowing for evaluation of the movement from both sides.

John Tosh points out that, "the most important published primary source for the historian

³⁷ Mays and Nicholson, "Negro's," 120; Savage, *Spirit*, 268.

³⁸ Savage, *Spirit*, 268; Mays and Nicholson, "Negro's," 120.

³⁹ Fallin, "Black," 44-45.

⁴⁰ Fallin, "Black," 44-45.

is the press.”⁴¹ Newspapers often have a particular slant that they use to shape the readers views; the articles pertaining to the pastor and the movement will give a biased opinion of the tone and relevance of the movement.⁴² This is very relevant to this study since it gives the white middle class view of the actions of the African-American pastor and their congregation/community. Works such as Nancy Ammerman’s *The Civil Rights Movement and the Clergy in a Southern Community* will, through the use of the interview, give the white clergy’s perspective on the movement.⁴³ This will give the very important perspective of the white congregants and how it relates to their African-American counterparts.

A few white clergymen spoke in support of the African-American pastor and promptly lost their pulpits.⁴⁴ Others who tried to approach the matter from a “teaching perspective” found themselves “too far ahead of the people” and desisted from their efforts.⁴⁵ Scores of other white clergymen supported the movement by raising money and joining the civil disobedience demonstrations; white pastors like Robert Graetz, a white pastor with an all-black congregation, worked in the NAACP specifically in Montgomery’s bus boycott, Glenn Smiley a member of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) and Virginia Durrs a close friend and protest supporter of Rosa Parks.⁴⁶ There were individual cases of extraordinary heroism and extreme sacrifice where whites lost their lives for the cause of brother/sisterhood.⁴⁷

The pastor evolved with the theology of the American slave. This theology led to the first great African-American institution, the church. Throughout its evolution the pastor guided the community within the often subjugating dominant white society, but what were the social or

⁴¹ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 63.

⁴² Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 63.

⁴³ Ammerman, “The Civil Rights Movement,” 339-50.

⁴⁴ Ammerman, “Civil,” 339; Lincoln, *Negro Church*, 118.

⁴⁵ Lincoln, *Negro Church*, 118; Ammerman, “Civil,” 339-40.

⁴⁶ Chappell, *Agitators*, 56-58.

⁴⁷ Lincoln, *Negro Church*, 118; Westbrook, “MLK,” 23; Chappell, *Agitators*, 84-85.

environmental pressures that helped to bring about the formation of the African-American church?

CHAPTER ONE

AFRICAN SLAVE TO THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCH

The Invisible Institution

Due to competition from other European powers the Portuguese monopoly on the Atlantic slave trade ended in the early part of the sixteenth century; this caused an increase in the trade with it reaching its peak in the eighteenth century.¹ The total number of slave imports rose from 610,000 during the period of 1451 to 1700, to 1,498,000 between the period of 1701 to 1800.² The main regions of British North America with a flourishing plantation economy, the Chesapeake (Virginia and Maryland), the Carolinas (North and South Carolina) and Georgia, received an estimated 140,000 African slaves in the period of 1619 to 1750; overall between the period of 1650 to 1808 a total of 559,800 slaves entered the American colonies.³

The conditions for slaves in the American South were much better in comparison to other parts of the Americas; the Caribbean and Brazil possessed appallingly high mortality rates.⁴ In general the better working conditions, better diet and climate produced a constant rise in the rate of slave reproduction.⁵ In a relatively short time the total population of the American-born slave increased from 700,000 in 1790 to almost 900,000 a decade later; soon the number of African-Americans exceeded the number of slaves imported from Africa.⁶ This was important because it led to the development of the African-American culture in the United States; the slaves' rapid assimilation of American cultural traits led to the formation of an original and mildly syncretistic

¹ Dal Lago, *American*, 23; Owen, *Property*, 8; Schneider, *Slavery*, 53.

² Owen, *Property*, 8; Schneider, *Slavery*, 53; Dal Lago, *American*, 25; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 11.

³ Schneider, *Slavery*, 53; Owen, *Property*, 8; Dal Lago, *American*, 26; Bancroft, *Slave*, 2.

⁴ Stenton, "Slavery," 134-35; Dal Lago, *American*, 44.

⁵ Dal Lago, *American*, 44; Owen, *Property*, 8; Schneider, *Slavery*, 53.

⁶ Schneider, *Slavery*, 53; Dal Lago, *American*, 44; Owen, *Property*, 8.

African-American culture.⁷

Slavery in the United States was a self-contained system of human domination and denial of personhood and dignity.⁸ In the West Indies the genocide of the Carib Indians at the hands of the Spanish is evidence that only those with fierce fortitude and indomitable personal self-esteem could endure in such a system.⁹ In the plantation system of the southern United States the great mass of slaves would build for themselves the structure of an invisible society; built on spirituality it put meaning into their existence.¹⁰ The “secret service” arose where slaves were expressly forbidden to attend religious services; these weekly religious meetings were often held in hovels, arbors, and pits.¹¹ The slaves would discuss the events of the day and gain new strength from the communal reality of slavery.¹² These religious meetings emphasized and tightened the social bonds among slaves.¹³ They would celebrate the maintenance of life in the midst of adversity and determine the communal strategies and tactics for continued survival, protest and overt resistance.¹⁴ Often called the “invisible institution” these secret meetings were the origin of what would become the modern African-American church.¹⁵

In her broken English ex-slave Becky Ilsey adroitly describes the pre-Civil War “invisible institution” stating, “Fo de war when we’d have a meetin’ at night, wuz mos’ always way in de woods or de bushes some whar so de white folks could’t hear. Slaves would sneak of

⁷ Dal Lago, *American*, 44; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 11.

⁸ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 27-28; Stenton, “Slavery,” 134-35.

⁹ Stenton, “Slavery,” 130; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 27-28.

¹⁰ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 27-28; Marx, “Religion,” 364; Cone *Black Power*, 95; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33-34.

¹¹ Manis, “Birmingham’s,” 75-76; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 27-28; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33-34.

¹² Glenn, “Negro,” 629; Marx, “Religion,” 364; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33-35.

¹³ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 24-25; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33-35.

¹⁴ Rawick, “From Sun Up,” 37; Cone *Black Power*, 92; Marx, “Religion,” 364; Manis, “Birmingham’s,” 75-76; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33-35.

¹⁵ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 29; Cone *Black Power*, 100; Manis, “Birmingham’s,” 75-76; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33-35.

(sic) twixt eight an 'twelve at night to hold church."¹⁶ Carey Davenport a former slave and Methodist minister states, "Sometimes the slave folks go down in dugouts and hollows and hold they own service and they used to sing songs what come a gushin up from the heart."¹⁷ These meetings carried with them considerable risk; Cato Carter a former slave wrote, "some places wouldn' 'low them to worship a-tall and they had to put their heads in pots to sing or pray."¹⁸ The white community not only passed laws to prevent slaves from receiving unsupervised religious instruction but they also sought to whip and kill slaves who met secretly to praise God; yet the meetings continued and became the crucible in which slave theology would be forged.¹⁹

Slave Theology and the African-American Church

Slave theology was formed by the confluence of reinterpreted white Christianity with the remains of African religion; specifically the Old Testament emphasis on spiritual and physical freedom.²⁰ The importance placed on the sacrament of baptism reminded American slaves of water rituals practiced back in Africa; also the importance of the felt presence of the Holy Spirit harkened back to similar practices in spirit possession practiced in West African religious ceremonies.²¹

The religion of the slave had a distinct pneumatological focus with a realized eschatology, namely freedom from bondage.²² In these secret services the Holy Spirit moved among them and through them, possessed them, until one or another's body moved in response

¹⁶ Hopkins, *Stammering Tongue*, 7.

¹⁷ Rawick, "From Sun Up," 34; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 34.

¹⁸ Rawick, "From Sun Up," 35; Hopkins, *Stammering Tongue*, 9; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 29.

¹⁹ Hopkins, *Stammering Tongue*, 9; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 29; Hopkins, *Stammering Tongue*, 9; Marx, "Religion," 364; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 34.

²⁰ Huggins, *Black Odyssey*, 73; Pinn and Pinn, *Black Church*, §29; Bennett, "Hermeneutics," 39.

²¹ Pinn and Pinn, *Black Church*, §29; Bennett, "Hermeneutics," 39; Glenn, "Negro," 628; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 23.

²² Pinn and Pinn, *Black Church*, §29; Huggins, *Black Odyssey*, 72-73; Glenn, "Negro," 628; Manis, "Birmingham," 75; Westbrook, "MLK," 27; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 14.

to the Spirit's call.²³ The slave-priest/preacher was more exhorter than pastor; their language and style was filled with cosmic imagery, punctuated by rhythmical sounds like drums, grunts and claps of hands rather than words.²⁴ The worship was not the message of one person to their flock, it was the birthing, expanding, sustaining of an atmosphere in which all worshipers were transported.²⁵ It rose and intensified with the slave-preachers' words against the hums and responses of the congregation, until the spirit was palpable in their midst.²⁶ It is important to note that worship of the plantation slave of the southern United States was the evoking of religious experience through the collective, rather than the individual will; but what of their northern brothers and sisters?²⁷

Before the Civil War there existed a population of free African-Americans in the northern states. These were escaped slaves, slaves given their freedom for services rendered or African-Americans born to freed slaves.²⁸ These northern African-Americans would build their own institutional version of the "secret meeting" for much the same reasons as their southern counterparts.²⁹ In 1787, pastors Richard Allen, Absalom Jones and William White were expelled from the white St. George's Church in Philadelphia; authors like Cone and Franklin say they withdrew from the white church rather than accept continued humiliation from segregation.³⁰ It is interesting to note that this was the same year the American Constitution was drafted in the

²³ Glenn, "Negro," 628; Pinn and Pinn, *Black Church*, §29; Manis, "Birmingham's," 75-76; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 23-24.

²⁴ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 26-27; Huggins, *Black Odyssey*, 73; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 15.

²⁵ Huggins, *Black Odyssey*, 73; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 26-27; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 5.

²⁶ Manis, "Birmingham's," 75-76; Huggins, *Black Odyssey*, 73; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 26-27; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 5.

²⁷ Huggins, *Black Odyssey*, 73; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 26-27; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 6.

²⁸ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 35.

²⁹ Gadzekpo, "The Black Church," 97; Bynum, *A. Philip*, 25; Meir and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 84-86.

³⁰ Bynum, *A. Philip*, 25; Meir and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 84-86; Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 47; Pinn and Pinn, *Black Church*, §31; Cone, *Black Power*, 95; Gadzekpo, "The Black Church," 97; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 8.

same city.³¹ They were expelled due in no small part to the white congregation becoming increasingly disturbed by the growing number of African-Americans attending the church services.³² This act led Allen to establish the Free African Society; resulting in the founding of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) in 1816.³³ Nine years after the formation of the AME in Philadelphia a group of African-Americans in New York established the African Methodist Episcopal Zion church (AMEZ) in 1796.³⁴ The free Negro found status in the African-American church; it also shielded them from the contempt and discrimination of the white world.³⁵ The founding of these historic churches was the first African-American freedom movement and would become pivotal in the battle against injustice in the United States.³⁶

After the Civil War reconstruction saw African-Americans given opportunities to participate in American society.³⁷ The hopes and expectations of these freed people were raised as they worked towards the goal of full acceptance.³⁸ In politics there were twenty-two African-Americans in Congress; of the twenty-two congressmen three were pastors.³⁹ The pastor was quite active in state constitutional conventions and in local and state offices; for the first time in its history the African-American church was not the only arena for Negro religious, political and social consciousness.⁴⁰ However, their newly found freedom created a crisis in the life of African-Americans as it became the impetus for the widespread outbreak of lynchings; these

³¹ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 47.

³² Bynum, *A. Philip*, 25; Cone, *Black Power*, 95; Franklin, "History," 4; Meir and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 85-86; Gadzekpo, "The Black Church," 100.

³³ Fields, *Black Theology*, 17; Bynum, *A. Philip*, 25; Meir and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 85-86; Cone, *Black Power*, 95.

³⁴ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 53; Meir and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 85-86; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 8.

³⁵ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 50; Bynum, *A. Philip*, 25; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 11.

³⁶ Gadzekpo, "Black Church," 100; Meir and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 89; Cone, *Black Power*, 95.

³⁷ Cone, *Black Power*, 95; Wharton, "Race," 373; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 157.

³⁸ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 50; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 157.

³⁹ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 50; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 157.

⁴⁰ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 113; Meir and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 169-170; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 157.

lynchings were not limited to the southern states.⁴¹

With the end of reconstruction came the Supreme Court approval of segregation; 1892 saw “separate but equal” come into being and a long series of “Jim Crow” laws ended the political activity for African-Americans.⁴² Freed slaves were systematically excluded from politics in a process that some southern whites called “redemption”; as a result the African-American church once again became the primary arena for social and political activities.⁴³ The religion of the African-American shifted to focus solely on the otherworldly dismissing the privations and injustices of this world as temporary and transient.⁴⁴ The African-American church would respond to these circumstances by becoming more unified and structured; this structure led to the church’s major role in the underground railroad.⁴⁵

It is important to remember that the organized social life among transplanted slaves had been destroyed by the slave system; the “factories” of the slave economy had broken the traditional African clan and family.⁴⁶ In the environment of the new world the slave owners prevented the development of a structured family life.⁴⁷ This was due to the fear that if families were permitted to stay together it would invite insurrection; this would soon change.⁴⁸ The “invisible institution” which had taken root among the slaves in the south and the institutional church that had grown up among the free African-Americans of the north would soon merge.⁴⁹ The merger of these two churches provided an organization and structuring of African-American

⁴¹ Dally, Review of *Slavery*, 651; Wharton, “Race,” 376-77.

⁴² Franklin, “History,” 3; Dally, Review of *Slavery*, 652; Meir and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 166; Aiello, “Jim,” §157.

⁴³ Dally, Review of *Slavery*, 652; Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 116; Meir and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 174-75.

⁴⁴ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 116; Meir and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 174-75; Aiello, “Jim,” §157; Evans, “Urbanization,” 816.

⁴⁵ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 35; Cone, *Black Power*, 103; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 225; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 202.

⁴⁶ Shenton, “Slavery,” 131; Cone, *Black Power*, 91.

⁴⁷ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 35-36; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 3-4; Shenton, “Slavery,” 131.

⁴⁸ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 35-36; Shenton, “Slavery,” 131.

⁴⁹ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 29; Cone *Black Power*, 96; Meir and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 89; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 35.

social, cultural and political life that has persisted until the present day.⁵⁰

At this juncture we can see that the prohibition of African-Americans in white churches not only gave rise to the African-American church but allowed African traditions to linger and survive through the slave-priest/preacher.⁵¹ In the south it came in the form of the invisible institution and in the north the AME and the AMEZ; their merger added great structure to the communal life of African-Americans.⁵² The church is the cornerstone of the community, culture and the anchor of its activism; its importance is so great that some scholars say that the African-American church is the African-American community with each having no identity apart from the other.⁵³ Its role as the most important African-American institution for both survival and resistance has not changed.⁵⁴

Towards the Civil Rights Movement

The demand for unskilled workers created by World War I saw an African-American migration to the north in pursuit of a better life.⁵⁵ This produced a crisis in the life of African-Americans equal to that created by the Civil War and emancipation.⁵⁶ In the cold impersonal environment of the city the southern form of the African-American church which had provided security and support in the rural south, did not exist; its absence denied the people of their social

⁵⁰ Gadzekpo, "Black Church," 95-96; Bynum, *A. Philip*, 29; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 36-37; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 20.

⁵¹ Huggins, *Black Odyssey*, 73; Gadzekpo, "Black Church," 99; Ruether, *Liberation*, 127.

⁵² Gadzekpo, "Black Church," 95-96; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 36-37.

⁵³ Ruether, *Liberation*, 127; Gadzekpo, "Black Church," 95; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 190.

⁵⁴ Bynum, *A. Philip*, 29; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 24-25; Gadzekpo, "Black Church," 96; ; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 190.

⁵⁵ Pfeffer, *A. Philip*, 10; Weaver, "Negro," 165; Savage, *Spirit*, §296; Meir and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 216; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 333.

⁵⁶ Thornbrough, "Segregation," 184-85; Weaver, "Negro," 165; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 333; Evans, "Urbanization," 817.

life and refuge from a hostile white society.⁵⁷ African-Americans tried to explain their new experiences in terms of their traditional outlook; an outlook saturated with biblical motifs.⁵⁸

They found this task daunting since they were unaccustomed to having their children go to school with white children; unaccustomed to the white teachers addressing them as mister and mistress; unaccustomed to African-Americans in positions of trust and authority.⁵⁹ Their children's education, whether with white children or not, broadened their intellectual horizons. It gave them a new outlook on life as it opened doors to many occupations that had been closed to African-Americans in the south.⁶⁰

This was called the "secularization" of the African-American church; young African-Americans with economic power and mobility started turning their attention away from the church for their social and political activism.⁶¹ These effects were far reaching and included reducing the number of African-American men that became pastors.⁶² In the south pastors constituted half of the professional class, in the north it was only one in ten.⁶³ This "secularization" was further exacerbated by the size of the churches.

Northern African-American churches were quite large, close to 800 congregants while their southern counterparts were less than half that number.⁶⁴ These churches were large, influential and possessed considerable economic resources; they concerned themselves with many aspects of African-American life other than the religious.⁶⁵ This repelled the African-

⁵⁷ Meir and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 216; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 54; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 333; Evans, "Urbanization," 817.

⁵⁸ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 54; Gadzekpo, "Black Church," 99.

⁵⁹ Thornbrough, "Segregation," 184-85; Weaver, "Negro," 165.

⁶⁰ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 54-55; Evans, "Urbanization," 817.

⁶¹ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 55; Evans, "Urbanization," 817; Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's Church*, 16.

⁶² Frazier, *Negro Church*, 55; Evans, "Urbanization," 817; Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's Church*, 16.

⁶³ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 55.

⁶⁴ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 57; Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's Church*, 15.

⁶⁵ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 334; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 57; Evans, "Urbanization," 819-20.

Americans who sought a type of religious association that was warm and intimate.⁶⁶ This longing was filled by the “storefront” church.⁶⁷ As the name suggests these churches were conducted in unrented or abandoned stores or in run-down houses located in the poor and deteriorated areas of the African-American community.⁶⁸ They were led by the “jack-leg” pastor, a semiliterate or uneducated pastor who gathered about him the poor African-Americans who sought a religious leader.⁶⁹

Father Divine, Daddy Grace and Elder Lightfoot Mischeaux, were notable “storefront” preachers.⁷⁰ To the poor the sermons of Daddy Grace held out the possibility of self-improvement, upward social mobility and respectability; they gave their members a sense of self-esteem and security.⁷¹ Daddy Grace’s organizational structure created offices for about twenty-five per cent of his followers giving them a feeling of importance and identity; emotional release was provided through brass bands, syncopated music, ecstatic dancing, seizures and “speaking with tongues.”⁷² The money he received from the poor who flocked to his services made him a wealthy man; to the people it was a small price to pay for the void he filled in their lives.⁷³

When southern African-Americans were fleeing to Harlem, New York, during the 1920s, only fifty-four of one hundred forty churches in Harlem were housed in regular church structures; most were Baptist others Methodist, Holiness or Spiritualist churches, the remainder

⁶⁶ Richardson and Wright, “Afro-American,” 502; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 57; Crumbley, “Storefront,” 14; Dash and Rasor, “Storefront,” 93; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 334.

⁶⁷ Richardson and Wright, “Afro-American,” 502; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 57; Crumbley, “Storefront,” 14; Dash and Rasor, “Storefront,” 93; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 334.

⁶⁸ Richardson and Wright, “Afro-American,” 502; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 57; Crumbley, “Storefront,” 14; Dash and Rasor, “Storefront,” 93.

⁶⁹ Richardson and Wright, “Afro-American,” 502.

⁷⁰ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 230; Washington, Review of *Black Apostles*, 604; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 209.

⁷¹ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 230; Dash and Rasor, “Storefront,” 93.

⁷² Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 230.

⁷³ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 230; Dash and Rasor, “Storefront,” 93.

were “storefront” churches.⁷⁴ The storefront church was an attempt, especially on the part of those from the rural south, to reestablish a type of church they were accustomed to.⁷⁵ They wanted to be known by the pastor and desired the warm intimate association of fellow worshippers.⁷⁶ This was because the personal dignity of the African-American was communicated almost entirely through his/her church affiliation.⁷⁷ To be able to say that “I belong to Mt. Nebo Baptist” or “we go to Mason’s Chapel Methodist” was the accepted way of establishing identity and status; this was especially true in a society where there were few to no means of gaining status.⁷⁸ Unfortunately many of the preachers that organized the “storefronts” were exploiters and charlatans and as a result none were affiliated with the AME or AMEZ; however, secularization did lead to a shift in the African-American ideology.⁷⁹

Due to “secularization” the delayed eschatological outlook of the African-American church began to change.⁸⁰ Its focus shifted to the African-American condition in this world; pastors’ sermons turned to these subjects and they once again began engaging in political affairs.⁸¹ This included greater interest in the affairs of the community and contributing to social welfare agencies like the National Urban League or civil rights organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).⁸²

The lack of distinction between the African-American church and the African-American community cannot be overstated.⁸³ The church is the spiritual face of the African-American community; whether one is a church member or not is besides the point in any assessment of the

⁷⁴ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 58; Dash and Rasor, “Storefront,” 93; Crumley, “Storefront,” 14.

⁷⁵ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 58; Dash and Rasor, “Storefront,” 93; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 119.

⁷⁶ Richardson and Wright, “Afro-American,” 502; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 58.

⁷⁷ Lincoln, *Black Church*, 116; Mays and Nicholson, *Negro’s Church*, 14.

⁷⁸ Lincoln, *Black Church*, 116; Mays and Nicholson, *Negro’s Church*, 14.

⁷⁹ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 59.

⁸⁰ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 333-34; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 56; Evans, “Urbanization,” 818.

⁸¹ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 337-38; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 56; Evans, “Urbanization,” 818.

⁸² Frazier, *Negro Church*, 56; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 337-38; Evans, “Urbanization,” 818.

⁸³ Ruether, *Liberation Theology*, 127; Gadzeko, “Black Church,” 95; Bennett, “Hermeneutics,” 38.

importance and meaning of the African-American church.⁸⁴ By prohibiting slave participation in church life white society prompted the creation of the slaves' "invisible institution" and the institutional church of the free slaves of the north.⁸⁵ Their amalgamation gave African-Americans their first organization and structure to their social, political and economic life; this new found security would be tested during the beginning of the twentieth century.⁸⁶

The coming of the Great War saw a migration of African-Americans from the south to the north seeking unskilled labor.⁸⁷ This created another crisis in the community because the support system that was the church did not exist in the form they had become accustomed.⁸⁸ The north gave African-Americans economic and political opportunities they were denied in the south.⁸⁹ This soon created the "secularization" of the African-American church; where many African-Americans did not solely look to the church for the social, political and economic life.⁹⁰ However, the church's role would still be substantial because the participation of African-Americans in society was restricted; in the south most African-Americans stayed in isolated local communities and in the north integration was taken only to a point.⁹¹ Those that thought the northern churches too large and impersonal sought out the smaller more intimate "storefront" church. These churches and their preachers possessed a different set of problems for the African-American community.⁹²

The indivisible nature of the African-American church and the community has been noted, but who was its architect, its orchestrator; who risked all to tend to the plantation slave,

⁸⁴ Lincoln, *Black Church*, 56; Gadzeko, "Black Church," 95; Bennett, "Hermeneutics," 38.

⁸⁵ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 36-37; Gadzeko, "Black Church," 95-96.

⁸⁶ Bynum, *A. Philip*, 29; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 24-25; Gadzeko, "Black Church," 96.

⁸⁷ Pfeffer, *A. Philip*, 10; Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's Church*, 33; Weaver, "Negro," 165.

⁸⁸ Thornborough, "Segregation," 184-85; Weaver, "Negro," 165; Savage, *Spirit*, §296.

⁸⁹ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 333-34; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 54-55.

⁹⁰ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 54-55; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 333-34.

⁹¹ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 89-90; Evans, "Urbanization," 818.

⁹² Richardson and Wright, "Afro-American," 502; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 57.

gave them hope and marshal them towards a common purpose? To answer these questions one must look at how the theology of the African slave in colonial America relates to the rise of the first incarnation of the African-American pastor, the slave-priest.

CHAPTER TWO

CHIEF, MYSTIC, HEALER

The African Priest and Slave Theology

The slave came from a social environment characterized by a polygamous clan system under the authority of the chief and the priest; due to the slave “factory” system African family, clan, language and kinship disappeared as families were scattered all over the West Indies and southern United States.¹ Slaves came from many different African cultures and not only had to adjust to a new environment and new social relationships but to each other; they were disoriented, dehumanized and endured a daily assault on their body and spirit.² The chief and elders disappeared but the “medicine man” or “priest” remained.³ The priest held vast power in the African tribal system; their realm was the province of religion and medicine; they alone remained unaffected by the system of slavery; their power and province became even more important in the plantation system of the southern United States.⁴ They not only salved the body and spirit but they also were the interpreter of the supernatural, the comforter of the sorrowful and the one who expressed the longing, disappointment and resentment of a stolen people.⁵ It is important to note that authors like Rawick and Hicks include the king and tribal elders as Africans who could have possibly fulfilled the priest’s role.⁶ Even though Hicks sees the king/chief as divinely instituted and maintained, which may aid the possibility of their continued

¹ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 3; Bascio, *White Theology*, 40-41; Stenton, “Slavery,” 130; Cone, *Black Power*, 91.

² Rawick, “From Sun Up,” 8; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 3; Bascio, *White Theology*, 40-41; Stenton, “Slavery,” 130.

³ Bascio, *White Theology*, 40-41; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 3.

⁴ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 25; Bascio, *White Theology*, 40-41; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 3.

⁵ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 25; Bascio, *White Theology*, 40-41; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 3.

⁶ Rawick, “From Sun Up,” 38.

leadership, due to the circumstances in the southern slave system it was more likely that the priest filled this leadership role⁷

The slave-priest was relied upon to maintain spiritual contact with the African ancestors; slaves looked to them as a unifying community resource.⁸ They were more than just “de leader in ligion”, they were the leader in every facet of community life; they unified a hitherto disjointed people.⁹ This built an intense relationship between the slave-priest and their people, a relationship similar to that experienced in the West African extended family compound.¹⁰ Their leadership would profoundly influence the daily lives of their fellow slaves.

The African slaves in the United States quickly came to the understanding that there was little possibility that their masters would one day be so kind as to consider them as brothers/sisters.¹¹ The inconsistency between the master’s claims about their external salvation and the powerlessness and wretchedness of their condition was too great; a condition imposed and directed by their Christian masters.¹² The religion of the slaveholder was a delusion; it was used expressly for the purpose of deceiving the slave into believing that their duty was to obey their master in all things.¹³ With the slave’s quick rejection of any distortion of the gospel it became apparent that the particular religion of the slave master would not be the same religion of the slave.¹⁴

African slaves were compelled to find a language that would unmistakably express their hopes of a reversal of their fortunes and at the same time conceal the message from slave

⁷ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 84; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33.

⁸ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 31-34.

⁹ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 31-34; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33.

¹⁰ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 33.

¹¹ Cone, *Black Power*, 92-93; Bennett, “Biblical Theology,” 39; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 3; Bascio, *White Theology*, 42-43.

¹² Bennett, “Biblical Theology,” 39; Cone, *Black Power*, 92-93; Brown, “Narrative,” 39; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 3;

¹³ Brown, “Narrative,” 39; Cone, *Black Power*, 93.

¹⁴ Bascio, *White Theology*, 42-43; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 3.

owners; the language found in the Bible was a ready vehicle.¹⁵ The slave understood Jesus in light of the liberating message of Moses, whose “offices are priest and king.”¹⁶ Yahweh had utilized Moses to emancipate the Hebrew slaves; because Yahweh had continued to act in human history the slaves’ maintained hope and certainty for their own deliverance.¹⁷ Therefore, slave theology consistently experienced God dwelling with those in bondage.¹⁸

The slaves developed their own religious life while at the same time adopting and appropriating compatible Christian beliefs. In its nascency Obeia worship, spirit possession and Voodooism were still quite prevalent; missionary efforts soon gave the proceedings a veneer of Christianity and gradually it became Christian but retained many of the old customs.¹⁹ From its beginnings it had an identity that was unequivocally and intrinsically African-American; it had a distinct character with no attempt at mimicking the white church.²⁰ The slave-priest was instrumental in this creative process and eagerly took to the gospels inculcating their message into the psyche of the plantation slave.²¹

God is both transcendent and immanent in African traditional religions and his authority entails all of creation.²² Like the African religions Catholicism was rich with ceremony, rituals, music and incantations but its formalism was daunting and constraining for the American slave.²³ The Great Awakenings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries opened American Protestantism to the African-American slave by shifting the emphasis of the church from human

¹⁵ Evans, *Believers*, 146; Bascio, *White Theology*, 42-43; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33.

¹⁶ Baker-Fletcher, Review of *Stammering Tongue*, 282-83; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 25.

¹⁷ Hopkins, *Stammering Tongue*, 2; Cone, *Black Power*, 64; Bennett, *Hermeneutics*, 38.

¹⁸ Hopkins, *Stammering Tongue*, 2; Cone, *Black Power*, 64; Bennett, *Hermeneutics*, 38.

¹⁹ Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 2; Gadzeko, “Black Church,” 97-98; Baker-Fletcher, Review of *Stammering Tongue*, 282-83; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 22; Dubois, “Negro Church,” §7.

²⁰ Gadzeko, “Black Church,” 97-98; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 2; Dubois, “Negro Church,” §3.

²¹ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 18; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33.

²² Hopkins, *Stammering Tongue*, 5; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 17-18; Lincoln, *Black Church*, 12; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 2-3.

²³ Huggins, *Black Odyssey*, 68-70; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 19.

impotence to human possibility for redemption.²⁴ A person needed only open their heart to the Holy Spirit to be saved; this pneumatological focus was rich in the Methodist and Baptist denominations.²⁵ Their relatively loose, democratic structure and unashamed acceptance of spirit and emotionalism made them the most hospitable to the African-American slave.²⁶

In John Thompson's narrative he describes the slaves' introduction to the Methodist religion.²⁷ He describes it as having a wonderful impact upon the slaves because it "brought glad tidings to the poor bondman; it bound up the broken-hearted; it opened the prison doors to they that were bound and let the captives go free."²⁸ For the slave the Christian religion communicated the possibility of liberation; it became the cornerstone of slave Christian discourse and its chief purveyor was the slave-priest.²⁹ Although often illiterate the slave-priest committed large portions of the Bible to memory; Cato Carter a slave, stated, "In the chapel some slave mens (sic) preached from the Bible but couldn't read a line no more than sheep could."³⁰ Noted for the imagery of their sermons they were said to possess unusual power and preached with such force as to excite not only the slaves but also the whites.³¹ However imperfect and distorted their knowledge of the Bible might be the fact that they were acquainted with the source of sacred knowledge, that was in a sense the exclusive possession of their white master, gave them prestige among their fellow slaves; it was the only African-American seat of

²⁴ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 19; Glenn, "Negro," 629.

²⁵ Pinn and Pinn, *Black Church*, §29; Huggins, *Black Odyssey*, 72-73; Glenn, "Negro," 629; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 14; Westbrook, "MLK," 27.

²⁶ Huggins, *Black Odyssey*, 72-73; Pinn and Pinn, *Black Church*, §29; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 5-6; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 23.

²⁷ Melcher, "Prophet," 91; Thompson, *John Thompson*, 19.

²⁸ Thompson, *John Thompson*, 19; Melcher, "Prophet," 91.

²⁹ Evans, *Believers*, 146; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 5-6; Bennett, *Hermeneutics*, 39; Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 17; Bynum, *A. Philip*, 129; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 33.

³⁰ Rawick, "From Sun Up," 35; Glenn, "Negro," 628.

³¹ Woodson, *Negro Church*, §41; Mays and Nicholson, *Black Church*, 3.

power and authority, even over some whites, which made it a sought after position.³² The slave-priest taught their fellow slaves to interpret their lives through the biblical narratives.³³

The Bible was rife with motifs that depict a safe place in which to live, a God who abhors injustice, and an expectation of deliverance from bondage. These motifs conveyed theological percepts that were very important to the slave community of the antebellum United States.³⁴ The theological perspective of the slave narratives and discourse reflected a pervasive prophetic and apocalyptic fervor; these motifs imbued the slave narrative with a persistent expectation of deliverance along with the punishment of the wicked for their oppressive acts.³⁵ Through the preaching/teaching of the slave-priest the slave used biblical language to describe every aspect of slave life.³⁶ The slave narrative often portrayed slavery as an inherently toxic institution, one that harms all who are associated with it.³⁷

The African-American pastor often stated that slavery was a sin against God and adulterated all who came in contact with it.³⁸ This sentiment is expressed adroitly in the writings of Mary Chestnut, wife of a South Carolina senator. On the eve of the Civil War she maintained a diary which remains unquestionably one of the most extraordinary source materials for understanding the nature of the impact of slavery upon the ruling class of the south. In one entry she responds to a woman who expressed envy at her condition as a mistress of a plantation; she states, "our men live like patriarchs of old, surrounded by their wife, family, and concubines." She goes on to say "the young woman who waits on me at morning is my niece. The young man

³² Frazier, *The Negro Church*, 24; Mays and Nicholson, *Black Church*, 3; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33.

³³ Gadzeko, "Black Church," 97-98; Melcher, "Prophet," 98.

³⁴ Melcher, "Prophet," 98; Gadzeko, "Black Church," 97.

³⁵ Melcher, "Prophet," 89; Dickerson, "African-American," 219.

³⁶ Gadzeko, "Black Church," 97; Melcher, "Prophet," 89.

³⁷ Melcher, "Prophet," 89.

³⁸ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 145; Cone, *Black Power*, 73; Reuther, *Liberation*, 132; Dickerson, "African-American," 218; Manis, *Fire*, 193.

who drives my coach is my children's half brother." She adds, "you can go to any plantation and the mistress of that plantation can name the father of every child on every plantation but her own." She ends with a comment, "Ours is a monstrous system."³⁹

In his narrative, Lewis Clarke, a slave in Kentucky for twenty years, portrays the slave system by employing the prophetic book of Micah.⁴⁰ Clarke depicts how the members of slave holding families live at odds with one another.⁴¹ He states, "for the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter in law against her mother in law, a man's enemies are the men of his own house" (Mic 7:6).⁴² Clarke uses this to express the theme that a corrupt system infects those who participate in it.⁴³ In his narrative the ex-slave Henry "Box" Brown called slavery a mixture of "gall and wormwood."⁴⁴ This refers to Jeremiah 9:15 where YHWH punishes Israel for its idolatry by stating, "I will feed them, even this people wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink."⁴⁵ Brown believes the nation like Israel will be punished for its crimes against God; he develops the metaphor of "drinking the cup" further by stating that slavery possesses the power to change the nature of all who drink of its vicious cup.⁴⁶

The use of biblical motifs did not stop at deriding the slave system; it was used to express thoughts and feelings that ranged from denouncing pro-slavery ministers to finding a safe place to be free.⁴⁷ To express the violent passions of an individual slaveholding woman, Revelation 15:7; 16:1 is used; Lewis Clarke states, "every boy was ordered to pass before this female sorceress that she might select a victim for her unprovoked malice, and on whom to pour the

³⁹ Stenton, "Slavery," 134-35.

⁴⁰ Clarke, "Sufferings," 610; Melcher, "Prophet," 89.

⁴¹ Melcher, "Prophet," 89; Clarke, "Sufferings," 610.

⁴² Clarke, "Sufferings," 9; Melcher, "Prophet," 89; Whipple, *Family*, §16.

⁴³ Melcher, "Prophet," 89; Stenton, "Slavery," 134-35; Whipple, *Family*, §16.

⁴⁴ Brown, "Narrative," 457; Melcher, "Prophet," 90.

⁴⁵ Melcher, "Prophet," 90.

⁴⁶ Brown, "Narrative," 459; Melcher, "Prophet," 88.

⁴⁷ Melcher, "Prophet," 90; Marx, "Religion," 364.

vials of her wrath for years.”⁴⁸ John Thompson expressed the violent beatings that young slaves often endured and the grief-stricken reactions such beatings provoked in their mothers by drawing on Jeremiah 8:22; He cried, “is there no balm in Gilead, is there no physician there, that thy people can be healed?”⁴⁹ Thompson is communicating the impatience and concern that healing has not occurred; that slavery has wounded African-Americans.⁵⁰ Finally, the motif of “vine and fig tree” from Micah 4:4 appears in many slave writings including William Craft’s *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*; in it he states he was bound for Philadelphia, a state that had abolished slavery, a slave named Pompey asks him “when you gets de freedom, and sitting under your own vine and fig tree, don’t forget to pray for poor Pompey.”⁵¹ For writers like Thompson, Craft and Parker the motif of “under one’s own vine and fig-tree” is used to imagine circumstance and a place where African-Americans live safe and free.⁵²

At this juncture the importance of the African slave-priest is quite evident; their unchanged role allowed them to salve the slaves’ physical and emotional pain, create family and community from the disoriented, broken tribes and remind them of their past ancestry.⁵³ Using biblical texts they gave the slaves a voice to describe their daily sufferings; not only giving them hope for a greater life after death but hope for freedom in this life.⁵⁴ At times they were the single sustaining force in the slaves’ hour of deepest need; creating an intimate relationship between them and their fellow slaves.⁵⁵ This imbued them with great power and prestige making

⁴⁸ Melcher, “Prophet,” 89; Clarke, “Sufferings,” 610.

⁴⁹ Thompson, *John Thompson*, 21; Melcher, “Prophet,” 89.

⁵⁰ Thompson, *John Thompson*, 21; Melcher, “Prophet,” 89-90.

⁵¹ Melcher, “Prophet,” 91; Thompson, *John Thompson*, 38.

⁵² Melcher, “Prophet,” 91; Thompson, *John Thompson*, 38.

⁵³ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33; Bascio, *White Theology*, 42-43.

⁵⁴ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 52; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33; Wilmore, *Black Religion*, 68-69.

⁵⁵ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 52; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33; Mays and Nicholson, *Black Church*, 3.

the slave-priest the leader of every facet of the slave community.⁵⁶

African ancestry became a distant memory as slaves were born and toiled in the southern United States never having known Africa.⁵⁷ The slave-priest slowly became the slave-preacher. At the same time the issue of slaves being taught the Bible, often under the same roof as whites, became contentious.

The Slave-Priest before the Civil War

Methodist and Baptist denominations began proselytizing slaves after the American Revolution.⁵⁸ The Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterians became imbued with the idea of an equality of the Negro in the church; the slaves were accepted in these congregations.⁵⁹ Although they did not always militantly denounce slavery, Methodist conferences took steps towards the abolition of slavery; they declared that slavery was opposed to the laws of God and contrary to the principles of the American Revolution.⁶⁰ Elevation of slaves by these liberal denominations incurred the displeasure and opposition of the white aristocratic church community; they curtailed slave involvement in church work and questioned if slaves could even enter heaven.⁶¹

The fear of teaching the slave the Bible was tied up in the fear that the slave would find in its narrative the implications of human equality; this would incite the slaves to make efforts to free themselves.⁶² This declined as slave masters became convinced that sufficient justification for slavery could be found in its pages.⁶³ This set the stage for the slave-preacher to carry on the tradition of leadership started by his predecessor; this leadership would be under very different

⁵⁶ Mays and Nicholson, *Black Church*, 3; Glenn, "Negro," 627; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 52; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33.

⁵⁷ Dal Lago, *American*, 44; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 11.

⁵⁸ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 15; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 5-6; Woodson, *Negro Church*, §40; Glenn, "Negro," 629.

⁵⁹ Glenn, "Negro," 118; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 6; Woodson, *Negro Church*, §40

⁶⁰ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 29; Woodson, *Negro Church*, §40.

⁶¹ Woodson, *Negro Church*, §40; Franklin, "History," 4; Meir and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 85-86.

⁶² Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 6; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 18; Woodson, *Negro Church*, §41.

⁶³ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 18.

circumstances and would take a subversive turn most notably in the form of the “secret meeting.”⁶⁴

When found to have an affinity for retaining scripture and unusual ministerial gifts, potential slave-preachers were ordained by white ministers or allowed to preach at the behest of their masters; they preached on the plantations, by rivers or even to white congregations.⁶⁵ There are those that rose to prominence including Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, Harry Hosier, George Liele, and Lott Cary but many who went unheralded.⁶⁶ Many preachers like Black Harry and Henry Evans possessed “great volubility of tongue”; Dr. Benjamin Rush considered Black Harry “the greatest orator in America.”⁶⁷ When these men of unusual power preached it was with such force as to excite both slaves and whites; however, steps were usually taken to silence these speakers for they heralded the coming of a new day.⁶⁸

The antebellum slave-preacher was the greatest single factor in determining the social and spiritual development of the slave community.⁶⁹ Like their slave-priest predecessor they gave hope to many weary spiritually and physically exhausted slaves; they were convinced that every human being was a child of God.⁷⁰ Their message stressed the essential worth of each person; they told the slave “you are created in God’s image, you are not slaves, you are not ‘niggers’; you are God’s children.”⁷¹ These preachers were able to lift the vision of a people from the disgrace of slavery to the hope of dignity in freedom. They were able to communicate religion to the slave in a useful and intimate form; being a slave and suffering with the people

⁶⁴ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33; Manis, “Birmingham,” 75-76; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 27-28.

⁶⁵ Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's*, 3; Woodson, *Negro Church*, §41.

⁶⁶ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 29; Woodson, *Negro Church*, §41.

⁶⁷ Woodson, *Negro Church*, §57-58; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 30-31.

⁶⁸ Woodson, *Negro Church*, §40-41.

⁶⁹ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 36; Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's*, 38; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33.

⁷⁰ Cone, *Spirituals*, 17; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 308.

⁷¹ Cone, *Spirituals*, 17; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 308.

they could make religion not only a discipline but also a great source of hope.⁷² The slaves found new strength and were inspired by the words that fell from the lips of the slave-preacher; this was pivotal for the slaves' psychological survival.⁷³ This dynamic continued to infuse the slave-preacher with great power and prestige.⁷⁴

The slave-preacher understood the great power they possessed over his fellow slaves and approached it with deep respect and caution.⁷⁵ They were not agents of open, unrestrained rebellion and resistance; their methods were more refined and came in the form of suggestion and innuendo.⁷⁶ They used subtle tools like the Negro spirituals whose coded, subversive messages helped to undermine the system of slavery fostering a culture of resistance.⁷⁷ Hopkins demonstrates how the moral values in slave narratives reveal this "culture of resistance"; one such value is "taking-not-stealing." Former slave-preacher Reverend Israel Massie reveals that,

slaves didn't think dat (sic) stealin' wuz so bad in dem times. Fak' is dey didn't call it stealin', dey called it takin'. Dey say, "I ain't takin' fom nobody but ma' mistrus an Master, an' I'm doin' dat 'cause I'se hongry!" White folks' certainly taught slaves to steal. If they had given them enough to eat dey wouldn't have no cause to steal.⁷⁸

Another moral value in the culture of resistance was knowing where runaways were hiding but not telling the masters. Again, the Reverend Israel Massie recollects that, "all de slaves knew (sic) whar he [the fugitive] wuz. In dem days, ya kno', slaves didn't tell on each other."⁷⁹ A third aspect of the culture of resistance was developing an accommodating personality for the master and another for each other.⁸⁰ Former slave John White writes, "even

⁷² Richardson and Wright, "Afro-American Religion," 496; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 308.

⁷³ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 27.

⁷⁴ Wilmore, *Black Religion*, 68-69; Glenn, "Negro," 627; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33; Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's*, 38.

⁷⁵ Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's*, 38; Wilmore, *Black Religion*, 68-69.

⁷⁶ Wilmore, *Black Religion*, 68-69; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 32.

⁷⁷ Baker-Fletcher, Review of *Stammering Tongue*, 282-83; Bascio, *White Theology*, 40.

⁷⁸ Baker-Fletcher, Review of *Stammering Tongue*, 282-83.

⁷⁹ Baker-Fletcher, Review of *Stammering Tongue*, 282-83.

⁸⁰ Baker-Fletcher, Review of *Stammering Tongue*, 282-83; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 32.

after I entertained the first idea of being free, I endeavored so to conduct myself as not to become obnoxious to the white inhabitants, knowing as I did their power, and their hostility to the colored people”; Hopkins calls this the “duality of survival.”⁸¹ This same culture of resistance would be used in the future struggle for civil rights. However, there is a theory that not all slave-preachers were agents of resistance and subterfuge.

For a time there was a theory that the slave-preacher was the pawn of the white slave owner; the criticism proposed that they used religion as a drug, an opiate to maintain docility rather than as something to impart resistant to an oppressive system.⁸² Preachers such as Reverend Jupiter Harmon and Reverend Israel Campbell turned the slaves’ minds from the suffering and privations of this world to a world after death where the weary would find rest.⁸³ These preachers were taken from plantation to plantation where their sermons would delight the plantation masters because of the opiate affect it had on the slaves.⁸⁴ George Liele and Uncle Jack were Virginian preachers in this realm; Liele began his ministry before the revolutionary war and Jack after the war. Both were so effective in pacifying their fellow slaves they were freed so they could devote themselves to full-time ministry; an ex-slave recalls:

One old lady named Emily Morehead runned (sic) in and held my mother once for Phipps to whip her. And my mother was down with consumption too. I aimed to get old Phipps for that. But then I got religion and I could’t do it. Religion makes you forget a heap of things.⁸⁵

It would seem that Christianity was used as a chain that shackled the minds of slaves while the master shackled their bodies; however, there is another side to this story.

⁸¹ Baker-Fletcher, *Review of Stammering Tongue*, 282-83.

⁸² Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 34; Woodson, *Negro Church*, §48; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 32.

⁸³ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 42; Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's*, 7.

⁸⁴ Woodson, *Negro Church*, §47; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 31.

⁸⁵ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 47; Woodson, *Negro Church*, §56; Yetman, *Voices From Slavery*, § 95.

Writers like Vincent Harding, James Cone and George Rawick point to the theory's fallacious conclusions; they cite insurrections plotted by preachers such as Gabriel, Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner.⁸⁶ These insurrections had their foundations in religious services and were the result of impassioned expositions of scripture; the slave-preacher was the primary expositor and resulted in slave owners becoming concerned with the relationship between religious gatherings and slave revolts.⁸⁷

Even before the coming of Nat Turner's famous slave rebellion this was a matter of concern in the state of Virginia; the thoughts of the white establishment were expressed through one Richard Byrd, who stated, "slave preachers use their religious meetings as venues for revolutionary schemes."⁸⁸ It was due to the organizational skills and unifying strength of the slave-preacher that numerous laws were passed throughout the south prohibiting slave-preachers and the assembly of slaves on Sunday.⁸⁹ Religion could be an opiate at times but it more frequently provided the necessary sustaining power that would allow for the development of a resistant force; the slave-preacher played a key role in ensuring the Bible was a tool of freedom not of bondage.⁹⁰

In the "culture of resistance" the slave-preacher existed in two worlds; they were subversives clothed in the sheepskin of submission.⁹¹ This ability was both survival mechanism and insurance that would enable the continuance of preaching the word.⁹² It is true that at times the slave-preacher would be hired by the master to tell slaves that if they wanted to go to heaven

⁸⁶ Fields, *Black Theology*, 17-18; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 30; Meir and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 87; Gadzeko, *Black Church*, 100.

⁸⁷ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 30; Fields, *Black Theology*, 17-18; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 36; Lincoln, *Black Church*, 203.

⁸⁸ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 30; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 34-35.

⁸⁹ Brown, "Narrative," §31; Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 50.

⁹⁰ Rawick, "From Sun Up," 33; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 32.

⁹¹ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 32; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 38.

⁹² Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 38; Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's*, 38; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 32.

they should obey their master; however, when unsupervised the slave-preacher would deviate from this order.⁹³ Many slaves knew the difference between the imposed slave religion and the “true Bible religion”; they would trust the slave-preacher to give them the true word of God.⁹⁴

One such unknown cotton patch apostle stated,

when I starts preaching I couldn't read a word and had to preach what master told me, and he say tell the slaves (sic) iffen they obeys the master they goes to heaven; but I knows there's something better for them, but daren't tell them' cept on the sly. That I don lots. I tells' em iffen they keeps praing, the Lord will get'em free.⁹⁵

In 1831 Nat Turner would take a different route and drew comparisons to Malcolm X; his attempt to lead a group of slaves in a violent revolt against slavery is the most published slave revolt in the history of the United States.⁹⁶ According to the *Confessions*, Turner saw himself as a prophet recalling many occasions when the Spirit of God spoke to him.⁹⁷ He identified with the prophetic tradition of the Hebrews and saw himself ordained for some great purpose; like the prophets of old he spoke out against wicked behaviour.⁹⁸ There were others that spoke out against this behaviour in a very different manner.

In the population of free African-Americans in the northern states there existed another type of preacher. They neither taught violent resistance against slavery nor sanctioned slavery and racial discrimination; one such preacher was the aforementioned Richard Allen.⁹⁹ Through his African Society he passed strong resolutions calling for the abolition of slavery preaching that it was against God's will. However, he was not an advocate of freedom by any means necessary; he counseled slaves to love and obey their masters because in doing so they would be

⁹³ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 39; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 32.

⁹⁴ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 39; Botkin, *Burden*, 26.

⁹⁵ Botkin, *Burden*, 26.

⁹⁶ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 30; Brown, “Narrative,” 31; Gadzeko, *Black Church*, 100; Cone, *Black Power*, 96-97; Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 58.

⁹⁷ Styron, *Confessions*, 252; Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 58.

⁹⁸ Styron, *Confessions*, 252; Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 58.

⁹⁹ Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 8; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 7-8; Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 49.

rewarded in heaven and God would punish the slave owners.¹⁰⁰ Allen is a prelude to the African-American pastors of the civil rights movement; they all presided over all-African-American churches due in fact to exclusion from white churches; they were not black nationalist but integrationist; they were advocates of the power of love and forgiveness; they made strong appeals to whites to act justly and to be merciful; they eschewed violence but acted against racial injustice.¹⁰¹

Summary

From 1619 until the end of the Civil War enslaved Africans had molded themselves into something new, an African-American people.¹⁰² They were not simply idle victims of brute white force; on the contrary they created a world around them that was sometimes visible but incomprehensible to the slave master.¹⁰³ Their creative strength fashioned a new African-American collective behind closed doors in the slave quarters or deep in the woods late at night; here slaves developed a culture of survival that included all the dimensions of a thriving but enchained community.¹⁰⁴

After the slaves were introduced to institutional religion those that showed an affinity for the scripture and acumen towards leadership were ordained or asked to preach.¹⁰⁵ The slave-preacher was anointed to his specific ministry when whites protested slave involvement in church life. Their mission would be slightly different than their priest predecessor; they not only gave them care and hope but taught them subversion.¹⁰⁶ Their subversive acts would have them living in two worlds; pacifying the master while giving the slaves tools to deal with their daily

¹⁰⁰ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 49; Fields, *Black Theology*, 17; Bynum, *A. Philip*, 25.

¹⁰¹ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 49.

¹⁰² Dal Lago, *America*, 44; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 11.

¹⁰³ Rawick, "From Sun Up," 8; Marx, "Religion," 364; Cone, *Black Power*, 95; Dal Lago, *American*, 44.

¹⁰⁴ Hopkins, *Stammering Tongue*, ix; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 34.

¹⁰⁵ Woodson, *Negro Church*, §44; Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's*, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 32; Baker-Fletcher, Review of *Stammering Tongue*, 282-83.

toil and hope for a better day.¹⁰⁷ There were those slave-preachers that were dupes for the masters, however, as a whole religion was used more as an invigorator and hope-spring than an opiate.¹⁰⁸

The slave-preacher played a significant part in the daily social and religious development of slave life; preaching in the cotton fields and rice paddies their duties included being counselors, planner of protests and harbinger of hope.¹⁰⁹ It was the one position permitted to the slave and it carried considerable power and prestige; acquired not only by preaching the word, salving their spirit and body but living what they preached in front of their congregation.¹¹⁰ White congregations often lauded them for their powerful oratory garnering them a position of authority, even over whites; something that would not go unnoticed by other slaves.¹¹¹

To people that were dehumanized and disenfranchised the church was the only place they felt belonging, love and part of something greater than themselves; they had a sense of dignity and hope and for the young slave it gave them something to aspire to.¹¹² The person who orchestrated all of this was the slave-priest/preacher; they created the church at their peril for they would be killed for their work at gathering the slaves, preaching the Bible and teaching them subversion.¹¹³ When it became known that Nat Turner was a preacher, whites concluded that the slave-preacher was a disruptive force and a bad influence on slaves.¹¹⁴ The slave states proceeded to enact laws silencing slave-preachers outright or severely restricting their ministerial duties.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁷ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 32; Baker-Fletcher, Review of *Stammering Tongue*, 282-83.

¹⁰⁸ Rawick, "From Sun Up," 33; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 32.

¹⁰⁹ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 38.

¹¹⁰ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 38; Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's*, 3.

¹¹¹ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 38.

¹¹² Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's*, 3; Bynum, *A. Philip*, 29.

¹¹³ Frazier, *The Negro Church*, 17; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 34.

¹¹⁴ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 17; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 32; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 34-35.

¹¹⁵ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 17.

Although there is no sharp demarcation between slave-priest, slave-preacher and African-American pastor, there are crucial components that denote significant change. The slave-preacher was born on American soil and had no recollection of his ancestral home.¹¹⁶ The pastor was a freeman and cared for a particular congregation; they were unshackled from the master's chains and did not travel from plantation to plantation doing the master's bidding by day and building the church by night.¹¹⁷

Since the emergence of the African-American church in the United States the pastor has been viewed as its unchallenged leader.¹¹⁸ African-American men and women believed and did everything the pastor suggested.¹¹⁹ Understanding the depth and scope of the intertwining relationship between the church/community and pastor is critical to any analysis of the African-American pastor.¹²⁰ How did they acquire the ability to give direction to African-American life and why were their actions able to influence white American society?

¹¹⁶ Bascio, *White Theology*, 40-41; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33.

¹¹⁷ Woodson, *Negro Church*, §44; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 31-32; Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 39.

¹¹⁸ Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's*, 38.

¹¹⁹ Madkins, "Leadership Crisis," 102-3.

¹²⁰ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 91.

CHAPTER THREE

AFRICAN-AMERICAN PASTORS AS A FORCE IN THE COMMUNITY

Familial bonds among slaves were discouraged on southern plantations in the United States; families could be and were regularly broken up.¹ This was a common tactic used by slave traders and plantation masters to prohibit insurrection; as a consequence the slave community quickly became more important than the nuclear family.² Individual slaves could be sold to another plantation hundreds of miles away but would quickly be accepted into the community because they knew the social mores.³ The intense relationship between the pastor and the congregation was dependent upon the congregation being a community, a sacred family, in which the pastor was the leader; the worship service they conducted was the evoking of a religious experience through the collective community not the individual.⁴ This relationship was reminiscent of the priest/elder-tribe relationship in a West African village extended family compound.⁵ The reality of community was a major adaptive process for the African-American slave in the United States.⁶

The African-American community believes their pastor possessed special grace manifested by their deep knowledge of the people's needs; this power is not derived from some legal or constitutional authority but from the traditional respect afforded a priest or tribal elder.⁷

¹ Raboteau, Review of *Dear Master*, 603; Rawick, "From Sun Up," 9-10; Whipple, *Family*, §8-9,12; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 35-36; Shenton, "Slavery," 131; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 3-4.

² Rawick, "From Sun Up," 9-10; Whipple, *Family*, §8-9,12; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 35-36; Shenton, "Slavery," 131.

³ Rawick, "From Sun Up," 9-10; Sudarkasa, "Heritage," 35-36.

⁴ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 324; Campbell, *White*, 344; Rawick "Narratives," 294; Rawick, "From Sun Up," 38.

⁵ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 324; Campbell, *White*, 344; Rawick "Narratives," 294; Rawick, "From Sun Up," 38; Sudarkasa, "Heritage," 35-36.

⁶ Rawick, "From Sun Up," 9-10; Sudarkasa, "Heritage," 35; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 275.

⁷ Rawick, "From Sun Up," 39; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 93.

They were believed to act not out of selfish self-seeking motives, but out of their deep contact with the soul of the congregation and the community; the cries of “amen,” “hallelujah,” and “tell it to them preacher,” that punctuated the sermon were in effect affirmations that they were in tune with the soul of the community.⁸ Their followers perceived them as the one person in the community who gave far more than they received.⁹ They referred to them using the possessive pronoun “my pastor,” quoted them, cited them authoritatively, lauded what they had done for them and what their sermons contained last Sunday; most of all they frequently turned to them to intercede with the white establishment.¹⁰

Another source of the pastor’s power is derived from his charisma; the African-American church produced and thrived on charismatic relationships between its pastors and congregations.¹¹ Churches, especially the prestigious ones, demanded pastors who could command the respect, support, and allegiance of congregations through their strong, magnetic personalities.¹² Furthermore, the majority of pastors claimed to have been directly “called” by God through dreams, personal revelation or divine inspiration; their congregations believed they had a direct pipeline to the divine.¹³

African-American pastors were protective in their relationship with their congregation; when the president of the National Baptist Convention stated that, “ministers are expected to stand for the people in nearly every avenue of life” he was not exaggerating.¹⁴ Although the pastors’ lack of education severely limited their ability to provide material help, they did adroitly communicate their faith; coach their congregants in everything from relating to God to coping

⁸ Rawick, “From Sun Up,” 39; Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 12-13; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 6.

⁹ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 12-13; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 323.

¹⁰ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 19; Washington, “Apostles,” 603; Fields, *Black Theology*, 17; Baker-Fletcher, Review of *Stammering Tongue*, 282-83.

¹¹ Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 117; Morris, “SCLC,” 31-32.

¹² Morris, “SCLC,” 31-32.

¹³ Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 117; Morris, “SCLC,” 31-32.

¹⁴ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 322.

with the mundane minutia of daily life; they were horse doctors, weather prophets, told the farmers when to plant, attended to the living, buried the dead, and acted as bondsman for all their people.¹⁵ Congregations often called their pastor “doctor”; they are called “doctor” in love because they had fulfilled the physical, psychological and spiritual function of the academic doctor.¹⁶ The title is bestowed on the basis of their experience regardless of academic qualifications; they are in every sense of the word their doctor.¹⁷

The pastor is also liberated to lead in the African-American community; they had no higher authority other than God; they are free to speak out at any public forum without fear of being called to task by a board of deacons; they are free to manage their own time; they did not council by appointment but had a telephone that rang day and night.¹⁸ The need for a reassuring voice, to hear a kind word, or to know somebody cares does not respect the hour of day.¹⁹ As a consequence the church often demonstrated protective care over their pastor; buying them clothes, cars, food, sending them on trips to Europe and seeing to their family’s every personal need.²⁰ African-American people loved their pastor and loved hearing their own pastor preach; no matter how distinguished, learned and famous the guest speaker may be they wanted to hear their own pastor.²¹

In the African-American religious community the successful pastor is an expert orator; the pastor that cannot preach is guilty of an unpardonable sin.²² Their relationship with the congregation is reciprocal; he/she talks to them and they talk back to him/her; they are united in

¹⁵ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 322.

¹⁶ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 93.

¹⁷ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 93.

¹⁸ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 25; Mays and Nicholson, *Negro’s*, 38; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33.

¹⁹ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 25.

²⁰ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 25.

²¹ Manis, *Fire*, 115; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 96-97.

²² Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 28; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 331.

a common bond of blackness and oppression just like the slave-preacher and the slave.²³ They saw their leadership as a symbol of strength and accomplishment when all around them are symbols of weakness and miserable failure.²⁴ Like their priest/preacher predecessors this relationship afforded the pastor great power and prestige; however, they must be careful when using this authority and power so as not to impede the development of their flock and fail to equip them with the necessary tools for their daily struggles.²⁵

What the Community would not Abide

The post Civil War African-American community of freedpeople respected, loved and often venerated their pastor but it was a rare pastor that went totally unscathed by criticism.²⁶ A pastor could not behave arrogantly or arbitrarily with impunity; African-Americans knew how to suffer external oppression but they had no tolerance for tyrants among them.²⁷ Pastors like Francis Grimke offered a scathing evaluation of the African-American pulpit stating while there were certainly faithful and gifted men serving in African-American churches, emotionalism, levity and greed characterized too many pulpits.²⁸ Emotionalism yielded little or no biblical instruction for the congregation, required no serious study by the pastor, lowered the spiritual state of the congregation and defiled the idea of biblical religion; levity destroyed the solemnity of worship and greed for money caused the church to degenerate into “a mere agency for

²³ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 93; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 331. Richardson, *Negro*, 91; Johnson, *Shadow*, 170-79; Warner, *Horseback*, 8.

²⁴ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 331; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 96.

²⁵ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 25; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 323; Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's*, 38; Wilmore, *Black Religion*, 68-69; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 96.

²⁶ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 324; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 77; Manis, *Fire*, 115.

²⁷ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 322.

²⁸ Grimke, “Afro-American,” §118; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 324; Warner, *Horseback*, 9-10.

begging.”²⁹ These three factors produced disastrous results on both church and ultimately on society.³⁰

Authors like Mays and Frazier critiqued post-Civil War African-American preaching as being too otherworldly neglecting the privations of this world; too focused on the individual sins of the congregation and not enough on protesting the oppressive environment in which they strove for individual piety.³¹ At times when they asserted their influential authority it would be interpreted as dictatorial; this perception is buttressed by the fact that many decisions in the African-American community were reached with the advice and counsel of the pastor.³² Also, due to their pulpit power they were often seen as skilled manipulators; someone that through their powers of oratory could make wrong look right and right appear as wrong.³³ The people may have loved their pastors but they also kept watch on them.³⁴ Although vigilant the congregation could also be versed in forgiveness and understanding.

African-Americans seemed to be less offended by the antics of their pastor, real or legendary; they saw their pastors as fallible human beings and accepted them as such.³⁵ The pastor’s foolishness was the subject of many jokes or “lies” told by African-Americans; the tone of these tales suggests not only that the people could be critical of their pastors but also that they did not always take their pastors as seriously as the pastors sometimes took themselves.³⁶

According to one folktale the deacon of Mt. Zion Baptist Church had a son named John, the black sheep and baby of the family.³⁷ John usually became offensive when his father

²⁹ Grimke, “Afro-American,” §118;123-25; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 324; Warner, *Horseback*, 9-10.

³⁰ Grimke, “Afro-American,” §118;123-25; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 324; Warner, *Horseback*, 9-10.

³¹ Evans, “Urbanization,” 816; Bennett, “Hermeneutics,” 40; Mays and Nicholson, *Plantation*, 7.

³² Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 77; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 324.

³³ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 77.

³⁴ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 77; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 324.

³⁵ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 324; Grimke, “Afro-American,” §123-25; Warner, *Horseback*, 9-10.

³⁶ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 324; Grimke, “Afro-American,” §123-25; Warner, *Horseback*, 9-10.

³⁷ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 324.

entertained the local pastor for Sunday chicken dinner; due to the fact that the pastor “lack de same paa’t of de chicken dat li’l John lack” and would take it from the platter.³⁸ On one occasion the pastor encountered John alone, he asked where the boy had been, John replied that he had been in hell; where his father had told him he was bound if he did not stop being disrespectful to the pastor.³⁹ The pastor asked, “well how is things down dere?” John answered, “Jes’ lack dey is heah, so many dam preachuhs’ roun de fiah till you cain’t get to hit.”⁴⁰ The congregation’s love for their pastor and vigilance against his perceived or real indiscretions is only part of the story.

What the Pastor Endured

Pastors often endured considerable hardships in fulfilling their duties to their congregation; the poor went hungry, itinerants spent many nights in uncomfortable places and the circuit riders covered hundreds of miles each month.⁴¹ Some pastors and their families’ had endured much suffering because of unpaid salaries; in Thomas County, Georgia it was reported that seventy-five percent of the churches were in debt to their former pastors.⁴² During the years that followed the Civil War pastors who took part in political activities often suffered reprisals from whites; intimidation was used to discourage pastors in politics from organizing Union Leagues, Republican Party groups and from voting and campaigning for public office.⁴³ Many pastors were attacked and arrested and more than one church was burned by nightriders.⁴⁴ Through the hardships, criticisms and intimidation pastors were undaunted in their quest to shepherd their flock.⁴⁵

³⁸ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 324.

³⁹ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 324.

⁴⁰ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 325.

⁴¹ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 326; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 96.

⁴² Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 326-27.

⁴³ Clairborne, *Autobiography*, 215; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 327; Meir and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 169-70; Drago, *Black Politicians*, ix-x.

⁴⁴ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 327; Drago, *Black Politicians*, 164-71.

⁴⁵ Mays and Nicholson, *Plantation*, 3.

True to its pneumatological focus the church sees the “call” of a new pastor as a matter for the Holy Spirit; it is common for church members to engage in weeks of prayer, asking God to send them the person especially suited to head their congregation.⁴⁶ Emmanuel K. Loke, a Baptist minister in Savannah Georgia, before his first service instructed his new congregation to do three things: trust him, love him, obey him, and finally he warned them that they must not be disrespectful, critical or complaining; if he preached a good sermon they should commend him if he did not then help him to do better next time.⁴⁷ Not all preachers were this explicit in their expectations of the congregation and not all of them succeeded in getting it, but the good ones did.⁴⁸

Many churches would celebrate the anniversary of their minister’s first service; it was used as a diagnostic device to determine the growth of the church and pastor/parishioner relationship.⁴⁹ The bonds that were formed between pastor and congregation were the strongest ones outside of the family in the African-American community; bonds that one must believe were far stronger than typically existed within the white churches.⁵⁰

Fundamentally it is difficult if not impossible to separate the African-American pastor from the African-American church; to speak of one is to speak of the other.⁵¹ The ministerial profession in the African-American community is quite unique; unlike the Negro lawyer, businessman or physician the pastor did not have to achieve acceptance for they were accepted in full authority from the beginning.⁵² This was due in no small part to the profession’s conspicuously important role in the early survival struggles of the race; its unique place because

⁴⁶ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 92; Glenn, “Negro,” 628; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 5-6.

⁴⁷ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 323-24.

⁴⁸ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 324.

⁴⁹ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 98.

⁵⁰ Campbell, *White*, 344; Rawick “Narratives,” 294; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 324; Evans, “Urbanization,” 816.

⁵¹ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 98; Ruether, *Liberation*, 127; Gadzekpo, “*Black Church*,” 55; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 190.

⁵² Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33; Mays and Nicholson, *Black Church* 38; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 31-34.

of its prominent and distinguished service; and most importantly it had “divine sanction.”⁵³

These attributes made the African-American pastor supreme among Negro leaders.⁵⁴

Summary

The African-American community developed as an entity that was greater than the individual slave; as a consequence the pastor’s sermons (call and response) spoke to the community rather than the individual.⁵⁵ African-Americans believed the pastor was possessed of special grace and was in tune with the soul of the community; they believed they gave more than they received and were all things to the community.⁵⁶ The pastor was liberated to lead; they had no higher authority other than God; had control over their time but were available at all times.⁵⁷ The congregation loved to hear their pastor preach and would not abide an orator of common prowess; they saw them as their symbol of strength and accomplishment.⁵⁸ Overall the bonds between the pastor and their congregation were very strong, stronger than their white counterpart.⁵⁹

As much as they loved their pastor the congregation also kept an eye on their activities and were critical of those that were avaricious; those that replaced the church’s protest element with emotionalism and individual piety; or were dictatorial or tyrannical.⁶⁰ The pastor endured many hardships in the performance of their many duties; they often went hungry; were ill paid if paid at all; traveled great distances to tend to congregants; in politics they faced intimidation, threats and arrests.⁶¹ With all this pastors never tarried from their appointed task.

⁵³ Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's* 38; Manis, *Fire*, 115; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 31-34.

⁵⁴ Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's* 38; Manis, *Fire*, 115.

⁵⁵ Rawick, “From Sun Up,” 9-10; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 324; Campbell, *White*, 344; Rawick “Narratives,” 294.

⁵⁶ Rawick, “From Sun Up,” 39; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 93; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 322.

⁵⁷ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 25; Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's*, 38; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33.

⁵⁸ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 28; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 331.

⁵⁹ Campbell, *White*, 344; Rawick “Narratives,” 294; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 324; Evans, “Urbanization,” 816.

⁶⁰ Grimke, “Afro-American,” 118; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 324; Warner, *Horseback*, 9-10.

⁶¹ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 326.

W.E.B Dubois exclaimed that the African-American pastor is the “most unique personality developed by blacks on American soil.”⁶² The slave-priest, slave-preacher and African-American pastor are different versions of the same person; their differences were cosmetic, having to do primarily with time and birthplace. They performed essentially the same role; care for the physical and spiritual needs of their oppressed brothers and sister.⁶³ They taught them how to survive in a hostile environment that tells them they are inferior; taught them how to be subversive and at the same time love those that hate them; taught them to frame their lives within the confines of the gospel and that God would set them free, physically, legislatively and psychologically.⁶⁴ This continuity helped to explain the African-American pastor’s ability to galvanize the people in a common purpose, mold their identity and dictate how they will engage the white community. It is a skill and influence that was an inherent quality of the position from its inception.⁶⁵ They have always, in some sense, been regarded as “God’s earthly viceroys”; nothing is done without their knowledge or without using Jesus’ weapon of love.⁶⁶

Although “God’s earthly viceroys” the African-American pastor had to navigate changes in African-American ideologies.⁶⁷ The community/church has shifted its theology and eschatology as it fought to earn a place at the table of freedom the United States had claimed to have set; these shifts in eschatology always coincided with greater societal freedoms or removal thereof.⁶⁸ In all these changes the pastor steered the community to what they saw as safe harbours as it related to their stance and participation in the wider community.⁶⁹ The early part of the twentieth

⁶² Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 7; Mays and Nicholson, *Negro’s*, 38.

⁶³ Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 33; Bascio, *White Theology*, 42-43; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 52.

⁶⁴ Baker-Fletcher, Review of *Stammering Tongue*, 282-83; Bascio, *White Theology*, 40; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 27; Cone, *Spirituals*, 17.

⁶⁵ Mays and Nicholson, *Negro’s*, 38.

⁶⁶ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 84; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 324.

⁶⁷ Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology*, 266-67.

⁶⁸ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 56.

⁶⁹ Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology*, 19.

century would see for the first time factions in the African-American community would challenge the pastor's power and leadership.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Abernathy, "Black Preacher," 1064.

CHAPTER FOUR

A SHIFT IN IDEOLOGIES

Pre-Civil War

The post-revolutionary African slave identified with the stories of liberation within the Bible and not the cultural biases inherent in the message the white slave-owners wanted to convey; this identification allowed them to be drawn into the eschatological plot of God that lay behind these stories, and this plot took over their lives.¹ The slave-priest taught the slaves to believe that they were a part of God's history; this awareness provided hope as they saw their lives and human worth from God's perspective and not from a culture that dehumanized them.² The slave-priest taught the African slaves that this world was temporary and limited; it is something to be passed through, a wilderness journey, but it was not the real world in the ultimate sense.³ The real world of God's future reign can be experienced in the present, but its final consummation would come at the end of time; it will be a world ruled with justice, love and mercy.⁴ The slave came to believe that human worth and human value were gifts from God and did not originate from the dominant culture; this outlook allowed the slave to slowly begin to envision a time on earth where they were free from bondage.⁵

The delayed eschatology of the slave would change as the slave priest/preacher created community from the African diaspora that were the slaves of the southern United States.⁶ As the pastors' power and influence increased they knew that with one phrase, word or gesture they

¹ Gadzeko, "Black Church," 99; Wimberly, "African-American," 19; Bennett, *Hermeneutics*, 39.

² Wimberly, "African-American," 19; Cone, *Black Power*, 55; Dickerson, "African-American," 228; Bennett, *Hermeneutics*, 39.

³ Wimberly, "African-American," 19.

⁴ Cone, *Black Power*, 110; Glenn, "Negro," 629.

⁵ Pinn and Pinn, *Black Church*, §147; Cone, *Black Power*, 55; Dickerson, "African-American," 218; Wimberly, "African-American," 20; Gadzeko, "Black Church," 99; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 4.

⁶ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 25; Baker-Fletcher, Review of *Stammering Tongue*, 282-83.

could transform a church meeting into a boiling caldron of emotion that would send the slaves pouring out of the woods killing the slave masters (as happened with Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner).⁷ His emersion in the gospel taught him the folly of that approach; instead they followed the path laid out by Moses and Jesus.⁸ In the confines of the “invisible institution” they had the slaves identify with the Hebrew saga of the Old Testament; they saw that God worked in human history to free those in bondage.⁹ Through the slave-priest/preacher the slave narrative became imbued with a prophetic and apocalyptic motif that had a persistent expectation of deliverance; thus the slaves slowly changed their focus from the great hereafter to the here-and-now.¹⁰ The antebellum slaves began to believe that God would one day free them from bondage and punish the wrongdoing of slaveholders.¹¹

Post-Civil War Ideology of the Freed Slaves

Emancipation was the realization of this new eschatological outlook; it saw former slaves endowed with hitherto unknown freedoms.¹² With this new autonomy African-Americans sought to find their place in the newly reconstructed United States of America.¹³ They believed that through hard work and community service they would gain acceptance in American society.¹⁴ Many took their place in the political arena, and African-American pastors took their leadership skills to local, state and federal affairs.¹⁵ For the first time in African-American history, the

⁷ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 84.

⁸ Baker-Fletcher, Review of *Stammering Tongue*, 282–83; Cone *Black Power*, 64; Bennett, *Hermeneutics*, 38.

⁹ Pinn and Pinn, *Black Church*, §147; Cone *Black Power*, 64; Cone *Black Power*, 64; Bennett, *Hermeneutics*, 38.

¹⁰ Melcher, “Prophet,” 87; Gadzeko, “Black Church,” 97.

¹¹ Baker-Fletcher, Review of *Stammering Tongue*, 282; Cone *Black Power*, 64; Bennett, *Hermeneutics*, 38.

¹² Frazier, *Negro Church*, 50; Cone, *Black Power*, 96; Warton “Race,” 373.

¹³ Cone, *Black Power*, 96; Wharton “Race,” 377; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 170.

¹⁴ Baker-Fletcher, Review of *Stammering Tongue*, 282.

¹⁵ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 113; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 190; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 169-70.

church was not the sole repository of Negro social and political thought and action; however, this would be short lived.¹⁶

Southern whites resented free African-Americans, especially politicians; Henry M. Turner, the first southern pastor of the AME and member of the House of Representatives, responded to white congressmen who attempted to unseat African-American members of the House during reconstruction.¹⁷ He states,

You may expel us, gentlemen, by your votes, but while you do it, remember that there is a just God in Heaven, whose all-seeing eye beholds alike the acts of the oppressor and the oppressed, and who, despite the machinations of the wicked, never fails to vindicate the cause of justice and the sanctity of his own handiwork.¹⁸

The southern white man perceived the African-American as a threat to his security, his status and his dominance.¹⁹ This was due in part to the fact that in many southern towns and states like Mississippi the newly freed African-Americans greatly outnumbered the white populace.²⁰ During reconstruction white southerners used a variety of methods to reassert their control; this included economic pressures against recalcitrant African-Americans and violence in the form of beatings, murders and even race riots.²¹ These riots were actually pogroms, with African-Americans being attacked and killed by whites, while the whites received relatively few injuries.²² White southerners saw this as “the determination of leading white citizens to liberate the city from black tyranny.”²³

¹⁶ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 113.

¹⁷ Cone, “Black Power,” 213; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 171-72; Wharton, “Race,” 373; Fitchett, “Tradition,” 207.

¹⁸ Cone, “Black Power,” 213; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 187.

¹⁹ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 171-72; Wharton, “Race,” 373.

²⁰ Fenton and Vines, “Negro,” 286; Wharton, “Race,” 370; Fitchett, “Tradition,” 207; Akin, “Minority,” 145; Owen, *Species*, 8.

²¹ Franklin, “History,” 3; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 194-95; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 120.

²² Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 172; Wharton, “Race,” 375-76; Franklin, “History,” 6; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 194-95.

²³ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 171-72; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 205.

Almost any attempt of African-Americans to realize their hope for a racially egalitarian society could call forth violent repression from white society.²⁴ The economic interests who had looked to the Republican Party and its continued hegemony as the basis for advancing their own interests eventually formed an alliance with southern business elements that had complementary needs.²⁵ They arranged for the Compromise of 1877 whereby southern democrats acquiesced in the election of the Republican Rutherford B. Hayes to the presidency over the Democrat Samuel J. Tilden.²⁶ This led to the idea of sectional reconciliation; its price was the rejection of the idea of a racially egalitarian society and even the desertion of the fundamental constitutional rights of African-Americans.²⁷

The result was the unimpeded development of a race system that supplanted the old institutional slavery as a mechanism of social control; segregation and Jim Crow replaced emancipation and reconstruction.²⁸ Almost overnight African-American freedom was replaced by laws that confined and restricted their rights and physical and economic mobility; moving them back to the bosom of the African-American pastor/church and back to a delayed eschatological outlook.²⁹ Although a new century would bring new hope, segregation would have a pronounced affect on the African-American pastor.³⁰

The African-American Pastor's Response to Segregation: The Road to Apostasy is paved with Good Intentions

The rise of segregation and discrimination in the post-Civil War period saw the African-

²⁴ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 173; Franklin, "History", 9-10.

²⁵ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 173; Franklin, "History", 9; Fishel, "Negro", 59; Montgomery, Fig Tree, 193; Aiello, "Jim," §157.

²⁶ Fishel, "Negro", 59; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 175; Bynum, *A. Philip*, 29; Montgomery, Fig Tree, 193; Aiello, "Jim," §157.

²⁷ Franklin, "History", 9-10; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 176; Montgomery, Fig Tree, 193; Aiello, "Jim," §157.

²⁸ Wharton "Race," 377; Franklin, "History", 10-11; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 175-77.

²⁹ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 116; Wharton "Race," 377; Cone *Black Power*, 105.

³⁰ Cone, *Black Power*, 105.

American pastor/church lose its zeal for freedom and equality in the midst of the new structure of white power.³¹ The African-American pastor remained the spokesperson for the African-American people, but faced with “insurmountable obstacles they succumbed to the cajolery and bribery of the white power structure and became its foil.”³² The passion for freedom was replaced with innocuous homilies against drinking, dancing and smoking; injustices in the present were minimized in favour of a kingdom beyond this world.³³

In fairness to the pastor it should be pointed out that the apostasy of the African-American church is partly understandable. If they had not supported the caste system of segregation and discrimination, they would have placed their lives and the lives of their people in danger; they would have been lynched and their churches burned.³⁴ They were left alone as long as they preached about heaven and told African-Americans to be honest and obedient and soon God would make things right.³⁵ They even received loans from white banks for new structures; the businessmen saw it as a good investment for the maintenance of the caste system.³⁶ This is not an excuse for the lack of obedience to the gospel of freedom, it merely explains it.³⁷

Depending on their particular circumstance the African-American pastor may have been seen as a devoted “Uncle Tom”; the transmitter of white wishes; the admonisher of obedience to the caste system; the liaison man between the white power structure and the oppressed African-Americans.³⁸ The pastor was accused of serving the dual function of assuring whites that all is well in the African-American community, while at the same time dampening the spirit of

³¹ Killian and Smith, “Negro,” 335; Cone *Black Theology*, 105; Glenn, “Negro,” 630; Evans, “Urbanization,” 814.

³² Mays and Nicholson, “Negro’s,” 6-7; Cone *Black Theology*, 105; Walker, “Disunity,” 347-48; Glenn, “Negro,” 627.

³³ Cone, *Black Power*, 105; Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 116; Wharton “Race,” 377; Mays and Nicholson, “Negro’s,” 7; Pfeffer, *A. Philip*, 23.

³⁴ Mays and Nicholson, “Negro’s,” 6-7; Cone, *Black Power*, 107; Wharton, “Race,” 377.

³⁵ Mays and Nicholson, “Negro’s,” 7; Cone, *Black Power*, 107.

³⁶ Walker, “Disunity,” 347-48; Mays and Nicholson, “Negro’s,” 7; Cone, *Black Power*, 107; Pfeffer, *A. Philip*, 23.

³⁷ Cone, *Black Power*, 107; Glenn, “Negro,” 630.

³⁸ Mays and Nicholson, “Negro’s,” 7; Cone, *Black Power*, 106; Glenn, “Negro,” 627- 30.

freedom among their people; drawing comparisons to the dupe slave-preacher before the Civil War.³⁹ Overall, the turn of the century saw a gradualist and conciliatory approach was being embraced by the African-American pastor; attacking one small aspect of discrimination at a time, hacking away piece by piece at the structure of segregation.⁴⁰ However, there were voices in the wilderness that urged the pastors to change their course.⁴¹

A Voice in the Wilderness

A. Philip Randolph was a secular socialist who challenged African-American pastors and their churches to pursue social change and find the moral means to achieve it.⁴² Randolph was the son of an AME church pastor and despite his irreligious inclinations, hoped that African-American pastors would aid in his efforts to organize Pullman car porters in the 1920s and 1930s; in the 1940s he endorsed grass roots mobilization as a tactic to fight racial discrimination.⁴³ Randolph understood the necessity of mobilizing African-American church communities as integral to an effective movement; he included progressive African-American pastors/churches in his social activism from the 1920s to the 1940s, a historical fact not so generally accepted and recognized.⁴⁴ Randolph urged a grassroots mobilization for a new African-American religious protest against racism and segregation; sadly the pastor/church did not capitulate.⁴⁵

Benjamin E. Mays, Dean of Howard University Divinity School, has been credited with educating “an insurgent Negro clergy.”⁴⁶ He shaped a professionally trained African-American clergy as educated religious leaders and insurgent militants to defeat Jim Crow laws in the 1920s

³⁹ Cone, *Black Power*, 106; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 34; Mays and Nicholson, “Negro’s,” 7.

⁴⁰ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 223-25; Killian and Smith, “Negro,” 334.

⁴¹ Dickerson, “African-American,” 224-27.

⁴² Dickerson, “African-American,” 226; Pfeffer, *A. Philip*, 23.

⁴³ Dickerson, “African-American,” 226; Kersten, A. Philip, 45-46; Pfeffer, *A. Philip*, 23.

⁴⁴ Dickerson, “African-American,” 227; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 210; Pfeffer, *A. Philip*, 23.

⁴⁵ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 247; Dickerson, “African-American,” 227; Pfeffer, *A. Philip*, 23.

⁴⁶ Dickerson, “African-American,” 219; Jelks, *Benjamin*, §116.

and 30s; his students included James Farmer of CORE and Martin King of the SCLC.⁴⁷ In an attempt to push the new African-American pastor out of a gradualist mindset Mays warned that success in the freedom movement depended on a modernized African-American church and a robust African-American theology capable of stirring the African-American masses to courageous confrontation with an oppressive social system.⁴⁸

The problem as Mays saw it was a loss of able students to other professions because the pastor and the church had not adapted themselves to a rapidly changing world.⁴⁹ Mays believed the African-American church remained rather conservative and did not courageously grapple with basic wrongs inherent in the social and economic order; in short theology needed to be tied to tactics that promoted freedom and equality.⁵⁰ Mays believed that it was the church, “black and white,” which had the duty and responsibility to establish a just society for all.⁵¹

It was not long before the African-American people began to recognize the failure of the African-American pastors’ ability to speak to the needs of the people.⁵² Reports of the criticisms of African-American pastors were often times blunt: “Blood-suckers, they’ll take the food out of your mouth and make you think they are doing you a favour”; another stated, “I’m a church member. I believe churches are still useful. But like everything else, there is a lot of racketeering going on in the church”; still others report that “ministers are not as conscientious as they used to be, they are supposed to be the leaders of the people, but they are fake leaders.”⁵³ Nature abhors a vacuum is a postulate in physics often attributed to Benedict Sinoza, it states that any void will

⁴⁷ Jelks, *Benjamin*, §117-20; Dickerson, “African-American,” 220-24; Mays and Nicholson, “Negro’s,” 16.

⁴⁸ Dickerson, “African-American,” 224; Evans, “Urbanization,” 805.

⁴⁹ Jelks, *Benjamin*, §118; Dickerson, “African-American,” 224-25; Evans, “Urbanization,” 808.

⁵⁰ Dickerson, “African-American,” 224-25; Evans, “Urbanization,” 816.

⁵¹ Jelks, *Benjamin*, §234; Dickerson, “African-American,” 225.

⁵² Cone, *Black Power*, 107; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 207.

⁵³ Cone, *Black Power*, 107; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 207.

be filled quickly, this is especially true in leadership; in the freedom movement this void was filled by the parareligious organizations.⁵⁴

Parareligious Organizations Take the Lead

The parareligious organizations picked up the torch of freedom and protest the African American pastor/church had unknowingly laid down.⁵⁵ The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909 and the National Urban League in 1910 were created as a consequence of the failure of the African-American pastor/church to plead the cause of African-Americans in white society.⁵⁶ They concluded that except in rare instances the African-American pastors/churches in the post-Civil War period have been no more Christian than their white counterparts.⁵⁷ Just as the African-American church is a visible reminder of the apostasy of the white church, the current civil rights parareligious organizations are visible manifestations of the apostasy of the African-American church.⁵⁸

Middle class African-American pastors slowly moved to a realized eschatology; until the mid-1950s it was permeated with a cautious gradualism in race equality.⁵⁹ Sociologists at the time stated, "The Negro church is a sleeping giant. In civil rights participation its feet are hardly wet"; they go on to say "the Negro church is particularly culpable for its general lack of concern for the moral and social problems of the community; it has been accommodating."⁶⁰ They add, "the African-American pastor has fostered 'indulgence in religious sentimentality' and riveted

⁵⁴ Marx, "Religion," 365; Drake, *Black*, 420; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 207; Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations*, 281.

⁵⁵ Abernathy, "Black Preacher," 1064; Cone, *Black Power*, 106; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 9.

⁵⁶ Cone, *Black Power*, 106; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 9.

⁵⁷ Cone, *Black Power*, 108; Dickerson, "African-American," 229.

⁵⁸ Dickerson, "African-American," 229; Cone *Black Theology*, 106; The view that the white church was in a state of apostasy was derived from the perception of African-Americans who believed that the white church had not vociferously fought against the evils of slavery and had therefore lost its way in terms of our shared humanity and its mission to usher in the kingdom of God.

⁵⁹ Killian and Smith, "Negro," 335; Marx, "Religion," 365; Glenn, "Negro," 631.

⁶⁰ Marx, "Religion," 365; Evans, "Urbanization," 814; Mays and Nicholson, "Negro's," 7.

the attention of the masses on the bounties of a hereafter.”⁶¹ Lastly, that “the Negro church remains a refuge, and escape from the cruel realities of the here-and-now.”⁶²

James Cone, father of black theology, lamented that the African-American church was born in protest; whether in the secret meetings of the “invisible institution” or Richard Allen and his followers walking out of St. George’s Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, they refused to obey the dictates of white superiority.⁶³ Freedom and equality made up the central theme of the African-American church; protest and action were the early marks of its uniqueness.⁶⁴ With the successes of these new parareligious groups the African-American leadership landscape possessed many different ideologies as it pertained to the freedom movement; conflict was inevitable.⁶⁵

A. Philip Randolph summed up the affects of these differing ideologies when he said “the Negro schools of thought are torn with dissension, giving birth to many insurgent factions.”⁶⁶ In 1923 “conservatives” like Booker T. Washington were at odds with the “radical” NAACP; by the forties and fifties there was the conservative Tuskegee Institute and National Urban League, the radical Marxists, Black Nationalists and by this time the “radical” NAACP had become the moderate middle.⁶⁷ All of this was due to what social psychologists called a “revolution in expectations.”⁶⁸

Revolution in Expectation

Young African-American radicals’ dissatisfaction and impatience with the pace of

⁶¹ Marx, “Religion,” 365; Evans, “Urbanization,” 814; Mays and Nicholson, “Negro’s,” 7.

⁶² Marx, “Religion,” 365; Essien-Udom, *Black*, 358.

⁶³ Cone, *Black Power*, 95; Harding “Religion,” 180-81; Marx, “Religion,” 364.

⁶⁴ Cone, *Black Power*, 94; Harding “Religion,” 180-81.

⁶⁵ Walker, “Disunity,” 342-43; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 251.

⁶⁶ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 251; Walker, “Disunity,” 347.

⁶⁷ Meier, “Booker T.,” 125-26; Rudwick, “Niagara,” 146; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 251-52; Walker, “Disunity,” 342.

⁶⁸ Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 317; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 251.

change in the society created by the freedom movement was not new; it all boiled down to what sociologists like Thomas Pettigrew call a “revolution of expectations.”⁶⁹ Conventional wisdom dictated that African-Americans should have higher morale today than any previous point in United States history; after all the gains had been faster in recent decades than any period since emancipation.⁷⁰ Why were so many young African-Americans impatient for further gains?⁷¹ The reason for this is elucidated by an example from the American military.

Using the relative morale of the Air Corps and the Military Police during World War II, one of America’s greatest sociologists Samuel Stouffer illustrated the fact that many behavioral science findings appear obvious only after the fact.⁷² Promotions were rapid and widespread in the Air Corps, but slow and piecemeal in the Military Police.⁷³ Conventional wisdom predicts that the Air Corpsmen would be more optimistic about their chances for promotion for the “obvious” reason that they were moving ahead faster than the Military Police.⁷⁴ But as a matter of empirical fact Stouffer found that the Air Corpsmen were considerably more frustrated over promotions than their brethren in the Military Police.⁷⁵ The reason was that the Airmen’s accelerated promotion system led them to have exceedingly high aspirations; even with their generous promotion system they were still relatively dissatisfied.⁷⁶ By contrast, morale was reasonably high among the Military Police; they did not expect rapid promotions and learned to be content with what few advances they did achieve.⁷⁷

The question as to why so many African-Americans were so unusually restive, angry and

⁶⁹ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 257; Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 317.

⁷⁰ Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 317.

⁷¹ Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 317.

⁷² Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 317; Stouffer, *American*, 249-52.

⁷³ Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 318; Stouffer, *American*, 249-52.

⁷⁴ Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 318; Stouffer, *American*, 249-52.

⁷⁵ Stouffer, *American*, 249-52; Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 318.

⁷⁶ Stouffer, *American*, 249-52; Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 318.

⁷⁷ Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 318; Stouffer, *American*, 249-52.

impatient for further social gains can be explained by the phenomenon of the “revolution of expectations.”⁷⁸ The great majority of African-Americans in the past dared not cherish high aspiration for themselves.⁷⁹ Like the Military Police they expected very little out of life and had to be content with what crumbs they did receive.⁸⁰ But in the 1950s African-Americans hungered for much more, like the Air Corpsmen they had tasted significant progress and could fully appreciate what further progress would mean to their lives and that of their children. Indeed, the aspirations of African-Americans had risen far more swiftly than their advances.⁸¹

It was the NAACP's very success in the legislature and the courts that more than any other single factor led to this “revolution in expectation” and the resultant dissatisfaction with the limitations of the NAACP's program.⁸² The NAACP was piling up victory upon victory in the courts, successfully attacked racially restrictive covenants in housing, interstate transportation and public recreation facilities.⁸³ By the mid 1950s, following the lead of the Congress Of Racial Equality (CORE), the NAACP now cautiously adopted direct-action strategies; with the youth in the organization pushing reluctant adults into backing direct-action.⁸⁴

CORE was a Christian pacifist organization founded in 1942 that began the nonviolent direct-action strategy in the freedom movement (called the Negro Revolt at the time).⁸⁵ In 1947 it tested a Supreme Court decision that declared segregation on interstate buses unconstitutional. Called the Journey of Reconciliation, the ride challenged bus segregation in the upper parts of the South.⁸⁶ The gains accrued by parareligious groups like the NAACP and CORE helped push

⁷⁸ Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 319; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 197-98.

⁷⁹ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 219; Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 317.

⁸⁰ Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 319.

⁸¹ Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 319; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 197-98.

⁸² Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 257.

⁸³ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 254.

⁸⁴ Killian and Smith, “Negro,” 334; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 255-60; Meier, “Role,” 353.

⁸⁵ Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 317; Meier, “Role,” 353.

⁸⁶ Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 317; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 253.

the African-American pastor out of their gradualist stance; by 1955 the new breed of Mays indoctrinated pastors like Farmer (CORE) and King (NAACP) led bus boycotts, sit-ins and marches in the deep south.⁸⁷ This was a prelude to marshalling all the different African-American ideologies under one nonviolent direct-action umbrella called the civil rights movement.⁸⁸

In Thomas Pettigrew's essay on the discrepancy between the rapid escalation of expectations instilled by the "Negro Revolt" and its actual accomplishments, he was unable to foresee the subsequent disillusionment of young African-American radicals with nonviolent direct-action tactics.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, his analysis would hold true for this new generation of young radicals created by the "secularization" of the African-American church.⁹⁰ More parareligious groups were formed to assuage the aspirations of a new generation of African-Americans seeking freedom and equality.⁹¹ By the 1960s young radical parareligious civil rights organizations like Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and The Black Nationalists criticized the African-American pastor and the NAACP for its now "conservative" stance on civil rights.⁹²

Creation of the Young African-American Radical

According to the census of 1910, African-Americans were overwhelmingly rural and southern.⁹³ Approximately three out of four lived in rural areas and nine out of ten lived in the south; this would change with the onset of World War I.⁹⁴ The demand for unskilled labour saw

⁸⁷ Walker, "Disunity," 342.

⁸⁸ Walker, "Disunity," 342; Gadzekpo, "Black Church," 104.

⁸⁹ Pettigrew, "Actual Gains," 318.

⁹⁰ Pettigrew, "Actual Gains," 318.

⁹¹ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 251-52.

⁹² Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 251-52; Marsh, "Drama," 235.

⁹³ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 251-52; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 9; Montgomery, *Fig Tree*, 11.

⁹⁴ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 213; Killian and Grigg, "Race," 493; Weaver "Negro," 174-75.

a migration of African-Americans to the urban north looking for jobs.⁹⁵ Nearly half a million African-Americans left the south during and shortly after World War I; Chicago went from a population of 44,000 to 110,000 between 1910-1920, Cleveland went from a population of 8,000 to 34,000 in the same time period.⁹⁶ There are accounts of southern towns practically depopulated of African-American residents; African-American pastors, physicians and morticians moved north because of the departure of the people they served.⁹⁷

Often called the “secularization” of the African-American church this employment opportunity lead to greater social and economic mobility; opening up the educational horizons for African-American children.⁹⁸ This eventually led to young African-Americans turning their attention away from the church for their social and political activism.⁹⁹ Unlike the other parareligious groups who urged the pastor to regain his role as leader of protests and acquisition of equal rights, this new group challenged the power, prestige and leadership of the African-American pastor.¹⁰⁰ The emerging shift in expectation was palpable.¹⁰¹

Black Power and Black Theology

Theology and ethics, as explicated in most seminaries, focuses on love and brother/sisterhood as the most desirable way of dealing with racial confrontations.¹⁰² This is the road taken by pastors such as Richard Allen and Martin King.¹⁰³ Young African-Americans, born of secularization, felt that white religionists saw no correlation between Jesus Christ and the

⁹⁵ Dickerson, “African-American,” 226; Weaver “Negro,” 165; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 213; Savage, *Spirit*, §296; Evans, “Urbanization,” 819.

⁹⁶ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 216; Weaver “Negro,” 166-67; Killian and Grigg, “Race,” 493.

⁹⁷ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 215-16.

⁹⁸ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 55; Weaver “Negro,” 172; Thornbrough, “Segregation,” 184-85; Savage, *Spirit*, §296.

⁹⁹ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 55

¹⁰⁰ Abernathy, “Black Preacher,” 1065.

¹⁰¹ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 54; Cone, *Black Power*, 17.

¹⁰² Cone, “Black Power,” 205.

¹⁰³ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 49; Dickerson, “African-American,” 218; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 331.

slaveships, the insurrections, the auction block, and the African-American ghetto.¹⁰⁴ They believed that the chief reason why African-Americans were absent in theology was due to the interpreters of America not knowing nor wanting to know the history, experience, and culture of African-Americans.¹⁰⁵

To these young radicals the reality was that racism was not primarily a problem of human relations but of exploitation maintained by the society as a whole.¹⁰⁶ They ignored the theological-ethical implications of Christianity, saying that they had seen too many people suffer and die on account of such religious rhetoric; they believed white theology sustained the American slave system and negated the humanity of African-Americans.¹⁰⁷ Instead they held to the fact that the function of theology is to explicate the gospel message to the contemporary situation.¹⁰⁸ To encounter this brutal fact means that they were presented with two alternatives: accommodation or rebellion.¹⁰⁹ It was from these thoughts that the tenets and discipline of black theology and black power arose.¹¹⁰

Black theology and black power believed that love, brotherhood and integration were subterfuge and enslavement ideas designed by white oppressors.¹¹¹ It affirms the right of African-American people to redefine themselves according to what is necessary for the full achievement of their humanity.¹¹² Black power investigates the meaning of colour from the political, economic, and social condition of the African-American people.¹¹³ It sets as its goal African-American self-determination and identity looking towards the full participation in the

¹⁰⁴ Cone, "Black Power," 206; Cone and Wilmore, "Black Theology," 31.

¹⁰⁵ Cone, "Black Power," 208; Pinn and Pinn, *Black Church*, §141.

¹⁰⁶ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 323; Cone, "Black Power," 206.

¹⁰⁷ Cone, "Black Power," 206; X and Hailey, *Autobiography*, 244; Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology*, 37.

¹⁰⁸ Pinn and Pinn, *Black Church*, §147; Cone, "Black Power," 206; Cone and Wilmore, "Black Theology," 31.

¹⁰⁹ Cone, "Black Power," 209.

¹¹⁰ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 325; Cone, "Black Power," 209.

¹¹¹ Cone, "Black Power," 202; Cone, *Black Power*, 18; Haley and X, *Autobiography*, 275.

¹¹² Cone, "Black Power," 202.

¹¹³ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 320; Cone, "Black Power," 202.

decision making process in American life.¹¹⁴ Black theology places the black power concept in its proper theological context, analyzing African-American liberation in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁵

With the northern migration and the subsequent “secularization” of the African-American church many young blacks had given up on the pastor/church as a relevant institution for social change.¹¹⁶ Young radicals were tired of the pastor and organizations like the NAACP using what they saw as the gradualist strategies of Christian love, nonviolent direct-action, legislation and court litigation aimed at securing constitutional rights.¹¹⁷ They wanted direct-action techniques, to mobilize the potential power of the masses in the ghettos along political and economic lines.¹¹⁸

Led by Stokely Carmichael and Floyd McKissick, black power as a slogan was created by the young African-American militants of SNCC and CORE; the slogan was soon adopted as a mantra by a proliferation of young militant action groups.¹¹⁹ New groups of militant young African-Americans, for whom “nonviolence” was a synonym for Tomism (a term used to decry African-Americans that acquiesced to white rule), were springing up all over the country and gaining prominence in the press.¹²⁰ They asserted that black power and black consciousness revealed the presence of Jesus the liberator.¹²¹

The slogan caused widespread confusion and alarm. This was due to the phrase’s ambiguity; this was compounded by the press’s distortion of the words of SNCC and CORE representatives.¹²² Sociologist found the same confusion around the definition of “fascism” in the

¹¹⁴ Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power* 47; Cone, *Black Theology*, 16.

¹¹⁵ Cone, “Black Power,” 207.

¹¹⁶ Abernathy, “A Black Preacher,” 1065; Cone, *Black Theology*, 106-07; Savage, *Spirit*, §267.

¹¹⁷ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 252; Lincoln, *Black Church*, 127; Westbrook, “MLK,” 27.

¹¹⁸ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 252; Savage, *Spirit*, §267.

¹¹⁹ Lincoln, *Black Church*, 125; Cone, *Black Power*, 5; Savage, *Spirit*, §267; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 320.

¹²⁰ Cone, *Black Power*, 106; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 316.

¹²¹ Hopkins, *Stammering Tongue*, xiv.

¹²² Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 321; Duberman, “Black,” 394-95.

thirties, “communist” in the fifties and “black power” in the sixties. The definition of black power changed depending on whom you asked, when you asked them and where and who is doing the asking; is it a long or short-term tool; is it meant to intimidate whites or unify African-Americans; is it for instilling race hate or race pride?¹²³

Although not within the scope of this thesis, Thomas Pettigrew’s assertion of “revolution in expectation” would continue into the late 1960s in the form of the *Black Manifesto*.¹²⁴ A document that denounced American capitalism and imperialism intending to replace it with an African-American socialist society concerned with not only the injustices in American society but the welfare of the peoples of the world.¹²⁵ They asked for 500 million dollars in reparations (to be used for nine projects) from the Christian churches and Jewish synagogues they believed implicit in maintaining the system of slavery.¹²⁶ The shock, outrage and condemnation that initially came from the Catholic, Jewish and Protestant faiths were replaced with much debate surrounding the linking of economic reparations with religion to fight racism.¹²⁷

The African-American Pastor Responds to Black Power

Having emerged from their post-Civil War apostasy, by the late fifties the African-American pastor had regained their power and prestige; sociologist like Joseph Fichter stated, “whatever their previous conservative stance has been the churches have now become spearheads of reform.”¹²⁸ Another adds that “as primitive evangelism gave way to a more sophisticated social consciousness the church became the spearhead of Negro protest in the deep

¹²³ Duberman, “Black,” 394-95; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 323.

¹²⁴ Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 318; Lincoln, *Negro Church*, 131; Cone and Wilmore, “Black Theology,” 266; Savage, *Spirit*, §271.

¹²⁵ Lincoln, *Black Church*, 131; Black National Economic Conference, “Black Manifesto,” line 24-53; Abernathy, “A Black Preacher,” 1064; Williams, “Reparations,” 41-43; Longwood, “Reparations,” 204.

¹²⁶ Black National Economic Conference, “Black Manifesto,” lines 7-16; Savage, *Spirit*, §271; Longwood, “Reparations,” 204.

¹²⁷ Williams, “Reparations,” 41-43; Longwood, “Reparations,” 205.

¹²⁸ Marx, “Religion,” 365.

south”; lastly the Reverend W.T. Walker states, “the church today is central to the movement, if there had been no Negro church, there would have been no civil rights movement today.”¹²⁹

Once again reigning supreme from their pulpits with little or no challenge from the laity the African-American pastor was deeply disturbed about the crisis that was the controversy over black power.¹³⁰ The pastor was aware that black theology accurately expressed the alienation of many young African-Americans from both the African-American church and society.¹³¹ It was clear to them that powerless African-American people throughout the land needed power, however, this new cry represented a new stance; one which, under the potentially explosive conditions in parts of the rural south and in urban slums, could herald a threatening imbalance in the power relationship through which progress had been previously charted.¹³² Old mechanisms for the purpose of racial justice were being challenged and judged ineffective.¹³³ Long-trusted acknowledged African-American leaders (pastors) were being by-passed.¹³⁴

In 1966, the mood of the black revolution had turned ominous, ghetto rebellion and the accompanying destruction of white-owned property, resulted in receding white liberal support.¹³⁵ A proliferation of young militant action groups who cried for black power were adopting an uncompromising stand for freedom.¹³⁶ African-American pastors were caught off guard and needed time to reassess the situation in light of the increased somber mood pervading the civil rights movement.¹³⁷ King stated, “it is absolutely necessary for the Negro to gain power, but the

¹²⁹ Brink and Harris, *Revolution*, 103; Marx, “Religion,” 365.

¹³⁰ Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology*, 19; Abernathy, “Black Preacher,” 1064; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 317; Williams, “Reparations,” 43.

¹³¹ Abernathy, “Black Preacher,” 1064.

¹³² Lincoln, *Black Church*, 126; Savage, *Spirit*, §267; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 316.

¹³³ Lincoln, *Black Church*, 126; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 321-22.

¹³⁴ Lincoln, *Black Church*, 126.

¹³⁵ Lincoln, *Black Church*, 125-127.

¹³⁶ Lincoln, *Black Church*, 125-127; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 322.

¹³⁷ Lincoln, *Black Church*, 127.

term black power is unfortunate because it tends to give the impression of Black Nationalism.”¹³⁸ On one occasion King pleaded with a group to abandon the black power slogan.¹³⁹ The African-American pastor moved to deal with this and the issue of black power under the leadership of Dr. Benjamin Payton and the National Council of Black Churchmen (later change to Christians).¹⁴⁰

In 1966, the National Council of Black Christians (NCBC) was organized in New York City and was seen as the northern counterpart of the SCLC; like the SCLC it was a political dimension to the African-American church network that allowed for the mobilization of church resources on a wider scale.¹⁴¹ The NCBC looked to return the pastor and church relevance to the freedom movement, especially in the eyes of young African-Americans.¹⁴² Seeking to put the issue into proper theological, historical and practical perspective, the NCBC published a statement entitled *Black Power* in *The New York Times* national newspaper.¹⁴³ The article addressed four groups of people in areas where clarification was urgent: (1) To the leaders of America (Power and Freedom); (2) To white churchmen (Power and Love); (3) To Negro citizens (Power and Justice) and (4) To the mass media (Power and Truth).¹⁴⁴ The NCBC tried to reconcile black power within the guidelines of the Christian gospel.¹⁴⁵

The article empathically asserted its aim to improve the lives of African-Americans and that black power should not jeopardize the gains already made. They were careful to disassociate themselves from the more radical and nationalistic elements by referring to America as “our beloved homeland”; the country’s most distinguished African-American pastors signed the

¹³⁸ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 320; Lincoln, *Black Church*, 126; Williams, “Reparations,” 43.

¹³⁹ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 321; Lincoln, *Black Church*, 126; Williams, “Reparations,” 43.

¹⁴⁰ Pinn and Pinn, *Black Church*, §148; Lincoln, *Black Church*, 127.

¹⁴¹ Lincoln, *Black Church*, 128; Morris, *SCLC*, 33.

¹⁴² Lincoln, *Black Church*, 128; Abernathy, “A Black Preacher,” 1065; Pinn and Pinn, *Black Church*, §148.

¹⁴³ Pinn and Pinn, *Black Church*, §148; Lincoln, *Black Church*, 128.

¹⁴⁴ Lincoln, *Black Church*, 129.

¹⁴⁵ Pinn and Pinn, *Black Church*, §148.

document.¹⁴⁶ At first white pastors recoiled at such a forthright “political” statement but soon made peace with the mild and reasonable statement of the new black determination to be totally and responsibly involved in the life of America.¹⁴⁷

African-American Pastor Reconciles Black Power

Although by 1968 some African-American pastors began to start to feel the spirit of black power, the character of this black ideology was incongruent with their deep commitment to an African-American liberation in the context of a full human liberation.¹⁴⁸ Rosemary Ruether, professor at Howard University seminary, believed that a black theology could be developed but it would be catholic, contextual to the African-American experience, humanistic and not racist.¹⁴⁹ It should be the affirmation of African-American humanity that emancipates African-American people from racism thus providing authentic freedom for both white and African-American people.¹⁵⁰ Even though they did not relinquish the black power slogan young African-American radicals did marshal their forces behind the pastors, Dr. King and the nonviolent protest movement.¹⁵¹ They believed, “he (King) was a man endowed with the charisma of God, he could set black people’s hearts on fire with the gospel of freedom in Christ; he may not have endorsed the concept of black power, but its existence is a result of his work.”¹⁵² The young African-American radical saw it as a return to the spirit of the pre-Civil War African-American pastors’ emphasis on freedom and equality in the present political structure.¹⁵³

Summary

In 1809, the slave believed in a delayed eschatology and that humanity was in God and

¹⁴⁶ Lincoln, *Black Church*, 129.

¹⁴⁷ Lincoln, *Negro Church*, 130.

¹⁴⁸ Ruether, *Liberation Theology*, 127; Cone, *Black Power*, 109.

¹⁴⁹ Ruether, *Liberation Theology*, 130-31.

¹⁵⁰ Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology*, 38.

¹⁵¹ Cone, *Black Power*, 110.

¹⁵² Cone, *Black Power*, 108-09.

¹⁵³ Cone, *Black Power*, 108.

his new kingdom.¹⁵⁴ This was followed by a realized eschatology that connected the slave with the Hebrew story of freedom in the Old Testament.¹⁵⁵ Emancipation saw the short-lived realization of this eschatological ideology.¹⁵⁶ The end of reconstruction saw African-American pastors steer their communities to what they saw as safe harbours; to protect the people from racism and discrimination they unknowingly descended into apostasy and unintentionally became a pawn of the white establishment.¹⁵⁷ From the twenties to the forties leaders like Mays and Randolph urged the African-American pastor to change from gradualism to direct-action; their call went unheeded, leading to parareligious organizations like the National Urban league and the NAACP filling the void of leadership in protest.¹⁵⁸

WWI saw an acceleration of the northern migration leading to greater education for a new generation of African-Americans; this broadened their understanding of the new social and economic realities of the caste system that was the United States.¹⁵⁹ It caused the “secularization” of the African-American church moving it slowly out of a delayed eschatology to one that was realized.¹⁶⁰ However, this new eschatology was permeated by a gradualist mentality; direct-action protest was initiated by the parareligious organization CORE.¹⁶¹ By the mid-fifties African-American pastors had left their apostasy and gradualism joining the new breed of nonviolent direct-action pastors.¹⁶² The pastor as an entity had regained status, power and prestige as a leader of the African-American community and returned the church to its pre-Civil

¹⁵⁴ Wimberly, “African-American Perspective,” 19.

¹⁵⁵ Pinn and Pinn, *Black Church*, §147.

¹⁵⁶ Warton “Race,” 373.

¹⁵⁷ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 116; Killian and Smith, “Negro,” 335.

¹⁵⁸ Dickerson, “African-American,” 224-26.

¹⁵⁹ Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 329.

¹⁶⁰ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 55.

¹⁶¹ Killian and Smith, “Negro,” 334.

¹⁶² Walker, “Disunity,” 242.

War spirit of protest towards a brother and sisterhood of humanity.¹⁶³ For all African-Americans it would soon be a time to act; African-American pastors were ready to guide the actions of the community, using the gospel as their compass.

¹⁶³ Walker, "Disunity," 242; Cone, *Black Power*, 17; Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology*, 38.

CHAPTER FIVE

A TIME TO ACT

Origins

Just as the 1920s became a period of unprecedented African-American intellectual creativity in the arts, poetry, prose and music, African-American religious intellectuals came of age in the 1930s and 1940s.¹ Ordained Baptist clergymen such as Mordecai W. Johnson, president of Howard University, Benjamin E. Mays, dean of Howard's divinity school, Howard Thurman, a Howard University professor, and George D. Kelsey, a Morehouse professor; sought to create a new insurgent pastor, laying the foundations for the civil rights movement.² First, they attained important academic positions at the best of the historically African-American educational institutions.³ Second, they undertook serious scholarly studies about the African-American church and religion.⁴ Lastly, they discovered Mahatma Gandhi, encountered A. Philip Randolph, theologized direct-action techniques and developed praxis for a religiously based assault upon segregation.⁵ With many of the post-reconstruction pastors still in a state of apostasy this was the start of a new generation ready to pick up the torch of freedom and sister/brotherhood.⁶

Through university lectures, speeches, sermons and published works both nationally and worldwide they asserted the sacredness of the human personality, attacked segregation as sin and advocated nonviolent strategies against Jim Crow.⁷ The aforementioned men came to believe that the task of the African-American church was twofold: one, develop a more prophetic and

¹ Jelks, *Benjamin*, §112-14; Dickerson, "African-American," 220.

² Dickerson, "African-American," 219; Jelks, *Benjamin*, §125; Farmer, *Heart*, 135.

³ Jelks, *Benjamin*, §112-14; Dickerson, "African-American," 219.

⁴ Dickerson, "African-American," 219; Jelks, *Benjamin*, §112-14.

⁵ Dickerson, "African-American," 219; Jelks, *Benjamin*, §125.

⁶ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 116; Killian and Smith, "Negro," 335.

⁷ Jelks, *Benjamin*, §125; Dickerson, "African-American," 219.

fearless technique in making applicable the implications of the religion of Jesus in relation to our social order; two, every African-American pastor must develop a type of leadership that would do for America and African-Americans what Gandhi did for India and what Jesus did for the world.⁸

Mays and his colleagues sought to “stimulate church leaders to improve the African-American church.”⁹ They did it by shaping a professionally trained African-American clergy to destroy racial castes in America.¹⁰ Thurman, Kelsey and Mays taught and mentored the likes of James Farmer (CORE) and Martin King (NAACP), clergy they thought might be receptive to the use of Gandhian methods to achieve African-American advancement; to be “prophets of the new day, fearless and courageous.”¹¹ Wanting social transformation grounded in Christian principles of love, Mays promulgated the belief that African-Americans participating in collective efforts to undermine Jim Crow should stand on their individual commitment to Christianity; acknowledging that Jesus is more potent now than he was nineteen centuries ago.¹² He wanted it to be clearly understood that African-Americans, despite the sins of segregation, were forbidden to hate their white brothers and sisters.¹³

A. Philip Randolph challenged African-American churches to adopt a “working class view point and program.”¹⁴ He understood the necessity of grassroots mobilization in the African-American church communities as integral to an effective movement.¹⁵ As the leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters he fought for and established the first African-American

⁸ Dickerson, “African-American,” 221; Jelks, *Benjamin*, §118.

⁹ Dickerson, “African-American,” 224.

¹⁰ Dickerson, “African-American,” 224; Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's*, 16.

¹¹ Dickerson, “African-American,” 224; Evans, “Urbanization,” 805; Farmer, *Heart*, 135.

¹² Dickerson, “African-American,” 229.

¹³ Dickerson, “African-American,” 229.

¹⁴ Dickerson, “African-American,” 220; Kersten, *A. Philip*, 48; Pfeffer, *A. Philip*, 16.

¹⁵ Dickerson, “African-American,” 226; Pfeffer, *A. Philip*, 23.

trade union to sign with a major American corporation.¹⁶ Randolph was an acknowledged civil rights leader and would become a powerful force in labour and race relations in the United States; setting the tactical foundations of the civil rights movement.¹⁷ Randolph proposed tactics that coincided with Gandhian nonviolence; his proposed March on Washington Movement in 1940 applied pressure upon federal authorities to outlaw racial discrimination in wartime defense plants.¹⁸ The movement mobilized thousands of African-Americans to come to Washington, D.C. in a demonstration and prayer protest; he wanted to show Franklin D. Roosevelt that African-Americans would militantly demand their civil rights.¹⁹ The march was assisted by the war and the fact that, as Kelsey stated, "Nazism exposed racism in all its cruel nakedness and extreme idolatry."²⁰ Roosevelt yielded to Randolph's threatened March on Washington and issued executive order 8802 outlawing discriminatory employment practices in defense plants holding federal contracts.²¹

At this juncture there was a new generation of militant pastors, inculcated with the Ghandhian philosophy of protest and who have been privy to successful demonstrations of grassroots mass efforts to curtail discrimination.²² The credit for developing the techniques and implementation of the nonviolent direct-action must be given to CORE; they used the technique a dozen years before the King/NAACP led Montgomery bus boycott.²³ If Kelsey, Thurman and Mays created an insurgent clergy like Farmer, the first to utilize nonviolent direct-action (CORE), and King, the leader of the SCLC, what were the contributions of those pastors whose

¹⁶ Kersten, *A. Philip*, 45-46; Pfeffer, *A. Philip*, 27.

¹⁷ Kersten, *A. Philip*, 46; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 252.

¹⁸ Kersten, *A. Philip*, 60-61; Dickerson, "African-American," 226; Manis, *Fire*, 134; Chappell, *Agitators*, 59.

¹⁹ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 216; Dickerson, "African-American," 226; Kersten, *A. Philip*, 60-61; Pfeffer, *A. Philip*, 48.

²⁰ Meier, "Role," 353-54; Dickerson, "African-American," 227.

²¹ Dickerson, "African-American," 226; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 216; Pfeffer, *A. Philip*, 49.

²² Meier, "Role," 353-54; Dickerson, "African-American," 224; Evans, "Urbanization," 805.

²³ Meier, "Role," 353-54.

actions went unheralded; what of those African-American high school and college students who needed no organization or pulpit but used their love and indomitable will to create change?²⁴

The Revolution: Structure and Strategy

It was common for African-American ministers in a community and even in different communities to have personal relationships among themselves; they met at conventions, community gatherings, civic affairs, they often exchanged pulpits and encouraged their choirs to sing at the churches of their colleagues.²⁵ More importantly they were linked formally by a city ministerial alliance or interdenominational alliance through which they were able to debate and confer on issues important to the African-American community; this harkened back to the merger of the southern “invisible institution” and the northern institutional church during the nineteenth century.²⁶

Scholars of the church have consistently noted the rapid and efficient transmission of information to the African-American community from the pulpit; this reliable channel greatly enhanced the possibility for mass action.²⁷ By 1957, many local civil rights movements were underway in a number of southern cities; they were often vigorous movements that engaged in nonviolent confrontations.²⁸ An example occurred in January of 1956 at Xavier University in New Orleans when seventy-two African-Americans (mostly students) were jailed for defying segregation laws on a city bus. This movement was led by the local Reverend A.L. Davis, his protests led to the integration of the buses by the summer of 1958.²⁹ This protest typifies the local pastors and their protest movements prevalent in the south during the civil rights

²⁴ Chappell, *Agitators*, 59; Farmer, *Heart*, 191-92; Chappell, *Hope*, 67; Emerson, Review of *Birmingham*, 165-66; Meier, “Role,” 353-54.

²⁵ Morris, “SCLC,” 33.

²⁶ Morris, “SCLC,” 33.

²⁷ Morris, “SCLC,” 33.

²⁸ Morris, “SCLC,” 33-34.

²⁹ Morris, “SCLC,” 33.

movement.³⁰ Many of the confrontations and protests were not directed by visible movement organizations (like SNCC or CORE) nor did the protestors receive notoriety for their immense efforts; these efforts were often met with bombed homes, burnt crosses, threats and beatings.³¹

Local movement participants, usually headed by the local pastor(s), met on a systematic basis, planning strategy, collecting funds, encouraging protests, and confronting white power structures.³² The pastors and organizers of the various movements maintained informal contact between localities and sporadically provided mutual support even before the formation of the SCLC; the New Orleans groups collect three thousand dollars to assist the Montgomery bus boycott.³³ Not all pastors and churches participated directly in the movement; some pastors pursued non-confrontational negotiations with local white employers for equal opportunities.³⁴

In Alabama, pastors King of Montgomery, Joseph Lowery of Mobile, and Shuttlesworth of Birmingham met regularly to discuss their local movements and actions at the state level. It was at these talks, along with discussions with northern leaders like A. Philip Randolph, Ella Baker and Bayard Rustin, that the need to unify all the local movements was devised in the form of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the NCBC.³⁵

The SCLC and its northern counterpart the NCBC added a political dimension to the already strong church communication network allowing it to mobilize church resources on a wider scale and commit them to the active pursuit of social change.³⁶ The SCLC pulled all churches directly into the movement and made it a dynamic force.³⁷ King would be named the president and would oversee this new unified movement; it is very important to note that

³⁰ Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 212; Morris, "SCLC," 33.

³¹ Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 97, 212; Morris, "SCLC," 33.

³² Morris, "SCLC," 34.

³³ Morris, "SCLC," 34.

³⁴ Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 211.

³⁵ Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 211; Morris, "SCLC," 35; Farmer, *Heart*, 186-87.

³⁶ Religion, "King's," 128; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 210-11.

³⁷ Religion, "King's," 128; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 210-11; Morris, "SCLC," 33.

hereafter his speeches would embody the thoughts, feelings, direction and tone of the entire pastoral leadership.³⁸

King's greatness may have been his ability to bridge the gulf between conservative and radical leadership in the African-American community.³⁹ Better than anyone else King articulated the aspirations of African-Americans; they responded to the cadence of his addresses, his religious phraseology, manner of speaking and his vision for them in American.⁴⁰ More importantly he communicated African-American aspirations to white America more effectively than anyone else.⁴¹ He made nonviolent direct-action respectable and palatable to the moderate and conservative white community.⁴² Abernathy, King, and Shuttlesworth would turn pockets of protest from different organizations into a genuine mass movement cutting across divisions within the African-American leadership community.⁴³ This set the stage for a revolution based on the ministry of Jesus, with the African-American pastor as its leader the revolution was infused with a special force.⁴⁴

What gave this revolution called the civil rights movement its special force was that its aim was to modify not overturn the society it confronts; it sought to amend, not to ravage, it was an attempt to guarantee full participation in the society.⁴⁵ This revolution did not offer new American values but demanded that old values be realized.⁴⁶ Moreover, the federal government

³⁸ Dillman, Review of *Becoming King*, 246; Meier, "Role," 355; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 216; Cone, *Black Power*, 108.

³⁹ Meier, "Role," 353; Dillman, Review of *Becoming King*, 246; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 216.

⁴⁰ Meier, "Role," 355; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 79-80; Dillman, Review of *Becoming King*, 246

⁴¹ Meier, "Role," 355.

⁴² Meier, "Role," 357.

⁴³ Pettigrew, "Actual Gains," 326; Dillman, Review of *Becoming King*, 246; Allen, "Civil," 17.

⁴⁴ Marsh, "Drama," 805; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 165-66.

⁴⁵ Pettigrew, "Actual Gains," 326; Clairborne, *Autobiography*, 227; Manis, *Fire*, 135-36; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 165-66.

⁴⁶ Manis, *Fire*, 135-36; Clairborne, *Autobiography*, 145; Pettigrew, "Actual Gains," 326; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 165-66.

supported the revolution, a strange ally for true revolutionaries.⁴⁷ Furthermore, it was supported to a considerable degree by white American opinion; whites marched in demonstrations, went to jail and even faced death with African-Americans; although a small minority it served the vital function of keeping the confrontation from becoming a purely African-American versus white conflict.⁴⁸ To suppress such a revolution would be to surrender the very foundations of the United States.⁴⁹ There was therefore only one viable option, and that was to move to a racially integrated society in which skin color lost all relevance.⁵⁰

The pastors knew that Jim Crow was rife with fissures, and they developed a plan to drive wedges into these cracks hoping to make the seemingly solid walls of segregation quake and crumble; ostensibly dividing white unity.⁵¹ The pastors saw three types of southerners: extreme segregationists who were willing to fight to preserve the institution; those in the middle who favoured segregation but would sooner see it destroyed than take personnel risks to defend it; and the tiny minority who would with varying degrees of caution support action to undermine segregation.⁵² The pastors pursued a strategy to speak to the conscience of the tiny third group and target the practical concerns of the much larger second or middle group; those who without any moral commitment found themselves compelled to break with the segregationist in order to restore social peace, a good business climate or the good name of their city in the national media.⁵³

The first group, the southern segregationists, were plagued not only by the African-American demonstrators in the streets but also by unreliable moderate whites that sat on stools in

⁴⁷ Pettigrew, "Actual Gains," 326; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 165-66.

⁴⁸ Pettigrew, "Actual Gains," 326; Manis, *Fire*, 135-36; Chappell, *Agitators*, 56-58.

⁴⁹ Pettigrew, "Actual Gains," 326.

⁵⁰ Pettigrew, "Actual Gains," 326.

⁵¹ Chappell, *Hope*, 107; Westbrook, "MLK," 22; Manis, *Fire*, 135-36.

⁵² Westbrook, "MLK," 23; Chappell, *Agitators*, 84-85.

⁵³ Chappell, *Agitators*, 82; Westbrook, "MLK," 23.

white-only lunch counters and in pews in white-only churches.⁵⁴ The segregationists failed to win the firm allegiance of this moderate constituency; this rift in white solidarity was the weak point of the segregationists.⁵⁵ The southern churches were a particularly important stronghold of white moderation; ostensibly the success of the civil rights movement in the south rested on the relative success that the white segregationist and their African-American opponents had in mobilizing the emotional resources of southern white evangelical Protestants.⁵⁶

What was even worse for the southern segregationist cause was their inability to count on much support from white southern religious leaders.⁵⁷ Their “middle of the road” position earned these clergymen the ire of both the civil rights movement and the white segregationists.⁵⁸ Both groups condemned white southern Christians and their clergy for sitting on their hands.⁵⁹

The African-American pastors’ strategy encompassed a regime of “combative spirituality”; entailing nonviolent direct-action protest, mass demonstrations, oratory and the use of the national media to expose the sins of and put a strain on the system that was segregation.⁶⁰ As Shuttlesworth stated, “using the weapons of spiritual warfare” the civil rights movement gave “the Christian Church its greatest opportunity in centuries to make religion real in the lives of people.”⁶¹ With their plan firmly entrenched in the minds and spirits of the pastoral leadership the time to act was at hand.⁶²

Montgomery Bus Boycott

After procuring Rosa Park’s release from prison, E.D. Nixon, president of the NAACP,

⁵⁴ Chappell, *Hope*, 107-08; Westbrook, “MLK,” 23; Chappell, *Agitators*, 76.

⁵⁵ Chappell, *Hope*, 107-08; Westbrook, “MLK,” 23; Chappell, *Agitators*, 76.

⁵⁶ Chappell, *Hope*, 107-08; Westbrook, “MLK,” 23.

⁵⁷ Westbrook, “MLK,” 23; Chappell, *Hope*, 25-26.

⁵⁸ Westbrook, “MLK,” 23; Chappell, *Hope*, 107-08.

⁵⁹ Chappell, *Hope*, 107-08; Westbrook, “MLK,” 23.

⁶⁰ Manis, “Birmingham’s,” 68; Chappell, *Agitators*, 81.

⁶¹ Chappell, *Hope*, 107-08; Dillman, Review of *Becoming King*, 247.

⁶² See Appendix A for civil rights timeline.

contacted Martin King, pastor of Montgomery's Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Ralph Abernathy, pastor of Montgomery's First Baptist Church and L. Roy Bennett, pastor of the Mount Zion A.M.E. Church; they were to discuss a boycott of the transit system due its practice of segregation.⁶³ The pastors recognized that the "boycott method could be used to unethical and unchristian ends," they also believed it could be used to "give birth to justice and freedom" by "withdrawing cooperation from an evil system"; these exact same events transpired in Birmingham under the leadership of pastors T.L Lane and Fred Shuttlesworth.⁶⁴ Before the Montgomery bus boycott King made a speech to the African-American congregation that would participate in the protest, in it he did three important things.⁶⁵ First he calls for unity when he stated, "in all our action we must stick together unity is the great need of the hour, and if we are united we can get many of the things that we not only desire but which we justly deserve"; he and the other pastors were not only asking for the unity of those directly involved in the protest but also a call to the different factions of African-American protestors.⁶⁶

Second, he focused on the gospel, keeping "God in the forefront" when he stated, "love is one of the pivotal points of the Christian faith, there is another side called justice."⁶⁷ He went on to say, "if we are wrong, the Constitution of the United States is wrong. If we are wrong, God almighty is wrong. If we are wrong, Jesus of Nazareth was merely a utopian dreamer that never came down to earth."⁶⁸ He ended with, "we are determined here in Montgomery to work and fight until justice runs down like water and righteousness like a light stream."⁶⁹ Lastly, using the tools of persuasion and coercion King ended his speech by again asking for unity and a

⁶³ Dillman, Review of *Becoming King*, 246; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 51; Chappell, *Agitators*, 55-56; Farmer, *Heart*, 185-86.

⁶⁴ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 53; Dillman, Review of *Becoming King*, 246; Farmer, *Heart*, 185-86.

⁶⁵ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 53; Marsh, "Drama," 234-35.

⁶⁶ Dillman, Review of *Becoming King*, 246; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 60; Marsh, "Drama," 235.

⁶⁷ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 60.

⁶⁸ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 60; Marsh, "Drama," 234.

⁶⁹ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 60; Marsh, "Drama," 234.

determination to stick together so that “when the history books are written somebody will have to say there lived a race of people, a black people, a people who had the moral courage to stand up for their rights”; these very same principles were asked of the Birmingham congregation by Fred Shuttlesworth.⁷⁰

During the boycott when King’s house was bombed, his wife and baby inside, nonviolent resistance was put to the test; angry participants faced off with the mayor, police commissioner and policemen.⁷¹ Shortly after the bombing King, on his bombed out porch, spoke to the angry crowd who were on the verge of physical confrontation with the police. He stated, “don’t get your weapons, he who lives by the sword will perish by the sword, remember that is what God said.”⁷² He went on to say, “I want you to love our enemies. Be good to them. Love them and let them know you love them.”⁷³ The African-American protestors responded as if in church with shouts of “Amen,” and “God bless you.” This is what the African-American pastor brought to the burgeoning civil rights movement; their leadership grounded the movement in Jesus’ gospel of love. King would make similar speeches after the second bombing of his home, Abernathy’s and the ten bombings of other pastors’ homes and churches.⁷⁴

Three hundred and eighty-four days after it started the boycott led to the United States Supreme Court declaring bus segregation laws unconstitutional.⁷⁵ King believed the “victory infinitely larger than the bus situation”; the real victory was in the mass meetings where thousands of African-Americans stood revealed with a new sense of dignity and destiny.⁷⁶ He exclaimed, “we were starting a movement that would gain national recognition whose echoes

⁷⁰ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 61; Dillman, Review of *Becoming King*, 246; Marsh, “Drama,” 234.

⁷¹ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 53.

⁷² Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 79-80; Walker, “Media,” 48-49.

⁷³ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 79-80.

⁷⁴ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 101-03.

⁷⁵ Dillman, Review of *Becoming King*, 246; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 83.

⁷⁶ Dillman, Review of *Becoming King*, 246-47; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 62; Manis, *Fire*, 235.

would ring in the ears of people of every nation.”⁷⁷

Little Rock, Arkansas and the Lunch Counter Sit-ins

In September of 1957 federal troops were needed to escort young African-American students into the high school in Little Rock, Arkansas. This was due to the Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus leaving the president of the United States no other alternative. King and the other pastors backed the president’s decision, thanking “President Eisenhower for using the troops to force the governor to enforce the laws of the land and integrate the high school.”⁷⁸ However, the African-American pastors felt “that Eisenhower did not feel like being a crusader for integration.”⁷⁹ They called him a man of integrity and good will but were “afraid that on the question of integration he did not understand the dimensions of social change involved”; even though disappointed the pastors sought to engender partnership with the government through the conciliatory tone of their message.⁸⁰

In 1960, young Negro students in the south, through lunch counter sit-ins, gave America a glowing example of disciplined, dignified nonviolent direct-action against the system of segregation.⁸¹ Although met with violence from hoodlums, police guns, tear gas, arrests and jail sentences, the students did not waver from their task and never retaliated.⁸² This movement was spontaneously born and accomplished integration in hundreds of communities at the swiftest rate in the civil rights movement.⁸³ King stated, after his arrest for participating in the sit-ins, “we do not seek to remove this unjust system for ourselves alone but for our white brothers as wells.”⁸⁴ Although they did not start the protest, the pastors dictated the tone of the movement by often

⁷⁷ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 62.

⁷⁸ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 109.

⁷⁹ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 109.

⁸⁰ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 110; Manis, *Fire*, 135; Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 326.

⁸¹ Chappell, *Hope*, 67; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 137; Emerson, Review of *Birmingham*, 67.

⁸² Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 110; Emerson, Review of *Birmingham*, 67; Bond, “Media,” 30.

⁸³ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 110; Macdonald, *Black*, 72; Larson, “Media,” 167-68; Bond, “Media,” 26.

⁸⁴ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 145.

referring to their white brethren and that the African-Americans suffering in jail were to awaken the conscience of the community.⁸⁵

Freedom Rides and The Albany, Georgia Campaign

Eleven Freedom Riders attempted to show the injustice and indignities African-Americans faced simply trying to travel through the south on the interstate buses.⁸⁶ Again it was led originally by the young and again it made sweeping changes across the south as the Interstate Commerce Commission moved to integrate all bus terminals in the south.⁸⁷ It would also do something just as important; these Freedom Rides would trigger the campaign in Albany, Georgia.⁸⁸

Backed by the SCLC and headed by Dr. W.G. Anderson the Albany protest challenged discrimination in public places, denial of voting rights, school segregation and the deprivation of free speech and assembly.⁸⁹ It was the only protest that used the full complement of nonviolent direct-action techniques: jail-ins (public jails); sit-ins (restaurants); wade-ins (pools) and kneel-ins (churches); police action; boycotts and legal actions.⁹⁰ On 24 July 1962, white officials unleashed force against the nonviolent demonstrators brutally beating a pregnant woman and caning one of the movement's lawyers; negro on-lookers, seething with resentment, hurled bottles and stones at the police causing King to halt mass demonstrations.⁹¹

The African-American pastors were afraid that engaging in violence would detract from the injustices perpetrated by the evil system of segregation.⁹² The pastors visited homes, clubs

⁸⁵ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 145.

⁸⁶ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 153; Macdonald, *Black*, 72; Larson, "Media," 168-69.

⁸⁷ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 153; Macdonald, *Black*, 72; Larson, "Media," 168-69.

⁸⁸ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 153.

⁸⁹ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 153-54.

⁹⁰ Chappell, *Agitators*, 123; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 154; Owen, "Bell," 843.

⁹¹ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 159.

⁹² Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 159.

and poolrooms “urging that no retaliation be tolerated”, even the angriest of men acceded.⁹³ They followed it up with a “Day of Penance” to pray for those in the “Negro community who have not yet found their way to the nonviolent discipline.”⁹⁴ The pastors once again sought to work with the federal government. After learning that President Kennedy had said that “the commissioner of Albany ought to talk to the Negro leaders,” Dr. King stated, “I felt his was a very forthright statement and immediately dictated a statement to the president commending him on his action.”⁹⁵

In the end, the campaign had failed to halt segregation in Albany.⁹⁶ It had failed because the attempt to make white America privy to the injustices done to American citizens did not come to fruition; due in large part to Laurie Pritchett.⁹⁷ Pritchett, an astute sheriff, had deflected the movement’s efforts with a cool head, orderly arrests and an abundance of prearranged jail space.⁹⁸ The SCLC and its local allies in Birmingham hoped for better results, confident they could provoke Eugene “Bull” Connor, the city’s brutal commissioner of public safety, into the sort of spectacle of bigoted violence that Pritchett had carefully avoided; one that would shine a media spotlight on their struggle and win support from hesitant white liberals.⁹⁹

Birmingham, Alabama

Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth is clearly one of the most unsung of the many heroes of the civil rights movement.¹⁰⁰ Described as a “wiry, energetic, and indomitable man”, Shuttlesworth leadership in the movement had his church bombed and home completely demolished, his wife

⁹³ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 159.

⁹⁴ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 159-60.

⁹⁵ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 164; Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 326.

⁹⁶ Westbrook, “MLK,” 22; Chappell, *Agitators*, 142; Emerson, *Review of Birmingham*, 67.

⁹⁷ Chappell, *Agitators*, 142; Westbrook, “MLK,” 22; Bond, “Media,” 32.

⁹⁸ Westbrook, “MLK,” 22; Chappell, *Agitators*, 124-26; Bond, “Media,” 32.

⁹⁹ Westbrook, “MLK,” 22; Bond, “Media,” 32.

¹⁰⁰ Manis, “Birmingham’s,” 67; Allen, “Civil,” 17; Fallin, “Women,” 42.

and he mobbed, beaten and stabbed, he was jailed eight times, four during the Freedom Rides.¹⁰¹ As one of the founders of the SCLC, no one in the civil rights movement more resolutely and directly confronted segregation; no one more regularly and over a sustained period of time deliberately put himself in a position to be killed than Shuttlesworth.¹⁰² He vowed to “kill segregation or be killed by it.”¹⁰³ His courageous, often times outrageous, acts of bravado had African-Americans believing he was “doing the will of God” because “couldn’t nobody do that but God”; his charisma captivated audiences and fuelled a fervor among African-Americans.¹⁰⁴

Using a combative spirituality Shuttlesworth looked for opportunities for liberation; he tried to desegregate the police department, buses, bus terminals, schools and all public accommodations; he spearheaded or supported bus boycotts, student sit-ins, the Freedom Rides, boycotts of downtown businesses and numerous lawsuits attacking segregation ordinances.¹⁰⁵ Over a seven-year period he was a thorn in Connor’s side challenging segregation statutes in the streets and in the courts.¹⁰⁶ He pushed integrationists as well as segregationists writing King complaining that he was not attacking segregation in Alabama vigorously enough. He stated, “when the flowery speeches have been made, we still have the hard job of getting down and helping people.”¹⁰⁷ Shuttlesworth called for nonviolence in the face of violence and for the protestors to “love the (white) man while we hate what he does.”¹⁰⁸

With the lack of success in the Albany campaign the SCLC agreed to come to

¹⁰¹ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 173; Allen, “Civil,” 17; Manis, *Fire*, 113; Fallin, “Women,” 42.

¹⁰² Allen, “Civil,” 17; Manis, “Birmingham’s,” 68; Chappell, *Hope*, 88.

¹⁰³ Manis, “Birmingham’s,” 68; Allen, “Civil,” 17; Manis, *Fire*, 115.

¹⁰⁴ Manis, *Fire*, 124; Emerson, Review of *Birmingham*, 67.

¹⁰⁵ Manis, “Birmingham’s,” 69; Allen, “Civil,” 17; Manis, *Fire*, 67; Chappell, *Hope*, 88; Combative spirituality eschews violence choosing instead to confront oppression on the spiritual plane transcending social, political and ontological conditions; returning love for hate and violence with the intent on reestablishing our common humanity and oneness in the kingdom of God.

¹⁰⁶ Manis, “Birmingham’s,” 71; Allen, “Civil,” 17; Emerson, Review of *Birmingham*, 67.

¹⁰⁷ Manis, “Birmingham’s,” 71; Emerson, Review of *Birmingham*, 67.

¹⁰⁸ Manis, *Fire*, 124; Emerson, Review of *Birmingham*, 67.

Birmingham; during the Good Friday march King and Abernathy were jailed.¹⁰⁹ Shortly after the arrest eight of Alabama's prominent white religious leaders published a statement attacking the civil rights campaign as "unwise and untimely" and a provocation to hatred and violence.¹¹⁰ In a controlled fury King crafted a letter of reply; the letter would eventually assume pride and place alongside Henry David Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* as a touchstone for the theory and practice of civil disobedience in American protest politics.¹¹¹

Although the letter was ostensibly addressed to the Alabama clergymen his target was a much wider audience of white moderates.¹¹² The letter demolished the arguments of the white moderates using the very "patient and reasonable terms" that they understood.¹¹³ The letter did not have an immediate impact on the Birmingham campaign, it would not be until weeks later that the letter and its contents received its venerable position.¹¹⁴ One reader stated "if the canon of Holy Scriptures were not closed I would nominate Martin Luther King's statement either as a continuation of the Acts of the Apostles or as an addition of the Epistles in the best tradition of the Pauline prison letters."¹¹⁵ However, the events that turned the Birmingham campaign in the movements favour were not King's or the SCLC but the "Children's Crusade."¹¹⁶

Children's Crusade

Under the leadership of pastor Jim Bevel students took up the Birmingham protest campaign; it would see them go to jail in historic numbers.¹¹⁷ As the jails filled up, "Bull" Connor abandoned his posture of nonviolence, the result was an ugliness that brought the

¹⁰⁹ Westbrook, "MLK," 22; Emerson, Review of *Birmingham*, 67.

¹¹⁰ Westbrook, "MLK," 22.

¹¹¹ Westbrook, "MLK," 22; Emerson, Review of *Birmingham*, 67; King, "Letter," 46.

¹¹² Emerson, Review of *Birmingham*, 67; Westbrook, "MLK," 25.

¹¹³ Emerson, Review of *Birmingham*, 67; Westbrook, "MLK," 24; King, "Letter," 289-99.

¹¹⁴ Westbrook, "MLK," 24; Emerson, of *Birmingham*, 67.

¹¹⁵ Westbrook, "MLK," 25-26; Emerson, Review of *Birmingham*, 67.

¹¹⁶ Westbrook, "MLK," 25; Emerson, Review of *Birmingham*, 67.

¹¹⁷ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 208; Emerson, Review of *Birmingham*, 67.

scorching glare of national disapproval on Birmingham.¹¹⁸ The newspapers and television of 4 May 1963, carried pictures of prostrate women with policemen bending over them with raised clubs; children marching up to the bared fangs of police dogs; and the terrible force of pressure hoses sweeping bodies into the streets.¹¹⁹ This scene fit into the pastor's strategy of showing the white moderates the true nature of the system.¹²⁰ This deeply stirred the moral consciences of the nation making the African-American fight the fight of decent Americans of all races and creeds.¹²¹

King likened the student protestors to Jesus in his youth stating, "there was another little child just twelve years old and he got involved in a discussion back in Jerusalem, he said, 'I must be about my father's business'."¹²² King goes on to say, "these young people are about their father's business, carving a tunnel of hope through the great mountain of despair."¹²³ King ends with that fact that, "Birmingham is by no means miraculously desegregated"; however, he would "like to believe that Birmingham will one day become a model in southern race relations," because it discovered a conscience.¹²⁴

March On Washington

The march on Washington continued the gospel of love and brotherhood culminating in the epic speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.¹²⁵ King and his fellow pastors stated that, "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together."¹²⁶ They also stated, "with this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful

¹¹⁸ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 208; King, "Hammer," 173.

¹¹⁹ King, "Hammer," 173; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 208-09; Emerson, Review of *Birmingham*, 67.

¹²⁰ Westbrook, "MLK," 23; Emerson, Review of *Birmingham*, 67.

¹²¹ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 208-09.

¹²² Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 211.

¹²³ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 211; King, "Hammer," 173.

¹²⁴ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 211; King, "Hammer," 171.

¹²⁵ Manis, *Fire*, 134-35; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 211; King, "Dream," 217.

¹²⁶ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 227.

symphony of brotherhood.”¹²⁷ Once again reinforcing the fact that the movement is for all people and all nations and that it is a revolution for the love of humanity; the pastors leadership had made it a revolution that sought to unite not divide.¹²⁸

16th Street Church Bombing and Freedom Summer

On 15 September 1963, segregationist unhappy with the changing climate in Birmingham, Alabama, retaliated by bombing the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church; taking the young lives of Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson and Cynthia Wesley.¹²⁹ The police killed another child in the streets and hate-filled white youths climaxed the day with the wanton murder of an African-American boy harmlessly riding his bicycle.¹³⁰ The African-American pastors remembered “the grief and bitterness felt on that terrible September day”; one woman cried “My God, we’re not even safe in church!”¹³¹ These terrible acts would not be the last of that summer, the state of Mississippi would once again enter the public consciences.¹³²

Under the leadership of Bob Moses a team of more that one thousand northern white students and local African-Americans citizens had instituted a program of voter registration and political action.¹³³ Negroes had the constitutional right to vote in the state of Mississippi but through violence, economic reprisals, and other forms of intimidation there were very few that did.¹³⁴ Andrew Goodman, James Chaney and Michael Schwerner were murdered shortly after they were arrested and released for trying to register Negro voters.¹³⁵ Once again the pastors would reestablish kinship with those who would do them ill and demanded it of everyone in the

¹²⁷ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 227.

¹²⁸ King, “Dream,” 220; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 227; King, “Negroes,” 180.

¹²⁹ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 229; King, “Hammer,” 170-71.

¹³⁰ King, “Hammer,” 170-71; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 230.

¹³¹ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 230.

¹³² Westbrook, “MLK,” 25.

¹³³ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 249.

¹³⁴ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 252.

¹³⁵ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 250; Chappell, *Hope*, 82.

movement. King, states, “we must not become bitter; nor must we harbour the desire to retaliate with violence.” He ends with, “we must not lose faith in our white brothers.”¹³⁶

Black Nationalists

By this time in the civil rights movement the pastor caught the ire of some young African-Americans because they saw them as soft, conservative, talking too much about love; a polished Uncle Tom, the same accusation leveled on the pastors predecessor, the slave-preacher.¹³⁷ The deleterious effects that the recession of 1953-54 had on African-American unemployment coupled with the “revolution of expectations” created a climate in which Black Nationalist groups thrived; the largest and best known were the Black Muslims.¹³⁸ Their leaders, Elijah Muhammad, and the fiery polemicist Malcolm X taught black youth to treat the white man the way he should be treated, not with love but “an eye for an eye.”¹³⁹

Black Nationalists believed Malcolm X’s assertion that “it’s not possible to love a man whose chief purpose in life is to humiliate you.”¹⁴⁰ They preached an eschatological vision of the doom of the white “devils” and the coming dominance of the “black man.”¹⁴¹ They promised a utopian paradise of a separate territory within the United States in which African-Americans would establish their own state.¹⁴² They offered a more immediate practical program of building up African-American business through hard work, thrift and racial unity; this appealed to the young upwardly mobile African-American.¹⁴³ King speaking on behalf of the other pastors responded stating,

¹³⁶ King, “Eulogy,” 222; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 232.

¹³⁷ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 266; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 34; Westbrook, “MLK,” 25; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 255-60.

¹³⁸ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 265-66; Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 326.

¹³⁹ Lincoln, *Black Church*, 127; Clasby, “Malcom,” 176.

¹⁴⁰ Cone, “Black Power,” 202.

¹⁴¹ X and Hailey, *Autobiography*, 254; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 265-66.

¹⁴² Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 265-66; X and Hailey, *Autobiography*, 248.

¹⁴³ X and Hailey, *Autobiography*, 278; Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 265-66.

Elijah Mohammad's Muslim Movement (is) nourished by the Negro's frustration over the continued existence of racial discrimination, this movement is made up of people who have lost faith in America, who have absolutely repudiated Christianity and who have concluded that the white man is an incorrigible 'devil'.¹⁴⁴

King went on to say that Malcolm X's "fiery demagogic oratory in the black ghettos, urging African-Americans to arm themselves and prepare to engage in violence can reap nothing but grief"; this is what the African-American pastors most feared.¹⁴⁵ He went on to say, "I have often wished that he would talk less of violence because violence is not going to solve our problems."¹⁴⁶ To the Black Nationalist the African-American pastor would say, "in the event of violent revolution, we would be sorely outnumbered."¹⁴⁷ In the end, "the Negro would face the same unchanged conditions, the only difference being that his bitterness would be more intense. Thus in purely practical as well as moral terms the American Negro has no rational alternative to nonviolence."¹⁴⁸

The Black Nationalist groups actually assisted the civil rights movement due to the fact that their talk of violence and their hatred of "blue-eyed devils" frightened white people into becoming more amenable to the demands of the integrationists pastors; they sounded so extreme to many whites that integration appeared to be a conservative program.¹⁴⁹

Selma, Alabama

Like Birmingham the adversaries to the march in Selma met them with unrestrained brutality that enlarged the issues to a nationwide scale.¹⁵⁰ There was the same call to non-violence, love and sister/brotherhood; "let us go more than ever before committed to the struggle

¹⁴⁴ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 197-98; X and Hailey, *Autobiography*, 177.

¹⁴⁵ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 266; Clasby, "Malcolm," 177.

¹⁴⁶ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 265.

¹⁴⁷ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 266.

¹⁴⁸ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 266; Westbrook, "MLK," 27.

¹⁴⁹ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 266.

¹⁵⁰ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 288.

and committed to nonviolence.”¹⁵¹ King went on to say, “our aim must never be to defeat or humiliate the white man but to win his friendship and understanding. We must come to see that in the end what we seek is a society at peace with itself, a society that can live with its conscience.”¹⁵²

Black Power

Black power as a slogan started when Stokley Carmichael proclaimed it to an audience in Greenwood, Mississippi during the Meredith March.¹⁵³ Young African-Americans started to become impatient and disillusioned with “the nonviolence stuff”; “We Shall Overcome” changed to “We Shall Overrun.”¹⁵⁴ There was a call for nonviolence to be dropped as a prerequisite for participation in the march; this view began to permeate CORE and SNCC.¹⁵⁵ The pastors retorted, “If the banner of nonviolence is lowered then Mississippi’s injustices would not be exposed and the moral issues would be obscured.”¹⁵⁶ King, speaking for the pastors, had the “deep feeling that it (black power) was an unfortunate choice of words for a slogan that would only bring division in the campaign.”¹⁵⁷

The African-American pastor believed in black power if it means amassing political and economic power in order to gain just and legitimate goals, but not if it has racist overtones.¹⁵⁸ African-Americans must work to build racial pride by using every constructive means possible; this must come through a program not merely through a slogan.¹⁵⁹ Even though they could understand why SNCC’s leader Stokley Carmichael “now says that nonviolence is irrelevant”; he

¹⁵¹ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 281-85; King, “Nonviolence,” 12.

¹⁵² King, “Nonviolence,” 12; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 286.

¹⁵³ Comer, “Social,” 72; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 320; Lincoln, *Black Church*, 125; Cone, *Black Theology*, 5.

¹⁵⁴ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 316.

¹⁵⁵ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 317.

¹⁵⁶ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 318; Westbrook, “MLK,” 27.

¹⁵⁷ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 320; Williams, “Reparations,” 43.

¹⁵⁸ King, “Black,” 303-05; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 321;

¹⁵⁹ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 321-26.

said it “because he has seen the most brutal white violence against Negroes and white civil rights workers and he has seen it go unpunished.”¹⁶⁰ Despite the positive aspects of black power, not the least of which is a psychological reaction to the psychological indoctrination that led to the creation of the perfect slave, its negative values prevented it from having the substance to become the basis for an effective strategy.¹⁶¹ He ended with the fact that “nonviolence is power, but it is the right and good use of power; constructively it can save the white man as well as the Negro.”¹⁶²

SNCC began calling for only black participants in the march along with forgoing nonviolence.¹⁶³ King and the other pastors respond by saying that they would not “in good conscience agree to continue (their) involvement and that of the SCLC.”¹⁶⁴ Their view again won the day and King again called for unity by stating, “this isn’t any time for organizational conflicts, this isn’t a time for ego battles over who’s going to be the leader. We must set out to be that David of truth sent out against the Goliath of injustice.”¹⁶⁵

Summary

African-American theologians and scholars like Kelsey and Mays set upon creating an insurgent clergy to combat segregation.¹⁶⁶ In colleges and universities they prepared this new breed of pastor, inculcating them with Ghandhian philosophies of nonviolent protest and grassroots mass demonstrations of civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph.¹⁶⁷ Pastors such as Martin King, Fred Shuttlesworth, James Farmer and Ralph Abernathy would unify African-

¹⁶⁰ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 323; Carmichael, “Power,” 63.

¹⁶¹ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 328; Williams, “Reparations,” 43.

¹⁶² Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 330; Westbrook, “MLK,” 27.

¹⁶³ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 318.

¹⁶⁴ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 318.

¹⁶⁵ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 319; Manis, *Fire*, 132.

¹⁶⁶ Dickerson, “African-American,” 221.

¹⁶⁷ Jelks, *Benjamin*, §125.

American leadership under one revolutionary umbrella called the civil rights movement.¹⁶⁸

Infusing the revolution with the special force of Jesus' gospel of love, they set out to bond with their white brothers and sisters.¹⁶⁹ Their strategy involved knowledge of the three groups of white segregationists and under the banner of combative spirituality they sought to illuminate the evils segregation was visiting on both African-Americans and their white brothers and sisters.¹⁷⁰ Using direct-action, oratory, mass demonstrations and media exposure they sought to destroy white unity around segregation and reach a place of negotiation, peace, harmony and brother/sisterhood.¹⁷¹

Without the leadership of the African-American pastor the revolution would have seen "many streets of the south flowing with blood."¹⁷² In the most volatile of situations the African-American pastor repeatedly rose up to demand adherence to Jesus' gospel of love; even to the risk of themselves and their families.¹⁷³ They had not changed since their incarnation as slave-priest/preacher; putting their life on the line ministering to their flock against the slave and Jim Crow laws.¹⁷⁴ They had only to point to the rebellions of Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner as evidence of the folly of violent confrontations.¹⁷⁵ The African-American pastor shows both African-Americans and whites the power of Jesus' gospel and its manifestation in nonviolent direct-action protest; as theologian Pat Tillich states, "love is the foundation, not the negation of power."¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁸ Dickerson, "African-American," 224.

¹⁶⁹ Dickerson, "African-American," 229; Pettigrew, "Actual Gains," 326.

¹⁷⁰ Westbrook, "MLK," 23; Chappell, *Agitators*, 84-85.

¹⁷¹ Manis, "Birmingham's," 68; Chappell, *Agitators*, 84-85.

¹⁷² Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 197.

¹⁷³ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 197; Manis, *Fire*, 124.

¹⁷⁴ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 17.

¹⁷⁵ X, *Autobiography*, 177; Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 34-35; Fields, *Black Theology*, 17-18.

¹⁷⁶ Cone *Black Theology*, 54.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT

The basis of the civil rights movement was to win the hearts and minds of the white moderate populace; therefore it would be illuminating to garner their thoughts and feelings on the African-American pastor and the movement.¹ The pastor galvanized the community in a revolution to expose their shared humanity; newspapers and television became a much needed ally helping the pastors' to broadcast their message of hope and brother/sisterhood to the United States and the world. The newspaper was also a useful tool for attaining the zeitgeist and collective conscience of the northern white liberal and the southern moderate; the fact that they are often slanted in an attempt to shape or expound the reader's views will serve to illuminate the thoughts and feelings of the white moderate.² Viewing both the print and visual media of the time will allow one to gauge the efficacy of the African-American pastor's civil rights strategy.

The power of Jesus expressed in the nonviolent direct-action protest produced love and understanding to those who would return it with hatred and brutality; this exposed the sin inherent in the southern system of segregation.³ With the help of the national media the African-American pastor forced the American people to glimpse an image of themselves they found distasteful; the hope was that it would lead to a collective introspection and a rediscovery of its conscience and founding principles.⁴

Reality TV

¹ Westbrook, "MLK," 23; Chappell, *Agitators*, 84-85.

² Tosh, *Pursuit*, 63.

³ Larson, *Media*, 153; Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §155-56; Westbrook, "MLK," 23; Chappell, *Agitators*, 84-85; Dickerson, "African-American," 229; Pettigrew, "Actual Gains," 326.

⁴ Larson, *Media*, 153; Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §155-56; Westbrook, "MLK," 23; Chappell, *Agitators*, 84-85.

Television was still in its infancy at the end of 1949, and enormous profits would come with national distribution; in 1947 total revenue was 1.9 million a decade later it would be close to a billion.⁵ The medium was coming of age during the civil rights movement; its simultaneous emergence with the movement was fortuitous for those advocating reform in race relations.⁶ It would be the most effective medium for relating the civil rights movement to the American people; this was due mostly to its ability to convey the emotions of the movement more dramatically than print or radio.⁷ Just as the African-American pastor had predicted, the civil rights movement was basically a contest for the emotions of the white moderate; television would convey the values of the contest “with a richness and fidelity never before achieved in mass communications.”⁸ Never would so many Americans see the effects of chronic racism so vividly displayed as they would on television in the summer of 1963.⁹ Viewers would be able to decide for themselves as they encountered the consequences of Jim Crow law, bigotry and race hatred.¹⁰

Due to racial attitudes in the south the hopes of those seeing an equitable future for African-Americans in television were crushed; network executives, station owners, advertising agencies and sponsors were sensitive to the concerns of their viewers and therefore refused to be associated with black performers.¹¹ As a result most southern stations did not carry coverage of the civil rights movement in the late 1950s.¹² Although it would become a boon for the movement, at this juncture securing television coverage for the movement would be a difficult task for the African-American pastor.

⁵ Macdonald, *Black*, 67.

⁶ Macdonald, *Black*, 71; Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §155-56; Larson, “Media,” 153.

⁷ Larson, “Media,” 153; Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §155-56; Chappell, *Agitators*, 82; Westbrook, “MLK,” 23.

⁸ Macdonald, *Black*, 93; Larson, “Media,” 153; Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §156; O’Neill, *Roar*, 44.

⁹ Larson, “Media,” 153; Macdonald, *Black*, 93; Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §156; O’Neill, *Roar*, 44.

¹⁰ Macdonald, *Black*, 93 Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §156; Larson, “Media,” 153.

¹¹ Larson, “Media,” 157; Macdonald, *Black*, 67; Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §156-57.

¹² Macdonald, *Black*, 68-70.

The Fourth Estate

The major papers in cities like Los Angeles did not cover African-Americans between the years 1952-1962; the “press had increasingly contributed to black invisibility for more than half a century.”¹³ Most papers failed to cover African-Americans as a normal segment of society.¹⁴ They promoted stereotypes focusing on conflict and unrest without explaining the reasons behind the protest.¹⁵ This caused African-Americans to look aggressive and demanding thus increasing the reader’s annoyance with racial issues. Northern readers saw race as a southern problem not a national one.¹⁶

Most coverage of African-Americans in white moderate national newspapers like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times* appeared in what was called the “Negro affairs” section of the paper; riot coverage appeared on the front page.¹⁷ The *Chicago Tribune* and *US News and World Report* coverage and editorials were unsympathetic to the civil rights movement; predictably many southern papers chose not to cover the movement or were pro-segregation, the African-American papers took the opposite stance.¹⁸ Again, the African-American pastors’ strategy was to speak to the emotions of the white moderate through the white moderate national newspapers; like the medium of television, on its face it appeared that the African-American pastor was undertaking a daunting task.¹⁹

Montgomery/Birmingham Bus Boycott

During the two bus boycotts the African-American pastors’ strategy and tone was translated by the white newspaper to its readers; a sympathetic tone was taken in articles and

¹³ Larson, “Media,” 157; Bond, “Media,” 17.

¹⁴ Bond, “Media,” 17; Larson, “Media,” 157.

¹⁵ Larson, “Media,” 157; Martindale, *Press*, 96.

¹⁶ Larson, “Media,” 157; Martindale, *Press*, 96.

¹⁷ Larson, “Media,” 157.

¹⁸ Bond, “Media,” 17; Larson, “Media,” 156.

¹⁹ Westbrook, “MLK,” 23; Chappell, *Agitators*, 84-85.

editorials in newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.²⁰ They down played any negative incidents on the newly integrated buses calling them “small incidents” and spoke optimistically of the “new situation” and that “in a short period of time good citizens of both races will cease to think very much about it”; they also referred to those that opposed it as a “stupid and vicious” minority.²¹ Moreover, during the Birmingham bus boycott six young African-American boys had shot at the white section of the bus during the boycott. The press went to great lengths to stress that “the incident had nothing to do with Negro efforts to end segregation on buses here.”²² It would seem like the press was echoing the sentiments and tone of the African-American pastor.

Little Rock

The television images of incensed white mobs battling with federal troops because nine African-American children were being enrolled in a Little Rock high school was ideal for television; it “had drama, tension, real and threatened violence, all concentrated in one area in a relatively tight time frame.”²³ While the tense situation called for enlightened leadership, there was Governor Faubus of Arkansas showing provocative photographs of bayonets aimed at white protestors declaring that the federal government was the aggressor.²⁴ Even conservative papers like the *Wall Street Journal* were asking, “how long can America bear the expense of racial bigotry?”²⁵ These events were pivotal for exposing the sins of segregation and furthering the strategies of the African-American pastors.²⁶

Sit-ins

²⁰ “Integration in Montgomery,” 18; Tracey, “Letters to the Editor,” 12; Sitton, “Negroes Press for Faster Desegregation,” E3; Bond, “Media,” 17-25.

²¹ “Integration in Montgomery,” 18; Bond, “Media,” 22.

²² Walker, “Media,” 51; Bond, “Media,” 22.

²³ Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §155-56; Larson, *Media*, 164; Macdonald, *Blacks*, 97; Bond, “Media,” 27.

²⁴ Macdonald, *Media*, 97; Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §155-56; Larson, *Media*, 164; Bond, “Media,” 27.

²⁵ Jones, “Letters to the Editor: How Much Time,” 16.

²⁶ Macdonald, *Media*, 97; Larson, *Media*, 164; Bond, “Media,” 27.

Between 1960 and 1961 students orchestrated numerous sit-ins throughout the south to integrate lunch counters; as expected southern papers were generally critical of the students' actions.²⁷ *Time* magazine provided a positive spin by contrasting the studious, orderly African-American students with the "degenerate" whites who opposed them.²⁸ The *New York Times* again took a sympathetic tone to the protestors; the coverage of the sit-ins stated that the "Negroes sat down and quietly requested service," while the assailants were characterized as "juvenile delinquents."²⁹ It is interesting to note that African-American violence broke out at the sit-in demonstrations in Knoxville, Tennessee; "Negro youth were running in a gang knocking white people off the sidewalks." The newspaper insisted "those arrested were not taking part in the sit-in demonstration"; again, sympathetic to the pastors' strategy.³⁰

Freedom Rides

CORE organized the Freedom Rides of 1961 to challenge segregation on interstate buses; putting both blacks and whites on the buses they traveled from Washington, D.C. to the south.³¹ When they got to Alabama they were attacked by angry whites; images of a burning Greyhound bus and hospitalized riders received extensive national coverage.³² However, the coverage did not lead to total public support for the event.³³ *Newsweek* established pastor King as the leader, even though he was not, and presented the riders as brave, but voiced sympathy for southern moderates.³⁴

²⁷ Larson, *Media*, 167; Macdonald, *Blacks*, 72; Bond, "Media," 26.

²⁸ Macdonald, *Blacks*, 72; Larson, *Media*, 168; Bond, "Media," 26.

²⁹ Sitton, "Negroes Press for Faster Desegregation," E3; "Rights in Conflict," E4; Bond, "Media," 30.

³⁰ Walker, "Media," 51; Bond, "Media," 30.

³¹ Larson, *Media*, 168-69; "Battle of the Buses," E1; Macdonald, *Blacks*, 72.

³² Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §161-63; Larson, *Media*, 168; "Battle of the Buses," E1; Macdonald, *Blacks*, 72.

³³ Larson, *Media*, 168; Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §161-63; "Battle of the Buses," E1; "Race Hatred Provoked," 32; Roden, "It Begins at Home," SM4.

³⁴ Larson, *Media*, 168; "Battle of the Buses," E1;

The *New York Times* wrote about the deeper issues of segregation that the Freedom Rides represented when they stated, “The struggle against segregation in this country covers a much broader area than that which the Freedom Rides are assailing.”³⁵ However, they did ask for restraint worrying that the Riders “may be overreaching themselves which could lead to the “extremists” overwhelming the “men of moderation on whom the real solution (for segregation) will ultimately depend”; echoing the thoughts of the African-American pastor.³⁶

Birmingham March/Children’s Crusade

Images of fire hoses and attack dogs being turned on young African-American demonstrators received extensive nationally and internationally television coverage.³⁷ Television stations like NBC had no commercial breaks and dedicated its entire evening schedule to the crisis facing the United States in 1963; it was an unprecedented act of programming, *Variety* called it “history-in-the-making.”³⁸ At a moment when Americans sought answers to civil rights problems the television showed southern leaders offering solutions that distorted the realities of the time, calling it outside and local “agitators” tied to international communism.³⁹ In response to the Children’s Crusade newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* called it the “outrage in Alabama” and a “national disgrace” that police dogs and fire hoses are used to subdue school children and teenagers.⁴⁰

March on Washington

³⁵ “The Inescapable Obligation,” E8; “Battle of the Buses,” E1; Roden, “It Begins at Home,” SM4.

³⁶ “The Inescapable Obligation,” E8; “Battle of the Buses,” E1; Roden, “It Begins at Home,” SM4.

³⁷ Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §161-63; Larson, *Media*, 170.

³⁸ Macdonald, *Media*, 99; Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §161-63.

³⁹ Macdonald, *Media*, 99; “The Nation: For Negro Votes,” E1.

⁴⁰ Ramsey, “Letters to the Times: Using Children in Alabama,” 32; Rodgers, “Letters to the Editor: Big Brother,” A12.

The March of 28 August 1963, advocating a voting rights bill was rendered more significant because television made it a national manifestation.⁴¹ Coverage of the event was expansive by 1960s standards; the *New York Times* stated that the coverage “rivalled that given the astronaut launchings.”⁴² The viewer saw the handiwork of the African-American pastor; a consensus among the generations of African-American leaders, all lending support to social change through nonviolent protest and Christian love.⁴³ *The New York Times* reported, “his dream so stirringly recited at the Lincoln Memorial, was the oldest and noblest of man’s dreams, the dream of universal brother/sisterhood among the children of God.”⁴⁴ This sentiment showed that the shared humanity the pastors’ were fighting for was beginning to emerge.

Selma March

The march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama was part of an effort to draw the nations’ attention to the need for federal intervention to guarantee voting rights to African-Americans; the day became known as “Bloody Sunday” because of the violent response of local officials to the march.⁴⁵ The goal of the action was clear; the violence used against the protesters was dramatic and got extensive television coverage. Rep. John Lewis, an activist at the time was beaten unconscious by the police; Lewis stated that, “the movement owes a depth of gratitude to television for helping pass civil rights legislation.”⁴⁶ Again, the newspapers were supportive echoing the tone of the movement in its description of the marchers; when they were faced by the “intransigent Sheriff James Clark...the Negroes would chant, sing and pray.”⁴⁷

⁴¹ Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §165; Larson, *Media*, 171; Macdonald, *Media*, 99.

⁴² Larson, *Media*, 171; Macdonald, *Media*, 99.

⁴³ Macdonald, *Media*, 99.

⁴⁴ “Martin Luther King Jr.,” A12.

⁴⁵ Larson, *Media*, 172; Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §167-68.

⁴⁶ Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §167-68; Larson, *Media*, 173.

⁴⁷ “The Nation: Battle of Selma,” E2; “The Nation: For Negro Votes,” E1.

By this time in the movement there was a noticeable phenomena; newspapers were usually happy to promote the nonviolent struggle associated with the respectable and responsible Martin King and did not want to promote what they considered more militant, potentially violent, leadership in Black Nationalist organizations.⁴⁸ Therefore they usually misrepresented the extent and nature of African-American violence in the movement.⁴⁹ Often elements of the American press both African-American and white, conservative and liberal, northern and southern seemed inclined to ignore, downplay or de-politicize incidents of African-American violence and inflammatory rhetoric in the civil rights protest; or at least strove to dissociate such phenomena from the mainstream movement.⁵⁰

Mrs. Annie Lee Cooper, upset about the rough treatment Sheriff Jim Clark meted out on the peaceful protestors, approached Sheriff Clark and “managed to send (him) reeling with a powerful punch to the head”; Clark and two deputies retaliated and clubbed Mrs. Cooper.⁵¹ The newspaper coverage of the Selma protest presented this incident in a most sympathetic way downplaying Mrs. Cooper’s initial assault and focusing instead on Clark’s excessive use of force; accompanying the article with pictures of Mrs. Cooper being pinned down by deputies while Sheriff Clark wielded a night stick.⁵² *The New York Times* wrote “she put up quite a battle as the officers seized her and threw her to the ground (Sheriff Clark) then brought the billy club down on her head with a whack that was heard throughout the crowd.”⁵³ *The Washington Post* wrote a similar story subtly casting doubt on Clark's claim that he was responding to an assault not initiating one.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Walker, “Media,” 52; Bond, “Media,” 22.

⁴⁹ Walker, “Media,” 48; Bond, “Media,” 22;

⁵⁰ Walker, “Media,” 48; Bond, “Media,” 30.

⁵¹ Walker, “Media,” 55-56.

⁵² Walker, “Media,” 55-56.

⁵³ Walker, “Media,” 56.

⁵⁴ Walker, “Media,” 56.

Summary

Although some coverage ignored, criticized and even demonized protestors, overall the media served as an ally and tool of the African-American pastor.⁵⁵ The media gave the movement extensive favorable coverage which resulted in mobilizing white public opinion and policy makers in congress and the white house.⁵⁶ Journalist and observers have proudly asserted that reporters at the time sided with the movement explicitly in their coverage.⁵⁷ William Drummond a newspaper reporter in Kentucky during the 1960s claims to have “first hand experience of how civil rights workers and newsmen thought they were in it together.”⁵⁸ This may be due to the fact that white reporters were often greeted with signs that read “no dogs, niggers or reporters allowed.” They were assaulted by white mobs while covering events and accused of being propagandist by southern politicians and police.⁵⁹

Television gets most of the credit for bringing images of injustice into people’s living rooms.⁶⁰ Roger Streitmatter states this position by covering the movement’s various events television news awakened people throughout the nation to the realities of African-American oppression in the south.

By pushing those realities into the face of the American people television news propelled the civil rights movement into the American consciousness and onto the national agenda. When those images became imbedded into the nation’s consciousness, public opinion suddenly galvanized in support of the civil rights movement.⁶¹

The movement’s success is credited to the African-American pastors’ strategy of provoking a violent response from white segregationist for the entire world to see. Streitmatter states,

⁵⁵ Bond, “Media,” 30; Larson, *Media*, 152; Walker, “Media,” 48.

⁵⁶ Larson, *Media*, 152. Walker, “Media,” 48; Bond, “Media,” 22.

⁵⁷ Larson, *Media*, 153; Macdonald, *Blacks*, 99; Walker, “Media,” 48; Bond, “Media,” 30.

⁵⁸ Bond, “Media,” 25; Larson, *Media*, 153; Walker, “Media,” 48.

⁵⁹ Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §157; Larson, *Media*, 155.

⁶⁰ Bond, “Media,” 26; Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §169-70; Larson, *Media*, 153.

⁶¹ Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §157; Larson, *Media*, 153.

the stream of violent scenes from the front lines of the American civil rights movement during the 1960s freedom marchers being attacked by fire hoses, snarling police dogs, and “Bull Connor’s cattle prods aroused the long dormant conscience of whites and mobilized mass support for the most far reaching civil rights legislation in the nation’s history.”⁶²

National polls at the time showed increasing public interest in the movement especially at critical points; in 1956 after the Montgomery bus boycott, in 1957 after the Little Rock Arkansas school desegregation and substantially in 1963 after the March on Washington. The Birmingham “Children’s Crusade” campaign is credited with influencing the Kennedy administration; the television coverage was said to have moved the president to propose civil rights legislation when he had been reluctant to do so before.⁶³ There was particular concern with how it was viewed overseas; African Heads of State discussed breaking relations with the United States and the Soviets showed extensive images from Birmingham to illustrate American hypocrisy.⁶⁴ The Selma march is also credited in moving L.B. Johnson to pass the voting rights act.⁶⁵

⁶² Larson, *Media*, 152; Macdonald, *Blacks*, 99; Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §157.

⁶³ Bond, “Media,” 30; Larson, *Media*, 154.

⁶⁴ Larson, *Media*, 154-55.

⁶⁵ Streitmatter, *Mightier*, §167-68; Larson, *Media*, 155.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has demonstrated how the African-American pastor's role has been central to the community and how that role has been fluid and adaptive to respond to the adversity and changes within the community and culture. It also confirms the conclusions of the great African-American scholar and civil rights pioneer W.E.B Dubois who once stated the African-American pastor is the "most unique personality developed by black on American soil."¹

African-American Church Priest, Preacher and Pastor

Born of need, nurtured in protest, with hope as its foundation, the African-American church served to insulate the slave/African-American from the horrors of slavery, segregation and discrimination.² Its role evolved from simply salving the soul, to being an instrument of protest and a bastion of future hope; it was the first African-American institution built on American soil.³ The African-American church, community and its architect were indivisible; it is difficult to say whether the pastor was a physical manifestation of the church-community or if the church-community were an extension of the pastor.⁴ His power and authority are not only unchallenged but supported by the church; this is due in part to the phenomena in the African-American social construct where the community is greater than the individual.⁵ He was the undisputed authority in all aspects of African-American life in this world and the next, but his job was a difficult one.⁶

¹ Hicks, *Black Preacher*, 7; Mays and Nicholson, *Negro's*, 38

² Frazier, *Negro Church*, 24-25; Lincoln, *Black Church*, 56.

³ Ruether, *Liberation*, 127; Frazier, *Negro Church*, 35.

⁴ Frazier, *Negro Church*, 17;

⁵ Rawick, "From Sun Up," 38.

⁶ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 12-13.

The African-American pastor would lament, “how can we affirm God’s existence and believe that he permits slavery?”⁷ It was the contradiction which disturbed the very “soul” of the pastor. Belief in God was not easy for them; it was an awesome experience, burdened with responsibility.⁸ Daniel A. Payne an A.M.E. bishop put it this way,

sometimes it seemed as though some wild beast had plunged his fangs into my heart and was squeezing out its life-blood. Then I began to question the existence of God, and to say, ‘if he does exist, is he just? If so, why does he suffer one race to oppress and enslave another, to rob them by unrighteous enactments of (the) rights which they hold most dear and sacred?’⁹

Throughout it all the pastor would preach love of self and, although loathing his actions, he would instill in African-Americans the remembrance of the sister/brotherhood they shared with their oppressor; they would put their lives on the line in hopes of securing both.¹⁰

Post-Civil War

After a brief period of emancipation and reconstruction the Jim Crow structure had devastating effects compared to slavery; in slavery one knows what the odds are but in a society that pronounced a person free but made them behave as a slave sapped all of the strength and will power from the would-be rebel.¹¹ The African-American church gradually became an instrument of escape instead of an instrument of protest.¹² It was a place African-Americans were “safe” from the new racist structure that replaced slavery.¹³

The “revolution of expectation” would affirm the aphorism that “one of the persistent delusions of the human mind is the feeling that conditions which came into being very recently

⁷ Cone *Black Theology*, 99.

⁸ Cone *Black Theology*, 99.

⁹ Cone *Black Theology*, 99.

¹⁰ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 79-80; Manis, *Fire*, 124.

¹¹ Cone *Black Theology*, 104.

¹² Cone *Black Theology*, 104.

¹³ Cone *Black Theology*, 104.

have existed for centuries.”¹⁴ It would see that over time a civil rights platform that was censured for its militancy would later be condemned for its gradualism.¹⁵ African-American religious intellectuals like Mays, Kelsey and Thurmond created an insurgent militant clergy ready to pick up the torch of protest and human freedom lain down by the good intentions of the post-reconstructive pastor.¹⁶ They in turn created a new African-American, one that was unafraid of physical economic or social reprisals for asking to be a full member of American society; they were willing to put their lives on the line for a realized eschatology.¹⁷ After a period of apostasy, where the role of salver outweighed that of protest and freedom seeking, the African-American pastor would reassert their authority and be the orchestrator of the civil rights movement; setting the tone, structure and strategy that was accepted by the white media and embraced by their white moderate brothers and sisters.¹⁸

Strategy of Nonviolence

Jesus recognized that the Old Testament Jews could either resist or acquiesce to Roman oppression.¹⁹ Non-resistance would lead the disadvantaged “to assimilate the culture and the social behaviour patterns of the dominant group.”²⁰ In the case of African-Americans, it would be to accept inferior status, socially, economically and politically; resistance was the only alternative, but what form would it take?²¹ Violence should be eschewed because it is counter productive; while it released tension and freed the oppressed from a disintegrating sense of complete impotency and helplessness, injury and destruction were its only products.²²

¹⁴ Luccock, “Jim Crow,” 864.

¹⁵ Meier and Rudwick, *Plantation*, 252.

¹⁶ Dickerson, “African-American,” 221.

¹⁷ Dickerson, “African-American,” 224-25.

¹⁸ Walker, “Disunity,” 242; Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology*, 17, 38.

¹⁹ Dickerson, “African-American,” 232.

²⁰ Dickerson, “African-American,” 232.

²¹ Dickerson, “African-American,” 232.

²² Dickerson, “African-American,” 232.

Nonviolent direct-action married to grassroots mobilization layered on a foundation of Christian love was the praxis of the revolution.²³ The civil rights movement was the prefect example of fundamental Christian ethics being put into practice. Their strategy of retuning love for hate and nonviolent response in the face of indescribable violence was directed essentially at white Christians.²⁴

The African-American pastor was instrumental in the success of the civil rights movement.²⁵ Without them setting its tone and fostering an adherence to nonviolence it would have been a revolution like many others; hateful, bloody with great loss of life and long lasting recriminations.²⁶ Using the concept of “the kingdom of God is in us” the African-American pastor used an approach that had filled Jesus and his followers with a sense of well being that protected them from the fear, despair, and insecurities that oppressive rulers could stir in their victims.²⁷ This sense of God with us allowed the oppressed to love their enemies and to struggle for social change without moral damage to themselves or injury to their opponent; nonviolence was a superior approach because ultimately it was “redemptive.”²⁸

In the End

The indicator species is a scientific term used to describe an organism whose presence either denotes a healthy ecosystem or one that is in decline.²⁹ The African-American church plays this role in American society. As long as it is still a relevant part of the African-American culture and performs the same task it did during its birth, it will be an indicator of true level of

²³ Dickerson, “African-American,” 233.

²⁴ Lincoln, *Black Church*, 118.

²⁵ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 197.

²⁶ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 197.

²⁷ Dickerson, “African-American,” 232.

²⁸ Dickerson, “African-American,” 232.

²⁹ Klinka, *Indicator*, §10-12; Terrell, *Water*, §33.

integration in the United States.³⁰ Its analogue would be baseball's Negro Leagues, which chronicled the integration of baseball in America.³¹ As the Major leagues reached full integration the need for a "separate but equal" league was lost and the Negro Leagues vanished.³² It is only when African-Americans do not feel that their only respite from the vicissitudes of white society is the soft arms of the African-American church; only when they can seek redress for ills and acquire social, political and economic power through other means will there be a change in the role and strength of the African-American church.³³

The African-American pastor orchestrated the creation of the church, shepherded it through all the eschatological and ideological changes, overcame a state of apostasy then galvanized all the different civil rights factions under one umbrella; the pastor led them from slaves with no rights to African-American citizens with full rights.³⁴ Such a person could only be viewed in a reverential light by the African-American community, he/she is a part of them and in him/her they place their trust, hopes and dreams.³⁵ Of this unique personality W.E.B Dubois goes on to say they are "leader, politician, an orator, a "boss", and intriguer, an idealist; by contrast in the white community there has been great institutional specialization, more differentiated leadership and the functions of the church have been more strictly of a religious nature.³⁶

The African-American pastor's tone and direction in the civil rights movement is not new; it was the same tone the slave-preacher used when they could have sent the slaves of the "invisible institution" out to kill their masters but chose not to because they believed in the path of Jesus; it is the same nonviolent protest Richard Allen had when he and other African-

³⁰ Heaphy, *Negro*, §5-6; Evans, "Urbanization," 805.

³¹ Heaphy, *Negro*, §5-6.

³² Heaphy, *Negro*, §5-6.

³³ Savage, *Spirit*, §237; Evans, "Urbanization," 805.

³⁴ Madkins, "Leadership Crisis," 102-3; Pinn and Pinn, *Black Church*, §147; Warton, "Race," 373; Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 116; Killian and Smith, "Negro," 335.

³⁵ Madkins, "Leadership Crisis," 102-3; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 18, 92-93; Evans, "Urbanization," 806.

³⁶ Glenn, "Negro," 627; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 18, 92-93; Evans, "Urbanization," 806.

Americans divorced themselves from the Methodist church due to its segregation rules; it is the same tone that King, Abernathy and Shuttlesworth and all the unsung pastors used to promote brother/sisterhood, reconciliation and redemption.³⁷ The pastor allowed the movement to be a revolution that reaffirms our shared humanity not just for the United States but the world.³⁸

Recommendations for Further Research

Black theology would be codified in a document that was inserted into American society during a tumultuous period.³⁹ On 26 April 1969, Jim Foreman walked into the Riverside church interrupting the sermon and delivered the *Black Manifesto*.⁴⁰ It denounced American capitalism and imperialism and announced the intention of “building a socialist society inside the United States.”⁴¹ African-Americans would lead such a society concerning themselves with “the total humanity of the world.”⁴² African-Americans who supported capitalism were labeled “black power primps and fraudulent leaders that contributed to the continuous exploitation of black people all around the world.”⁴³

Although the environment around them had continued to change the pastor had shown that over time they had done two things: one, maintained the gospel of love, comforted and sought greater freedoms for their flock within the greater context of a sister/brotherhood of humanity; two, taken new ideologies and folded them into congruency with the biblical message.⁴⁴ How has the African-American pastor dealt with new ideologies, the “revolution of expectations” and the secularization of the church since the death of Martin Luther King and the end of the civil rights movement of the 1960s; is there still a civil rights movement and if so

³⁷ Hamilton, *Black Preacher*, 49; Wilmore, *Black Religion*, 68-69.

³⁸ Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 197.

³⁹ Lincoln, *Black Church*, 125.

⁴⁰ Abernathy, “A Black Preacher,” 1064.

⁴¹ Lincoln, *Black Church*, 131.

⁴² Lincoln, *Black Church*, 131.

⁴³ Lincoln, *Black Church*, 131.

⁴⁴ Dickerson, “African-American,” 229; Pettigrew, “Actual Gains,” 326; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 197.

what form has it taken and is the pastor still its undisputed leader?

APPENDIX A

- 1909 Establishment of the NAACP
- 1940 A. Philip Randolph – Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, March on Washington
- 1941 Establishment of CORE
- 1947 CORE – Freedom Rides (Virginia)
- 1955-56 Rosa Parks Arrested for sitting in the white section of the bus
NAACP/Martin King leader of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA)
Fred Shuttlesworth leader of Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR)
Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott
Birmingham, Alabama bus protest
- 1957 SCLC formed, King named president
Desegregation of Central High School Little Rock, Arkansas
- 1960 SNCC – Lunch counter (student) sit-ins
- 1961 CORE Freedom Rides (Deep South)
- 1963 Failure in Albany, Georgia
Success in Birmingham with Shuttlesworth versus “Bull” Connor
Letter from Birmingham Jail
Student demonstrations “Children’s Crusade”
President J.F. Kennedy to draft Civil Rights Act
President J.F. Kennedy and NAACP’s Medger Evers assassinated
March on Washington
- 1964 Bombing of Sixteen Street Baptist Church
Civil Rights Act signed into law
Freedom Summer
- 1965 Selma, Alabama “March for Voters Rights”
Voting Rights Act enacted by President L.B. Johnson
- 1966 James Meredith wounded by sniper in Mississippi “March Against Fear”,
CORE, SCLC, SNCC continue March
Black Power
NCNC formed to address black power in light of the gospel
- 1968 MLK assassinated⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Pinn and Pinn, *Black Church*, 147; Clayborne, *Autobiography*, 376-88; Dillman, Review of *Becoming King*, 246; Manis, *Fire*, xvi-xvii.

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