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**UTOPIA PARK, UTOPIAN CHURCH: JAMES K. HUMPHREY AND
THE EMERGENCE OF THE SABBATH-DAY ADVENTISTS**

by

Romauld C. Jones

**A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of History**

**Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
August 2001**

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WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
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EMERGENCE OF THE SABBATH-DAY ADVENTISTS

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UTOPIA PARK, UTOPIAN CHURCH: JAMES K. HUMPHREY AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE SABBATH-DAY ADVENTISTS

Romauld C. Jones, Ph. D.

Western Michigan University, 2001

James K. Humphrey was a Baptist minister who joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church shortly after migrating to the United States from Jamaica at the turn of the twentieth century. A leader of uncommon skill and charisma, Humphrey ministered in Harlem, New York, during the period the area became the Black capital of the United States, leading his congregation to a position of primacy in the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Yet Humphrey believed that the African American experience in Adventism was one of disenfranchisement, a problem he attempted to ameliorate with the establishment of the Utopia Park Benevolent Association. When Humphrey refused to abort or alter his plans at the request of Seventh-day Adventist church leaders, his credentials were revoked and his congregation expelled from the denomination. Subsequently, Humphrey established an independent Black religious organization, the United Sabbath-Day Adventists.

This study focuses on the ministerial tenure of James K. Humphrey, as a Seventh-day Adventist and later as a Sabbath-Day Adventist pastor. The study: (a) explores Humphrey's social and political world, (b) examines West Indian-American relations in Harlem during the early twentieth century, (c) traces the African American experience in the Seventh-day Adventist church up to 1930, (d) investigates the Utopia Park affair, and (e) surveys the church history of the Sabbath-Day Adventists both during and after the leadership of Humphrey. Cultural history

and ethnohistory, as well as biography and oral history, are utilized to place Humphrey in his political and social context, which is early twentieth century Black New York in general, and Harlem in particular.

Humphrey's break with the Seventh-day Adventist church provides clues to the state of African Americans in the denomination at that time, and has had an impact on Black-White relationships in the organization ever since. It set the stage for the creation of the separate administrative structure for African Americans in the Seventh-day Adventist church that was established in 1945. The history of the United Sabbath-Day Adventists also demonstrates the struggles of small, independent Black congregations in the urban community during the twentieth century.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The history of people of African descent in the New World is one of struggle for freedom, empowerment and self-determination. Their humanity initially challenged by European traders who viewed them as heathenistic and a notch or two above animals in terms of their physiognomy, theirs was an unending quest to prove their humanity and to claim their equality. In the course of their sojourn in Western society, people of African descent have been subjected to “scientific” experiments that sought to ascertain their physical, moral and intellectual constitution.¹ Yet what African Americans² found particularly disturbing was the treatment they received at the hands

¹For an impartial account of the work of the United States Sanitation Commission, impaneled on June 13, 1861, by President Abraham Lincoln to conduct scientific research on the physical, mental and moral powers of people of African descent, see John S. Haller, Jr., *Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority, 1850—1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 19–34.

²The names and terms with which people of African descent living in North America have resonated, or by which they have preferred to be called, have changed over the years. Negro, Afro-American, Colored, Black, African-American, and African American have all been used. Today, the preferred term is African American, with or without the hyphen. In the first half of the twentieth century, the period that is the focus of this study, Negro was the term in vogue. Yet in this study I have elected to use the term African American and Black, at times using them interchangeably. Of course, direct quotes shall reflect the term used by the source being referenced. Not surprisingly, some West Indians are ambivalent about the term African American, believing that it excludes them. Those who subscribe to this view see themselves as being Afro-Caribbean.

of White³ Christians, who, ostensibly, had introduced them to Christianity. Refusing to accept their discriminatory practices, some of these Blacks left predominantly White denominations and founded their own independent religious organizations.

This study is the account of one such religious group. It is the portrayal of how the United Sabbath-Day Adventists came into existence, and of its founding pastor, James Kemuel Humphrey, a Jamaican expatriate who pastored in Harlem during the first half of the twentieth century. By no means institutional history, it is an account of Humphrey's tenure as a Seventh-day Adventist minister and a Sabbath-Day Adventist religious leader, and of the events and conditions that shaped his ministry. It recounts the circumstances that led to his break with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, surveys the history of the independent religious organization Humphrey established and led for the first twenty years of its existence, and assesses his role and impact as a bold agent of change.

Humphrey was a Baptist minister when he was introduced to the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church by an Adventist layman shortly after arriving from Jamaica as the twentieth century dawned. At that time, a stream of Blacks were beginning to flood the urban communities of the North from the South and the Caribbean, making the period one of change and volatility. One area that Blacks settled in was the Harlem section of the borough of Manhattan in New York

³ According to *The Chicago Manual of Style*, "the term *Black* is now often capitalized as the widely accepted name of the dark-skinned group or groups of people originating in Africa. . . . Similarly, *White* is often capitalized as the preferred term for light-skinned people, for some reason long known as Caucasians." See *The Chicago Manual of Style*, Fourteenth Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 247. In this study, I shall capitalize the words *Black* and *White*, doing so even when they are used as adjectives as in the case of Italian, German, Irish, Jewish, etc.

City, and during the 1920s it was said that Harlem was in vogue. By the end of the decade Harlem was the “Black capital of the world” and home to most New York City Black organizations, as well as its Black social and political leaders. Yet, in spite of the egalitarian claims of the Progressivism⁴ that characterized the first two decades of the twentieth century, African Americans remained locked in a struggle for their civil rights. Amidst calls from political leaders for restrictive measures to deal with the burgeoning urban Black population, African Americans fought to achieve legitimacy and relevancy in the broader community.

A charismatic leader of uncommon administrative and organizational abilities, Humphrey began pastoring for the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists shortly after becoming a Seventh-day Adventist. He quickly rose through the pastoral ministry ranks of the organization, serving on administrative committees at both the local and national levels. By 1920, First Harlem SDA Church, which he was serving as pastor, was the largest church in the Greater New York Conference, and in 1924 it spawned another congregation in Harlem. By the late 1920s, Humphrey had also been instrumental in establishing churches in Mt. Vernon, Brooklyn, and Jamaica, New York.

⁴ Among the useful works of the Progressive era are Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), John W. Chambers, *The Tyranny of Change: America in the Progressive Era, 1900—1917* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980); Robert M. Cruden, *Ministers of Reform: The Progressives' Achievement in American Civilization, 1889—1920* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); John Milton Cooper, *Pivotal Decades: The United States, 1900—20* (New York: Columbia, 1990); Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900—1916* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963). The lives and policies of the two American presidents who dominated the era are adequately covered in John Milton Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

The gospel Humphrey preached was social, as well as theological.⁵ He wanted Blacks to be empowered economically and spiritually. As such, he began to promote a program he thought would lead to greater self-determination for Blacks. Yet his Utopia Park Benevolent Association project ran afoul of Seventh-day Adventist denominational policies, and when Humphrey refused to alter his plans at the request of church leaders, he was defrocked and his Harlem congregation, which almost unanimously stood in solidarity with him, expelled from the denomination. Subsequently, Humphrey established an independent Black religious organization, the United Sabbath-Day Adventists, taking most of his former members with him.

No research on independent Black Seventh-day Adventist churches has been attempted to date, and James K. Humphrey and the United Sabbath-Day Adventists are spoken of with disdain in some Seventh-day Adventist circles. Humphrey is considered a recalcitrant who used his charisma and leadership skills to exploit gullible African Americans during a difficult period in this nation's history. In other spheres, Humphrey is an unknown commodity, making his rescue from anonymity a critical matter.

Yet James K. Humphrey's break with the Seventh-day Adventist Church starkly reveals the tenuous state of African Americans in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in the early twentieth century, and set the stage for the creation of the separate administrative structure for Blacks known as "Regional Conferences" that

⁵ James Cone says that their African heritage and existential situation in America caused Black clergy to stop short of bifurcating the material and spiritual needs of their people. See James H. Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 92.

was established by the denomination in 1945. To be sure, the independent Adventist group Humphrey established never rivaled the congregation he left in terms of membership or influence in the Harlem community. Yet Humphrey's split with the institutional Seventh-day Adventist Church had a fundamentally significant impact on Black-White relations within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and has shaped the course of Black-White working relationships in the denomination since. African American Seventh-day Adventists owe much to James K. Humphrey and the United Sabbath-Day Adventists.

In seeking to fulfill the objectives of this study, cultural history and ethnohistory will be utilized as methodologies. Twentieth century American history, as well as twentieth century African American history and biography, will also be engaged. James K. Humphrey and the United Sabbath-Day Adventists will be placed in their political and social context, which is twentieth century Black New York.

In Chapter II, an overview of early twentieth century Harlem is given. Harlem was in vogue then, offering newly-arrived Blacks from the South and the West Indies a refuge from the strange, alien conditions they encountered in New York City. Yet Harlem did not become an African American community in a vacuum, but in the context of unique developments in patterns of race relations in the United States in the early twentieth century. More important, beneath the veneer of "good times" and optimism that characterized early twentieth-century Harlem were disturbing realities that the Great Depression revealed.

The West Indian community in Harlem is surveyed in Chapter III. A Jamaican expatriate, Humphrey was part of a generation of ambitious West Indian men and women who streamed into Harlem until 1924, when a change in the immigration laws

of the United States slowed their coming. The myth of West Indian superiority is investigated. Especially significant is the foundation of the myth. Issues examined in this chapter include whether West Indian immigrants were the “cream of the crop,” and what the radicalness of the migration experience suggest about the West Indians who came to America. The interactions between West Indian and indigenous African Americans are analyzed, showing that West Indians and American Blacks, though they did exist in a state of tension, contributed to each other’s growth and progress in the United States. West Indians were victims of warring impulses, with one pulling them towards a larger Anglo-American culture and one towards a unique West Indian identity.

In Chapter IV, the African American experience in the Seventh-day Adventist church is traced. Like most Christian organizations, Seventh-day Adventists espouse a theological doctrine of community and inclusion. The church places a premium on the worth and dignity of all people, whom Adventists believe were created in the image of God.⁶ Yet from its inception the denomination has struggled with the issue as it relates to people of African descent, and on occasion has reflected the contradictory racial tendencies and practices of the American society in which it was born and weaned.

An examination of the Utopia Park project is undertaken in Chapter V. Utopia Park was the spark that led to Humphrey’s break with the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the establishment of the Sabbath-Day Adventists. For

⁶ See *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), 74.

Humphrey, Utopia Park was an attempt to achieve self-determination for Blacks in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which, he believed, mirrored that of European peoples of the same period. World War I had erupted when such ethnic groups as the Czechoslovakians demanded their right to self-determination, a move that incurred the wrath of Germany, and people of African descent had fought in the war, trying to preserve the world from tyrants and imperialists. Yet when African Americans tried to obtain their own freedom and right to self-determination after the war, they were condemned as anarchists.

In Chapter VI, the church history of the United Sabbath-Day Adventists is traced. In it, an oral history retrospective of James K. Humphrey is given, the church planting activities of the infant organization is reviewed, its early struggles are surveyed, and the General Conference Sessions the denomination conducted are investigated. Also, a comparative analysis of the Seventh-day Adventists and Sabbath-Day Adventists is conducted. The study concludes with a review of the attempts made to reconcile the Sabbath-Day Adventists with the Seventh-day Adventists, an examination of the social and religious context in which the Sabbath-Day Adventist church was born and grew, and an evaluation of the Sabbath-Day Adventists.

CHAPTER II

THE SOCIAL WORLD OF JAMES K. HUMPHREY

The first three decades of the twentieth century constituted a critical period in the history of people of African descent in the United States. It was an era that saw thousands of African Americans abandon the South for the urban centers of the North because of Jim Crow practices that made a mockery of their civil liberties. After World War I, America was a bonanza of optimism and hope, the feeling of euphoria permeating all of its racial, ethnic and socio-economic groups. For some American Blacks, the war had provided opportunities for economic enhancement, as the wartime economy required labor previously provided by European immigrants. The result of impatience with Southern racism and new opportunities opened by the war effort was a wave of Black migration, with New York City receiving a significant share of the immigrants in the 1920s.

Of the first three decades of the twentieth century, the 1920s is by far the most celebrated.¹ Today the 1920s are referred to by many as the “Roaring Twenties,” a period of unparalleled and unprecedented fun and frivolity in New York City, and it is said that Harlem then was in vogue. Harlem was the quintessential American playground, providing New York City residents and all takers with arts and

¹For a trenchant treatment of the period, see Geoffrey Perrett, *America in the Twenties* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982). See also, William Leutenberg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914–1932*, 2nd Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

entertainment. It was a city within a city, a safe haven for Blacks from the South and the West Indies, the center of empowerment and self-actualization in a desert of disenfranchisement and social and economic oppression. Yet Harlem during the 1920s was not without irony and contradiction. Craftily hidden beneath the veneer of “good times” were stresses and tensions that were glaringly exposed once the Depression set in at the end of the decade.

My goal in the chapter is to present a picture of how Harlem during this period appeared to literate Blacks. What follows is not a modern scholarly consensus or debate of early twentieth-century Harlem, but an evocation of Harlem in the minds of contemporary people, offered, for the most part, without judgment. In other words, this is how Harlem seemed to this generation.

Black Migration Into New York, 1900–1930

The first person of African descent to take up residence in what is New York City today was Jan Rodriguez, a free Black sailor who in 1613 began to trade with the Native Americans. A decade later, eleven Blacks were living in a row of clay houses at the southern tip of Manhattan Island in the area that is known today as the Bowery. By 1700, 3,000 Blacks were living in Manhattan, and by 1850, the year the Fugitive Act became law, 14,000 Blacks were calling New York City home. That figure would swell to 60,000 by 1900, with 5,000 of them jammed into one block on West 53rd Street. In that year racial tensions exploded as Whites, openly resentful of

the burgeoning Black population, faced off the newly arrived Blacks in the city.⁸

Harlem, New York, was not always the undisputed Black capital of the United States. Prior to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Harlem had been an isolated village at the northern tip of Manhattan island inhabited by an overwhelming number of poor immigrants, many of whom were squatters. As the twentieth century dawned, New York City experienced an urban revolution marked by improvements in transportation, communication, sanitation, and, concomitantly, a population explosion that sent residents north in search of affordable housing. Land speculators capitalized in Harlem, and by the turn of the century a frantic building activity resulted in rows and rows of brownstones and luxurious apartment houses that were inhabited, for the most part, by middle-class Whites. Yet the glut of houses led, inevitably, to an alarming number of vacancies and a deflated real estate market that threatened New York with financial ruin. Unwilling to face financial catastrophe, some White landlords began renting to Blacks at exorbitant, but traditionally, high prices. Thus began the mass movement of Blacks to Harlem.⁹

World War I in part accounted for the deluge of Blacks from the South to the North. Organized labor exploited the shortage of workers in the North to the hilt, stopping short of no legitimate means to lure Blacks from their rural surroundings in the South. Not a few Blacks left for the North with all their belongings. In one day 2,500 of them left one Southern city with every thing they owned packed into the

⁸Display, Schomburg Library, New York City, Spring, 2000; Gilbert Osofky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963), 11–16.

⁹Osofky, 3–34; Jervis Anderson, *This Was Harlem: A Cultural Portrait, 1900–1950* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1981), 3–12.

three cars of a train.⁴

The overabundance of available housing units and lack of tenants was a godsend to the thousands of newly-arrived African American immigrants to New York City. One enterprising Black realtor who exploited the situation was Philip Payton, whose Afro-American Realty Company, founded in 1904, had a virtual monopoly on Black business. Payton envisioned Harlem as a place of cheaper rents and improved living conditions for Blacks. His financial prowess enabled countless Blacks to obtain in Harlem “better, cleaner, more modern, more airy, more sunny houses” than they had ever been able to procure and occupy in the city before. More than anyone else, Payton created Black Harlem, and it has been said that he did more for Black New Yorkers than any other person, Black or White.⁵

As the 1920s dawned, Harlem was still an overwhelmingly White community. In fact, the area around 125th Street would remain decidedly so until the middle of the decade.⁶ But the African American migration to New York City in general, and Harlem in particular, increased significantly during the 1920s, pushing the Black population upward. Between 1920 and 1930, Black migration to New York City jumped over 100 percent, as foreign-born as well as indigenous Blacks flocked to the

⁴James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1968), 151.

⁵Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, 147–148.

⁶Not surprisingly, the Harlem of today is not the Harlem of the 1920s. At first, Black Harlem ran from 135th Street to the south, to 145th Street to the north; and from Eight Avenue to the west, to the East River to the east. Few Blacks ventured beyond these boundaries at the start of the 1920s. Yet by the end of the decade Black Harlem had expanded to 110th Street to the south and 155th Street to the north, and from St. Nicholas Avenue to the west to the East River to the east.

city in search of the proverbial Promised Land. Most Harlemites during the period had at least one relative who was a newcomer to the area, and not a few of the old-timers provided temporary living quarters for the newly arrived.⁷

By 1925 Harlem had come to be viewed as another Statue of Liberty, and the migration of Blacks there was compared to the pushing of the American Western frontier. It was the thrust toward democracy of African Americans, who were grasping for their destiny without giving much heed to the rest of New York. Harlem was not then a slum or ghetto, but neither was it a resort or colony. A little of all, it was the capital of the Black race, culturally and spiritually to African Americans what Dublin was to the New Irish and Prague was to New Czechoslovakians.⁸ Atypical of many American cities, it was also unlike other Black enclaves in America in that it was not situated on the fringes of periphery of New York City. Rather, it was ensconced in the heart of the city, making it impossible for one to ignore it.⁹

Of telling significance is the fact that Blacks were only able to move into Harlem as Whites moved out. Thus, even as the Black population of Manhattan was climbing during the 1920s, the White population was declining. In fact, overall Manhattan's population dropped eighteen percent during the period. At the end of the decade Blacks constituted twelve percent of the borough's population, though

⁷Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census, 1930: Population* (Washington, D.C., 1933), II, 216–218; Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., *Against the Tide: An Autobiography* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1938), 70–71.

⁸Alain Locke, "Harlem," *Survey Graphic*, Vol. VI, No. 6, March 1925, 630.

⁹Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, 146.

just five percent of the city's population.¹⁰ Figures vary as to the number of Blacks who actually lived in Harlem during the "Gilded Age" of the 1920s, with estimates reaching as high as 250,000 by the end of the decade,¹¹ but one thing is sure, and that is that over sixty percent of Blacks then in Harlem had not been born in New York but in the South, giving the area a distinctly Southern ambiance and flavor. West Indians, too, were beginning to enter the area in appreciable numbers, making Harlem a veritable Black melting pot in which people who shared a common racial heritage but a diversity of cultural heritages were coming together for the first time in an urban environment. The influx of Blacks into Harlem continued unabated throughout the 1920s, and by the end of the decade Harlem was predominantly Black. By then every major Black organization of New York City was located in Harlem, as were, not surprisingly, all major Black churches, Black newspapers, and Black publications.

Harlem became the nerve center of the Black community, the Mecca of the African American. In Harlem the pulse of Black America could be felt, and Blacks there began to experience a "common consciousness" for the first time since being brought to the New World.¹² As such, Blacks from around the world wanted to see, if not live in, Harlem. In "City of Refuge," a short story by Rudolph Fisher, one of

¹⁰Bureau of the Census, *Negroes in the United States: 1920-1932* (Washington, D.C., 1935), 55.

¹¹This estimate breaks down the population as follows: 100,000 women, 90,000 men, and 60,000 children, living in 35,000 households. Frank Dolan, "Harlem, Race Goal, Land of Struggle," *Daily News*, Vol. 11, No. 112, Monday, November 4, 1929, 11.

¹²Alain Locke, *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1968), 7.

the “New Negroes” of the Harlem Renaissance, King Solomon Gillis, the story’s main character, emerges from the subway at the corner of 135th Street and Lenox Avenue exclaiming: “Done died and woke up in heaven.” Gillis was stunned by the sea of Black faces swirling around him. As he put it, there were “Negroes at every turn . . . black ones, brown ones, yellow ones, men standing idly on the curb, women, bundle-laden, trudging reluctantly homeward, children rattle trapping about the sidewalks.” Yet what really startled Gillis were the “cullud policemens” directing traffic, and to whom the occasional White person in sight paid full attention and obeyed.¹³

Gillis could have been the prototype of Langston Hughes, one of the key figures of the Harlem Renaissance. As a teenager spending the summer after his high school graduation in Mexico, where his father was living, Hughes incessantly dreamt of Harlem, for him the greatest city in the world, and the place he wanted to visit more than any European country. When Hughes moved to Harlem in 1921 as a nineteen-year-old freshman at Columbia University, it was still a racially-mixed community, though it had already earned the moniker “Negro Capital of the World.” Taking a room at the YMCA on 135th Street because of “overcrowding” at the Columbia dorm where he had been promised housing, Hughes was impressed and mesmerized by the glitter and glamour he saw. Seventh Avenue was Harlem’s Broadway. A wide, spacious promenade lined with theaters, churches, restaurants, stores, and apartment buildings, it was a majestic thoroughfare into which the Black

¹³Rudolph Fisher, “The City of Refuge” in *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968), 57–59.

population poured daily in search of business and pleasure. At 132nd Street and Seventh Avenue stood the Lafayette Theater, where Black plays were running and where Hughes himself would later present many of his poems, and at 129th Street and Seventh Avenue stood the Metropolitan Baptist and Salem Methodist Episcopal churches, two of Harlem's prestigious Black churches, facing each other like proud sentinels. Of particular interest and delight to Hughes was the building at the corner of 135th Street and Lenox Avenue that housed the Schomburg Collection of Negro Literature and History. This branch of the New York Public Library was a resource Hughes utilized throughout his long and distinguished writing career.¹⁴

The Harlem of the 1920s was not just a city within a city, but, more importantly, a community that offered sanctuary to an oppressed people, and acceptance and empowerment to those living on the margins of society. Thus, Paul Robeson, the college football hero who later became a singer of world renown, found that in Harlem he was readily accepted even as the United States government was putting a mechanism in place to banish him to anonymity. The beleaguered Robeson, whose older brother was pastor of a Harlem African Methodist Episcopal (AME) congregation and lived in Harlem too, felt "at home among my people" in Harlem, where he met and married his wife, and where his career as an artist began and flourished.¹⁵

¹⁴Langston Hughes, "My Early Days in Harlem," in *Harlem: A Community in Transition*, ed. John Henrik Clarke (New York: The Citadel Press, 1963), 62–63.

¹⁵Paul Robeson, *Here I Stand: An Autobiography* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 1–2.

Economic Conditions

Economically, the 1920s was the age of triumph for big business and the consolidation of industry and monopoly capitalism on a world wide scale. In the United States, the consolidation was facilitated by White capital and Black and immigrant labor, which, though obtained cheaply and en masse, was relatively efficient. In Harlem, the phenomenon constituted a sort of quasi-colonialism which was marked by labor difficulties and overt acts of racism and discrimination.

Of the 321 specific occupations listed by the Census of 1920, at least one Black in New York City was employed in 316 of them. Fifty or more Blacks were engaged in 175 of these occupations. Yet Blacks dominated in jobs that required strength and physical stamina more than intellectual and reasoning ability. As such, over 24,000 Black men, nearly half of all Black men working in New York City at the time, worked as porters, waiters, messengers, janitors, and chauffeurs.

African American men found employment as longshoremen more than at anything else, accounting for nine percent of Black men at work and fourteen percent of all longshoremen in the city. African American men rarely found employment in jobs that called for apprenticeship and contact with the White public in the capacity of salespeople. Lack of trust in the African American's competencies, widespread paranoia that Blacks stole and malingered, and outright discrimination all conspired against the advancement of Blacks in the workplace.¹⁶ Blacks found work as ticket choppers, but not as conductors; messengers to whom were entrusted thousands of

¹⁶Charles S. Johnson, "Black Workers and the City," in *Survey Graphic*, Vol. VI, No. 6, March 1925, 643.

dollars, but not as money changers; policemen, but not as firemen; deck hands, but not as sailors; linotype operators, but not as motion picture operators; glass annealers, but not as glass blowers; and porters in sleeping cars, but not as conductors. They were entrusted with goods to be delivered, but could not sell the goods.¹⁷

The situation was not much better with African American women, who found employment mainly as servants and laundresses. In 1925, sixty percent of all Black women working in New York City were employed in these two professions. Elsewhere, African American women worked as social workers, nurses, probation officers, investigators, police women, Big Sisters for the Children's Court, secretaries, and teachers. Approximately 300 Black women were teachers, a position that placed them in a position of community leadership.¹⁸ Yet Black women of the 1920s lived more than a divided life.¹⁹ As Black women they were a part of a twice-oppressed minority. Not surprisingly, the economic and social realities they encountered affected their emotional and mental states. In an attempt to deal creatively and meaningfully with the social and economic forces working against them in Harlem, Black women organized and ran a host of clubs and associations in their churches and elsewhere.

¹⁷Chester T. Crowell, "The World's Largest Negro City," *The Saturday Evening Post*, August 8, 1925, 93–94.

¹⁸Elise Johnson McDougald, "The Double Task: The Struggle of Negro Women for Sex and Race Emancipation," *Survey Graphic*, Vol. VI, No. 6, March 1925, 689–691.

¹⁹For an excellent analysis of how women attempted to reconcile their "divided" lives, see Rosalind Rosenberg, *Divided Lives: American Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992).

African Americans were employed in small numbers in occupations requiring unionization. Not all Blacks were opposed to unionization, as was commonly believed at the time. To be sure, the shorter tenure of Blacks with industrialization and their lack of exposure to the purpose and utility of unions did help to create a less than robust response to them. Up to that time personal loyalty was the hallmark of the African American's work ethic. Yet where unionization was not denied them, Blacks joined unions. Approximately 5,000 of the more than 5,300 longshoremen in New York City were unionized, over half of all Black carpenters and musicians were organized, and almost all of the 2,300 women garment workers were in the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. That African Americans dominated in lines of work that were not unionized, such as porters and servants, is what accounted for the majority of them not belonging to unions. Unionization notwithstanding, Blacks were still subjected to discriminatory practices on their jobs.²⁰

Despite the generally positive image Blacks had of Harlem during the 1920s, economic realities there were foreboding. In a ground-breaking study of 2400 African American families living in Harlem in the 1920s, Konrad Bercovici discovered that almost fifty percent who rented paid twice as much of their income on rent as Whites. Apartments for which Whites had paid \$40 went to Blacks for \$100 and up.²¹ Ostensibly, it was all a matter of supply and demand. Furthermore, twenty-five percent of Blacks had at least one boarder, and an undetermined number of

²⁰Charles S. Johnson, "Black Workers and the City," 719, 721.

²¹Konrad Bercovici, "The Black Blocks of Manhattan," *Harper's Magazine*, October 1924, 617.

apartments were so cramped that dwellers had to sleep in shifts.²² Many of the new arrivals to Harlem found temporary shelter at the Harlem Forum, which was almost always overcrowded with hungry, frightened, cold Blacks with hope in their eyes.²³ Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., the venerable senior minister of the landmark Abyssinian Baptist Church, addressed the “stiff economic conditions” permeating Harlem in the first sermon he preached in his new church building there, saying that economic hardship was the cause of many dishonest lives. He stressed the improbability and impossibility of anybody earning \$15 a week being able to pay rent of \$60 a month, saying that a poor widow with three children “looking up into her face crying for the necessities of life needs material help more than she needs spiritual comfort.”²⁴

Exorbitant rents and unscrupulous landlords conspired to create unsavory and unsanitary living conditions for the majority of Harlem’s residents. Landlords were known to refuse to supply heat and hot water to tenants so that, frustrated, the tenants would move out, thereby giving the landlords an opportunity to increase rents.²⁵ Exacerbating matters was the fact that the majority of apartment buildings and brownstones housing the African American population had been built for people with family structures and lifestyles fundamentally different from those of the new inhabitants. Black Harlemites were given to dividing up their apartments into as many

²²“Twenty-four Hundred Negro Families in Harlem: An Interpretation of Living Conditions of Small Wage Earners” (New York: Urban League, 1927), 23.

²³Bercovici, 623.

²⁴*The New York Amsterdam News*, Wednesday, February 28, 1923, 9.

²⁵*The New York Amsterdam News*, Vol. XVII, No. 20, May 16, 1923, 1.

different spaces as possible, subletting the rooms to generate income to pay the rent. In the process, they made lodging and boarding legendary in 1920s Harlem.

Harlemites bemoaned the fact that Blacks in Harlem did not own much in the way of business enterprises. Langston Hughes, for example, decried having to go downtown to have his works published. He saw downtown as White and uptown as Black, with White downtown controlling everything in Harlem. African Americans could not even play the “numbers”²⁶ among themselves, he claimed, citing the kidnapping of Casper Holstein, the “numbers” kingpin, by Whites as proof that Harlem was controlled by Whites. Hughes also claimed that all the stores and businesses in Harlem were owned by Whites, and that many of the businesses, even those located in the very heart of Harlem, did not even employ Black salespeople. Particularly distressing to him was the fact that almost all the policemen in Harlem were White.²⁷ Sounding a similar note, Claude McKay, the Jamaican poet and novelist, stated that the “saloons were run by the Irish, the restaurants by the Greeks, the ice and fruit stands by the Italians, the grocery and haberdashery stores by the Jews,” and that the only African American businesses, excepting barber shops and

²⁶The “numbers” was a ubiquitous practice in Harlem. More than pastime, it dominated life and was played on Harlem’s street corners, back alleys, and dwellings. Bets were given to “runners” on slips of paper. Dream books, the numbers of hymns, dates, prices paid for merchandise, license plates and a host of other sources supplied hopeful players with the numbers they played. “Bankers” received all bets and paid out all winnings. Often, they failed to do so, though at the risk of their lives.

²⁷Langston Hughes, “My Early Days in Harlem,” in *Harlem: A Community in Transition*, ed. John Henrik Clarke (New York: The Citadel Press, 1963), 63.

hair stylists, were churches and carabets.²⁸

Yet African Americans were not wholly absent from commerce in Harlem during the 1920s. As early as 1919 the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) was operating two restaurants, three grocery stores, and a laundry in Harlem. As the 1920s dawned, only one of the restaurants, the one located in Liberty Hall, was operating at a profit. Soon afterwards, J. Raymond Jones, who had joined the UNIA in 1920, was handed the responsibility of operating the stores, wet-wash laundry, and restaurants. All operations were turning a profit within a couple of years. Toward the end of the decade, Jones launched an ice-vending business himself, servicing one of Harlem's major apartment complexes. Of course, the Black Star Line was the most ambitious attempt at a Black-owned and Black-operated business by the UNIA of the period. The failure of the Black Star Line resulted more from a lack of business sense than from chicanery and charlatanism on the part of the UNIA's head, Marcus Garvey.²⁹

One industry that was not off limits to Blacks was the funeral industry, which did a brisk business laying Blacks to rest. Funeral directors advertised heavily in the Black newspapers and periodicals of the day, with one claiming to be able to provide a complete funeral with dignity for as little as \$150.³⁰

Low incomes and high unemployment put New York City Blacks in a

²⁸Claude McKay, *A Long Way From Home: An Autobiography* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, Inc., 1970), 49.

²⁹John C. Walter, *The Harlem Fox: J. Raymond Jones and Tammany, 1920–1970* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 37–44.

³⁰*The New York Amsterdam News*, Wednesday, December 20, 1922, 8.

precarious position during the period. When racism and discrimination were factored in, the ability of African Americans to mount a sustained effort at entrepreneurship and to be a reckoning force at the table of capitalism were all but erased. More consumers than producers, African Americans in Harlem still attempted to generate and control a local economy through the establishment of the North Harlem Community Council (1918), Harlem Stock Exchange (1920), Association of Trade and Commerce (1921), Harlem Economic Association (1924), Harlem's Businessmen's Club (1927), and the Housewives League (1930). In 1930 the National Negro Business League organized over 100 Black-owned and Black-operated stores into the Colored Merchants' Association in order to buy cooperatively and sell at competitive prices. As part of its service to the merchants, the Association offered instruction in the rudiments of mercantilism. Over 130 merchants took advantage of the opportunity.³¹

Life in the Black community presented Black businesses with some unique challenges. One was that Black owners and consumers often were members of the same church and civic organization, which some consumers interpreted to mean easy credit and less-than-strident collection procedures. The granting of credit by Black merchants had an adverse impact on their cash flow. Unpaid accounts strained many a relationship, and threatened some businesses with bankruptcy. The challenges did not end there. Black merchants often lamented that their clients were not as courteous with them as they were known to be with White merchants. On the other hand, Black customers were known to feel that they were doing Black merchants a

³¹Roi Ottley and William Weatherby, *The Negro in New York* (New York: Oceana, 1967), 231; *The Daily News*, Monday, November 4, 1929, 2, 11.

huge favor by choosing them over White businesses. The net result was that Black merchants were caught in a no-win situation. At a time when African Americans were bemoaning the lack of economic opportunities available to them, they were less than enthusiastic about supporting their own.³⁸

In addition to its legitimate entrepreneurs, 1920s Harlem bulged with a medley of merchants who peddled their commodities on its streets. Roots, herbs, powders, chains, cloths, and an assortment of products all intended to enhance the African American's chances of success in the big city could be found at any hour of the day and well into the evening. The recent immigrant was especially targeted by these street corner vendors, who did a brisk business despite the drawbacks and shortcomings of their products and their sales pitches. Yet the African American greatest exploiter was still the landlord, who gouged and extorted huge sums from unsuspecting newly-arrivals, ostensibly because housing was at a premium.³⁹

During the 1920s there were about twenty individuals in Harlem with a net worth that exceeded \$100,000.⁴⁰ Worth much more than that was Madame C. J. Walker. Born a couple of years after the end of the Civil War in Louisiana, Madame Walker was a married woman at fourteen years and a widow with an infant daughter at nineteen. Subsequently, she moved to St. Louis, finding work there as a laundress. One evening, Madame Walker had a dream in which she saw the answer to the

³⁸Ottley and Weatherby, 230–231.

³⁹Winthrop D. Lane, "Ambushed in the City: The Grim Side of Harlem," *Survey Graphic*, Vol. VI, No. 6, March 1925, 692–694; *New York Age*, Vol. 36, No. 21, Saturday, February 10, 1923, 1.

⁴⁰*The Daily News*, November 4, 1929, 11.

unyielding texture of Black hair. Empowered by her dream and equipped with all of \$2, she launched her business. In less than a decade her name was a household word in African American communities across America. Madame C. J. Walker took Harlem by storm, setting it abuzz with gossip in 1913 when, at age forty-four, she bought three lots on West 136th Street on which she constructed a “castle” after tearing down the decrepit brownstones. By the time she died at age fifty on May 24, 1919, she had amassed a \$2,000,000 estate which she bequeathed to her only daughter, A’Leilia Walker Robinson.³⁵

At least two Black banks were servicing Black Harlem as the 1920s came to an end. One was the Paul Dunbar National Bank at 150th Street and Eight Avenue. The other was the Harlem branch of Chelsea Exchange Bank, at 135th Street and Seventh Avenue. Managed entirely by Blacks, the Chelsea Exchange Bank was located on the ground floor of a 500 family cooperative that had been built in 1927 by John D. Rockefeller. The building took up a square block of the city and provided recreational facilities for both children and the elderly.³⁶

Educating children in Harlem during the first three decades of the twentieth century posed serious challenges. Less than a hundred children were graduating yearly from high school in the early 1920s because they had to work to help support their families. In fact, if the child labor laws on the books at the time had been

³⁵Bercovici, 622.

³⁶*The Daily News*, Vol. II, No. 112, Monday, November 4, 1929, 11.

enforced, many African American families would have been driven to starvation.³⁷

With Blacks from the South and the West Indies flooding the area prior to and especially during the 1920s, overcrowding in schools became a severe problem that necessitated, among other things, “double session classes,” a phenomenon that contributed to lateness and truancy.

In an attempt to assuage its overcrowding problem, the New York City Board of Education in 1921 announced the erection of a new forty-eight-room school building, with a playground and modern equipment, on the block bordered by 139th and 140th streets, and Seventh and Eight avenues. The Board of Education proposed the playground because neighborhood children had “no play space but the street,” which denied them the chance to develop their “mental, moral and physical” selves. The Board also noted that the community had been in a state of racial transition for fifteen years, and that the City was obligated to provide residents with an education uniquely tailored “to meet the needs of the neighborhood.”³⁸

In 1916, a comprehensive study of Public School 89, the main elementary school serving Harlem, had shown that 1736 of the 2071 students were Black and revealed problems of attendance, overage students, delinquency, and health care. At that time, thirty-four percent of the students came from broken homes, and the study, conducted by the school’s principal, revealed a direct relationship between retardation and those unfortunate home conditions. Seven out of eight children were overage, with some children being as far as four years behind in scholastic training

³⁷Bercovici, 617.

³⁸*The New York Age*, Vol. 34, No. 25, Saturday, March 12, 1921, 1, 5.

and in ideals like punctuality and conduct. Usually forty to fifty boys were on some kind of probation at any one time. The Board concluded that the influx of children from the South was to be blamed for the conditions, and it believed that the erection of the new school would help assuage the problems. Additionally, the Board proposed the organization of smaller classrooms and the establishment of vocational training for overage students.³⁹

The economic viability of Harlem was also influenced by health issues, a sore spot for Harlemites during the 1920s. The death rate for Blacks in 1923 was 20.85 percent, as compared to 11.25 for Whites. Ill-equipped to deal with the change in the climate, housing conditions, and other pathologies and social ills, Blacks paid a disproportionate toll for living in the city. In Harlem, Blacks were known to be exploited by poorly-trained doctors, who often chose to work in the area because they knew they lacked the competencies to work elsewhere, and because they knew they could easily exploit the African American's lack of knowledge about medical matters. Harlem had doctors called podopractors, manopractors, and pedipractors. Charlatans from an array of medical schools preyed upon a naively hopeful Black community.⁴⁰ White doctors knew that Blacks had faith in them. This accounts for one telling a patient he was afflicted with "spider cancer," an incurable ailment the patient allegedly had contracted after a fall. Another doctor charged a patient \$600 to relieve him of water, ostensibly because the procedure to correct a condition called

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Bercovici, 620.

pleurisy was major surgery.⁴¹ In spite of their dealings with poorly trained doctors, African Americans still showed a thirty-one percent decline between 1911 and 1923 in the four childhood communicable diseases: measles, scarlet fever, whooping cough, and diphtheria.⁴²

Harlem Hospital, the major provider of health care during the “Gilded Age,” did not employ Black doctors until mid-decade, when it retained the services of five full-time Black physicians. This move occurred only after the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) challenged the monopoly White doctors had at Harlem Hospital. Working in tandem with Harlem Hospital to meet the health needs of the community was the Harlem Committee of the New York Tuberculosis and Health Association, which was organized in 1922 and served approximately 1,300 residents annually. Located in the same building that housed the New York Urban League, the Harlem Committee endeavored to keep Harlem informed about getting and keeping well. An information service, dental clinic, health club, and nutrition classes were some of the services it provided, and its Institute for Physicians was immensely successful in mentoring young doctors.⁴³

Harlemites annually observed a “Negro Health Week,” usually in the Spring. During this time churches, schools and civic organizations joined together in promoting and emphasizing the reduction of infant mortality, better sanitation,

⁴¹Lane, 714, 715.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Henry O. Harding, M.D., “Health Opportunities in Harlem,” *Opportunity*, Vol. 4, No. 48, December 1926, 8.

personal hygiene, and the elimination of tuberculosis, among other improvements.⁴⁴ Clergy preached the virtues and values of good health during the week, and were generally at the helm in the drive to sensitize and raise the consciousness level of community residents to the importance and utility of cleanliness.

The Political Scene

Politics was an important activity in Harlem from the moment the area emerged as the premiere Black community in the country. As the twentieth century dawned, the Republican party still wielded a powerful influence upon Blacks. In 1905, Charles W. Anderson was appointed by the Republicans to the post of Collector of Internal Revenue for the Second New York District. Anderson was born in 1866 in Oxford, Ohio, moving to New York City when he was twenty years old. Beginning in 1893, he was appointed to a series of state jobs because the Republican party had little power in Democrat-controlled New York City. As the chief lieutenant of the Republican Party in New York City, Anderson worked assiduously to deliver the African American vote, going so far as organizing the Colored Republican Club in New York City in 1904 during the national presidential campaign. It was for his support of the re-election efforts of Theodore Roosevelt that Anderson was appointed Collector of Customs for the Second District of New York. He held the position well into the Democratic presidential administration of Woodrow Wilson, when Black patronage by the Republicans was eliminated.

Anderson was a competent politician who had a passion for the development

⁴⁴*The New York Age*, Vol. 34, No. 25, March 12, 1921, 7.

of the African American community. He succeeded in winning the friendship of both W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. He was also instrumental in getting Samuel J. Battle to become the first Black New York City police officer, and in bringing many jobs to Harlem.⁴⁵

Even as Anderson was delivering votes for the Republican party, the Democrats were making inroads into the African American community through the aegis of the United Colored Democracy. Organized in 1898, the United Colored Democracy functioned as a subdivision of the Democratic Party, winning patronage jobs along the way for its supporters. It battled the Colored Republican Club of New York City to be the first to bring Black district leadership to Harlem. By World War I most of the leaders of the United Colored Democracy were from the South and the West Indies. In 1915, at the height of the war, Ferdinand Q. Morton was elected leader of the club, remaining at the helm until his death in 1924. One reason the Democratic Party was successful in winning Black support was Ferdinand Q. Morton.

Morton was a Phillips Exeter Academy alumnus and Harvard University graduate whose father was a government worker in Washington, D.C. He was a lawyer who commanded the respect and admiration of the leader of Tammany Hall, Charles F. Murphy. Morton won for himself appointment as an assistant district attorney, and served as head of the city's Indictment Bureau and as a member of the Municipal Civil Service. He was considered egotistical and unyielding by some of his contemporaries. Yet, like his counterpart in the Republican Club, he was instrumental

⁴⁵Edwin R. Lewinson, *Black Politics in New York City* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974), 37–39.

in helping African Americans get some low-level patronage jobs in the city of New York.⁴⁶

The first African American to win elective office in New York City was Edward A. Johnson, a lawyer who in 1917 won the State Assembly seat for the Nineteenth Assembly District. Together with the Twenty-first District, the Nineteenth Assembly District covered Harlem. Johnson won re-election the following year, when John Clifford Hawkins, a Black Republican won the seat for the Twenty-first Assembly District. For the next twelve years Blacks from both parties were elected to the State Assembly from both districts, with Hawkins himself winning re-election in 1919 and 1920.⁴⁷ Members of the New York State were elected annually. By 1920, two Blacks had also been elected to the City's Board of Aldermen: Charles H. Roberts, a dentist; and George W. Harris, a newspaper editor.⁴⁸

Despite their activity at the polls, African Americans were treated as second-class citizens by the White leadership of both political parties, who almost always selected the Black district sub-leader themselves. Worse, Blacks were segregated in the political clubs. Even in the overwhelmingly Black Nineteenth Assembly District, the Black leader had to maintain a separate club for Blacks. A West Indian immigrant who eventually became a judge was initially sent away from one White district

⁴⁶Ibid., 60–62.

⁴⁷For an incisive look at Harlem politics during this period, see Thomas M. Henderson, "Harlem Confronts the Machine: The Struggle for Local Autonomy and Black District Leadership," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, July 1979, 51–68.

⁴⁸*New York Age*, Vol. 32, No. 7, November 9, 1918, 1; Vol. 33, No. 8, November 15, 1919, 1; Vol. 34, No. 7, November 6, 1920, 1; Vol. 35, No. 8, November 12, 1921, 1.

leader's club, becoming a member only after he refused to go away. The votes of African Americans may have been needed at the polls, but Blacks were not welcome at the district leaders' club. The Republicans were especially shrewd. They used intrigue and strategy to maintain their hold on power until 1929, when the Twenty-first Assembly of Upper Harlem, by then seventy percent Black, was divided by them into a White and Black district.⁴⁹

As the 1920s drew to a close, the governor of New York, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the State Legislator decided to award four new municipal judgeships to Manhattan borough. Two of the judgeships were to go to Harlem, which desperately needed help in adjudicating the housing conflicts that were a corollary of the housing problems and overcrowding in the area. The idea was to elect Black Republican judges in Harlem, the feeling being that Blacks were still wedded to the Republican Party. Yet by that time the New Democrats, a group dominated by West Indians with Raymond Jones, U. S. Poston, Captain Gaines, and Chick Jones as key leaders, was powerful enough to strike a deal with the United Colored Democracy, made up mostly of indigenous African Americans. The result was the election of James S. Watson and Charles Toney to municipal judgeships in 1930.⁵⁰

In spite of their involvement in politics African Americans never emerged as a political force in New York City in the early twentieth century because of their small numbers, their lack of economic clout, discrimination, the political alignments of the City and State, and because a significant number of them were still Republicans while

⁴⁹Lewinson, 64–65.

⁵⁰Walter, 51.

most White New Yorkers were Democrats.⁵¹ Early Black Democrats were considered traitors and shunned by fellow Blacks. Yet internal rifts and divisions also militated against Blacks winning elected office and becoming a political force. Still, African Americans did vote, helping John F. Hylan, a Democrat, to win the mayoral race in 1917. In that year Blacks constituted twenty-seven percent of the Democratic vote. Four years later Hylan garnered seventy percent of the African American vote. In 1922, Alfred E. Smith, the Democratic candidate for governor, received about two-thirds of the Black vote.⁵²

Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)

No Black social or political organization was better able to exploit the latent post-1918 disillusionment, discontent and despair that inundated Harlem than the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Founded in 1917 by a charismatic Jamaican immigrant named Marcus Garvey, the UNIA piqued the curiosity and fancy of not a few of the West Indians and Southerners that streamed into Harlem after the war. When the organization held its first convention in the summer of 1920, it claimed an international following of over 2,000,000. By 1922, it was alleging a worldwide membership of 6,000,000.⁵³

⁵¹Lewinson, 34–35.

⁵²Ibid., 59.

⁵³Among the valuable works on Marcus Garvey and the UNIA are Edmund Moses Cronon, *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); Cary D. Wintz, ed., *African American Political Thought, 1890–1930: Washington, Du Bois*,
(continued...)

Garvey was born in Jamaica, where he had heard and studied about Booker T. Washington's philosophy of Black uplift and self-empowerment, and where he had put his words into action with the formation of the Jamaican Improvement Association. Coming to America by way of England, the diminutive Jamaican of stocky build and penetrating eyes arrived in Harlem in 1916, a couple of years shy of his thirtieth birthday. Garvey was appalled to see that Harlem's Black masses were under the rule of Whites, and he immediately set out to correct the state of affairs by establishing a Black state within the United States. His rise to prominence began one day when he was afforded a few minutes to address the small crowd gathered around one of the soap boxes that were ubiquitous on Harlem's street corners at the time. On these makeshift platforms self-styled prophets and social commentators held court, informing their listeners of impending doom and articulating their panacea for the social ills and pathologies plaguing the Black race. Initially dismissed as a West Indian carpet-bagger,⁵⁴ Garvey ultimately succeeded in commanding the attention, if not the admiration, of the crowd, holding it spellbound with his imagination and

53(...continued)

Garvey, and Randolph (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1996); John Henrik Clarke, ed., *Marcus Garvey and the Vision of Africa* (New York: Random House, 1974); Robert A. Hill, ed., *Marcus Garvey: Life and Lessons* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); and Marcus Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey* (New York: Arno Press, 1968). See also Tony Martin, *Marcus Garvey, Hero* (Dover, Mass.: The Majority Press, 1983); *Marcus Garvey, Message to the People* (Dover, Mass.: The Majority Press, 1986); and *The Pan-African Connection: From Slavery to Garvey and Beyond* (Dover, Mass.: The Majority Press, 1983).

⁵⁴Indigenous African Americans and Black West Indians have always existed in creative tension, at best. The reasons for their less than optimum relationship run the gamut from the sublime to the ludicrous. An extended analysis of the relationship between these two cultural groups that share a common racial heritage is provided in Chapter III.

largest Black mass movement in the nation's history, and in becoming the most celebrated and controversial African American figure of his era.

Acutely aware that Harlem was notorious for reveling in grand parades and colorful ceremonies, Garvey and the UNIA staged some of the biggest and brightest. Coverage of these and other UNIA events in *The Negro World* was usually couched in hyperbole.⁵⁵ "Monster" and "vast" audiences were always on hand to hear the Honorable Marcus Garvey, who often rode in the parades bedecked in attire that would have made a peacock blush, and who was treated with the deference and decorum afforded monarchs and autocrats.⁵⁶ Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., who succeeded his father as pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church, recalled sitting as a youngster beside Garvey in his decked-out caravan as it wormed its way through the streets of Harlem, as well as sitting at Garvey's feet and being thrilled by his lectures.⁵⁷

Garvey did establish a "black State" within the United States. Not surprisingly, he was its president. The "black State" boasted a vice president; Cabinet; Black Congress; Black army, replete with Black officers and a Black nurses corps; a Black newspaper called *The Negro World* that served as the main propaganda instrument of the organization; a steamship line, called the *Black Star*

⁵⁵ *The Negro World* was the official organ of the UNIA. Calling itself "The Voice of the Awakened Negro" and "The Peerless Paper," it was dedicated solely to the "interests of the Negro race." The paper was published weekly, and boasted a circulation of 50,000.

⁵⁶ *The Negro World*, Vol. X, No. 6, Saturday, March 26, 1921, 3.

⁵⁷ Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., *Adam by Adam: The Autobiography of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.* (New York: The Dial Press, 1971), 51.

Line, that was intended to transport African Americans back to Africa; a Black religion; and a Black God.⁵⁸ The mainstream newspapers and magazines of the day loved it all, lampooning and caricaturing Garvey and his movement to no end. Ultimately, Garvey was indicted and convicted of federal crimes for which he received a five-year sentence to a federal penitentiary in Atlanta, Georgia.⁵⁹

When Garvey was found guilty of charges of using the United States mails to conspire to defraud, *The New York Amsterdam News* reported: “Garvey Convicted: Locked Up Without Bail.” The weekly stated that the jury had deliberated for ten and a half hours, and that when it returned its guilty verdict Garvey burst into a tirade, lambasting the United States attorney who had prosecuted the case as the meanest person he had ever come across, and shouting maledictions at the judge and “other Jews” who he alleged had conspired against him.⁶⁰

Yet to summarily and scathingly dismiss Garvey as irrelevant, the UNIA as the “Ugliest Negroes in America,” and Garvey’s accomplishments as inexplicable aberrations of the times is to fail to sense and resonate with the temper of the era in Harlem. Garvey was infinitely more than a shrewd propagandist who skillfully exploited the uncertainty of the decade. The truth is that Garvey was able to tap into

⁵⁸For an enlightening discussion of the religious dimension of Garveyism, see Randall K. Burkett’s *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. and the American Theological Library Association, 1978).

⁵⁹E. Franklin Frazier says that Garvey could not have planned a more strategic climax to his career in the United States than his imprisonment in Atlanta. E. Franklin Frazier, “The Garvey Movement,” *Opportunity*, Vol. 4, No. 47, November 1926, 346.

⁶⁰*The Amsterdam News*, Vol. XVII, No. 23, Wednesday, June 20, 1923, 1.

the latent, nascent nationalism then simmering in the African American community. A new African consciousness permeated Black America in the early twentieth century, and when Garvey arrived in Harlem in 1916 the cultural capital of Black America was a cauldron of bitterness and unresolved emotions that were later fueled by two fundamentally significant events. The first was the wholesale massacre of Blacks in East St. Louis in July 1917, which left a bitter taste in the collective mouth of the African American community, and the second was the treatment Harlem's Fifteenth Infantry Regiment received during World War I.

James Weldon Johnson, the respected senior statesman of the African American community and the executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for most of the 1920s, refused to dismiss Garvey and his movement as irrelevant, calling him instead a symbol and a symptom. Johnson claimed that anybody who was able to attract to himself the confidence and loyalty of 4,000,000 persons, however and gullible they might have been, and who could articulate his views in such a way that on calling an "international conference" he was able to get over forty foreign countries to send delegates to it, could not be dismissed as a joke. Johnson also reminded his readers that Garvey had been successful in getting the German government to send a petition to him asking that he use his influence against the deployment of Black troops on the Rhine, even though all parties involved knew that Garvey could do nothing about it.⁶¹

In a similar vein, A. F. Elmes, a contributing editor of *Opportunity* magazine, while disclaiming that he was ever a Garveyite, editorialized Garvey in the wake of

⁶¹James Weldon Johnson, "After Garvey—What?" *Opportunity*, Vol. I, No. 8, August 1923, 231–233.

the “tumult and shouting” that attended his last days in Harlem and subsequent imprisonment. Elmes believed that Garvey was not “fundamentally insincere,” but “substantially in the main sincere.” He opined that Garvey’s mind was “short in analytic power and penetrating capacity,” a drawback that made him miss the mark in “method and procedure,” but that overall Garvey was a decent human being with a compelling vision for the African American community.⁶²

In life as well as in death, Marcus Garvey attracted a horde of admirers and detractors alike. He has been ridiculed and vilified by some, and canonized by others. His failures notwithstanding, Garvey succeeded in harnessing the dormant Black consciousness in the African American community in general, and Harlem in particular. His ideology and movement have inspired every type and generation of Black nationalist leader since.

The Religious Climate

In 1896, the year the Populists exemplified the agrarian revolt in the United States, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that separate was equal, giving legal sanction to the Jim Crow conditions that had settled over American society in the aftermath of the Civil War.⁶³ Blacks were systematically segregated from Whites in every area of life, including the church. Most political and religious leaders believed that, though not ideal, segregation was the most practical

⁶²A. F. Elmes, “Garvey and Garveyism—An Estimate,” *Opportunity*, May, 1924, 139–141.

⁶³For an excellent analysis of the impact of the phenomenon, see Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 2nd ed., Revised ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).

way of dealing with the complex race issue. Even President Woodrow Wilson, ostensibly a Progressive politician who was leader and architect of the New Freedom democratic platform, gave tacit endorsement to segregation in society when he allowed some branches of the federal government to be segregated.⁶⁴

The influx of Blacks into Harlem was fueled and facilitated by the African American church, traditionally the most stable, influential and financially viable of all Black institutions. As the twentieth century dawned, the Reverend F. A. Cullen, whose foster son, Countee Cullen, later played a major role in the Harlem Renaissance, was the spiritual overseer of a group of three women who met in a cramped room in Harlem. Demonstrating “Kingdom growth,” the group swelled into becoming the Salem Memorial Episcopal Church, relocating a couple of times until in 1923 it acquired an impressive structure on Seventh Avenue from a white congregation fleeing the “invasion” of Blacks.⁶⁵

The experience of Salem was not unique. African American churches and religious groups either pioneered the move to Harlem or followed their members and supporters there. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. had been smitten by the Harlem bug as early as 1911, when the area was still overwhelmingly white. Declaring that Harlem would be the final destination of the Abyssinian Baptist Church, Powell encouraged the members of his congregation not only to join the exodus there, but to buy real

⁶⁴See Arthur Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910–1917* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954).

⁶⁵*The New York Age*, Vol. 36, No. 20, Saturday, February 3, 1923, 7.

estate in Harlem while the market was still depressed.⁶⁶ According to the leading national Black weekly newspaper of the day, the Abyssinian congregation cheered when its pastor announced at Easter services on April 4, 1920, that the church was moving to Harlem. Powell informed his congregants that the church would be buying six lots on 138th Street, and that the land would be used to erect a sanctuary with a seating capacity of 2,000, a “well-equipped gymnasium, reading room, employment agency, ladies’ parlor, model kitchen and dining room, and a well-furnished home for teaching domestic science.” Total cost of the building project was estimated at \$200,000, with the church hoping to realize a large part of the figure from the sale of its West 40th Street property.⁶⁷

The Abyssinian facility was completed in June, 1923, at a cost of \$334,881.86, making it one of the most expensive Black churches in the United States.⁶⁸ Noting that one of the signs of progress among African Americans was the realization that the church should be “the center of not only religious but also social and community activities,” the *Crisis* magazine gave extended coverage to the grand opening of the new facility. It applauded Powell’s larger vision of social service and noted that \$265,000 of the building’s total cost had been raised by members before the building was dedicated, citing this fact as proof of the “increasing prosperity

⁶⁶ Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., *Against the Tide: An Autobiography*, 67–70.

⁶⁷ *The New York Age*, Vol. 33, No. 29, Saturday April 10, 1920, 1.

⁶⁸ Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., *Adam by Adam*, 50–52.

among the colored people.”⁶⁹

Yet Abyssinian Baptist was not the wealthiest Black congregation in Harlem during this time. That distinction belonged to St. Philip’s Protestant Episcopal Church, which had spent over a million dollars for a row of apartment houses on the north side of West 135th Street soon after it had moved to Harlem in 1911. St. Philip’s commemorated its centenary in 1920 with a week long celebration.⁷⁰ At the beginning of 1921, St. Philip’s, located at 213-215 West 133rd Street, was collecting rents totaling \$10,000 monthly.⁷¹ The church’s financial statement for the previous year, issued because the officers of the corporation believed parishioners were “deeply interested in the general welfare of the Parish and further that a fair idea may be given of the great amount of business tact and economy required for the wise management of so large an investment,” showed real estate investments of over \$1,000,000 and assets of \$139,893.41. By 1927, assets were \$737,710.75, and by 1930 had reached \$757,793.14.⁷²

On the last Sunday of September 1924, Salem Methodist Episcopal Church, which for fourteen years had worshiped in an apartment house that had been converted to a church building, moved into the church building previously owned by

⁶⁹“The Abyssinia Church of New York,” *Crisis*, Vol. 26, No. 5, September 1923, 203–205.

⁷⁰*New York Age*, Vol. 34, No. 8, Saturday, November 13, 1920, 1.

⁷¹St. Philip’s Protestant Episcopal Church, *Minutes of the Vestry held January 11, 1921*, Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library, New York City.

⁷²St. Philip’s Protestant Episcopal Church, *Financial Statements, 1920–1930*, Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library, New York City.

the Metropolitan Methodist Episcopal Church, a White congregation. Around 1916 the Metropolitan Baptist Church acquired the building at 128th Street and Seventh Avenue, and in 1921 Williams Institutional Church of the Colored Methodist Episcopal denomination acquired from a once robust Jewish congregation its synagogue on 130th Street. The acquisition of these properties in Harlem saw the seating capacity of Harlem's main Black churches and missions, by 1925 numbering twenty-five and sixteen respectively, rise to approximately 27,000. By that time there were thirteen congregations with seating capacities ranging from 500 to 2,500. The rest of the churches seated anywhere from 200 to 400 people.⁷³

Not all of Harlem's churches were large, institutional organizations. The area had many churches of the store-front variety that placed a premium on ecstasy, emotionalism and the charismata. Not surprisingly, these congregations appealed to the less educated and sophisticated among the newly-arrived Blacks. In the early twentieth century Harlem was fertile ground for the cultivation of religious thought, and just about any religious ideology or theology was offered a measure of hospitality there. Since its emergence as the Black capital of the United States, a steady succession of cult leaders had flowed through Harlem, leading groups with names as bizarre as their claims. Yet to dismiss these leaders, usually augmented by clairvoyants and herbologists, as transient charlatans who preyed upon the frustrations and fears of a vulnerable community is to miss the broader social and historical issues and themes of the era.

On the average, there was a church to each block in Harlem. Traditional and

⁷³George E. Haynes, "The Church and the Negro Spirit," *Survey Graphic*, Vol. VI, No. 6, March 1925, 695–697.

nontraditional religion were offered by these religious bodies, with worship services ranging from the austere, structured, high-church style of the Methodists and Presbyterians to the expressive, high-energy, loose, spontaneous emotionalism of the Baptists and Pentecostals. Musical instruments, especially drums and tambourines, were vital to the rhythm and flow of the services of the latter, although all types of religious services promised relief from the vicissitudes, vacillations, and voids of early twentieth century life in Harlem. Religious services were almost always well attended, and one enduring feature of religious life in Harlem then was the overwhelming support given churches by their congregants.⁷⁴

Harlemites were kept apprised of the religious services and activities of the major congregations by weekly reviews in the *Amsterdam News* and *New York Age*. Both published a "Bulletin Board" in which recapitulations of the previous Sunday's services were given, including a summary of the minister's sermon, attendance at the service, offerings collected, babies christened, and baptisms conducted. In addition to keeping the community informed, the "Bulletin Board" of these two newspapers kept the churches accountable to the African American community.

Black churches in Harlem were more than religious sanctuaries where members assembled for worship. They were social centers that offered community, integration and acceptance to a people reeling from the blows of oppression, disassociation, and discrimination. Additionally, they were political centers in which

⁷⁴*The New York Age*, Vol. 40, No. 23, Saturday, February 19, 1927, 5.

African Americans enjoyed a measure of empowerment and self determination.⁷⁵ The churches were visible, concrete expressions of their congregants' struggle for power. Harlem, like most other Black communities, needed these churches to anchor and integrate African Americans into the broader community. Consequently, most Harlem churches remained open all day Sunday, offering their members a variety of activities that made their stay worthwhile. Fellowship or potluck meals assuaged the pangs of hunger that would inevitably set in after the morning's divine worship service, and the evening's evangelistic services were usually as packed as the morning service.⁷⁶

In addition to religious services, the larger Black churches of Harlem provided ways for Harlemites to grow socially and educationally by organizing athletic and social clubs, and musical and literary organizations. Many of them sponsored a Sunday afternoon lyceum or forum that attracted overflow crowds. Discussions, always lively, focused on a wide range of issues, including the future of Blacks in such areas as politics, art, economics, and literature.⁷⁷

Yet Harlem was criticized for the multiplicity and variety of its churches, it being said that at least fifty percent of them could have been closed and the community not suffer.⁷⁸ The proliferation of churches in Harlem did not escape the

⁷⁵For an incisive look at the historic role of the African American church in the Black community, see E. Franklin Frazier's *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976).

⁷⁶*New York Age*, Vol. 40, No. 19, Saturday, January 22, 1927, 5.

⁷⁷Walter, 36.

⁷⁸As stated earlier, religion has always been a central force in Black life, and nowhere was it more so than in early twentieth century Harlem, where it was

(continued...)

keen, analytical eye of James Weldon Johnson, who, as a contributing editor of *The New York Age*, at one time wrote a column addressing the issue with the hauntingly probing title, "The Question of Too Many Churches." Johnson argued that what Harlem needed was not more churches but better ones. He said that most of these churches were "staggering under debt," were "poorly pastored," and, as a consequence, were inefficient and ineffective. Calling their operations and ministry a "waste of energy and money," he believed that the duplication of their efforts could be eradicated by "intelligent consolidation."⁷⁹

The New York Age kept up the pressure on Black churches to give an accounting of their stewardship to the African American community. In a front page article under the caption, "What is Expected of the Churches," the newspaper bemoaned the fact that Harlem's Baptist and Methodist churches had failed to do "their whole duties by their constituencies" in that they had been making exorbitant and "continuous demand upon the time and money of their members without giving in return a reasonable and fair consideration in spiritual and material things."⁸⁰ In response, several pastors provided "concrete facts of work done" by their churches.

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expressed in a vast array of religious organizations. Some of these manifestations were established and structured, while others were loose, ever evolving and moving, and transient. Cults and sects abounded in Harlem, and spiritualists found the area fertile ground to peddle the accessories of their trade. Harlem had churches bearing names like "The Metaphysical Church of the Divine Investigation," "St. Matthew's Church of the Divine Silence and Truth," and "Tabernacle of the Congregation of the Disciples of the Kingdom." *Black Manhattan*, 163–166.

⁷⁹James Weldon Johnson, "The Question of Too Many Churches," *The New York Age*, Vol. 33, No. 26, March 20, 1920, 4.

⁸⁰*The New York Age*, Vol. 33, No. 24, Saturday, March 6, 1920, 1.

Among the pastors who came forth was Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., who spoke of the “helpful activities and noble sacrifices” of his congregation.⁸¹

Powell was a social activist who preached that Christianity is more than “preaching, praying, singing, and giving,” and that preachers who only twice a week “ram the Bible down the throats of the people” are derelict in their responsibility to execute what he termed an “applied Christianity.” He called on fellow pastors to “cease criticizing and abusing people for spending their evenings in questionable places” until they had provided “wholesome environments” for the people to socialize.⁸² Powell’s rallying cry, designed to address the personal and corporate issues with which African American were dealing, show that Black religious leaders perceived the church as one of the principal weapons against the social, economic, and political challenges facing their community.

Powell’s clarion call to fellow clergy to preach a holistic Gospel was not without reason. During the 1920s the theology of most of Harlem’s Black churches was a stifling fundamentalism that mostly denounced evil practices, such as going to the movies. Harlem’s preachers loved to rail against the frivolous lifestyle that characterized the area and caused the era to be dubbed the “Roaring Twenties.” Prohibition, a veritable bookend that marked the start of the period, had produced an underground liquor-producing industry in Harlem, and the result was that liquor could have been procured there at any hour of the day or night. Black preachers denounced liquor as the enemy of people in need of no more enemies, movie theaters

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., “The Church in Social Work,” *Opportunity*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1923, 15.

as citadels of crime, clubs as crucibles of corruption, and several congregations collaborated in passing a resolution deploring these phenomena as placing the African American community in grave peril. Paradoxically, Harlem's preachers were not as quick to frown upon or censure numbers betting, the community's great game of chance, ostensibly because they recognized that income from this source sustained several families and helped others contribute to their church's coffers.⁸³

The Social Scene

The reputation Harlem acquired during the 1920s was of a fun-loving, anything-goes place. Harlem was known for its laughter, which was one of the first things that struck White visitors to the area.⁸⁴ Harlem became known as a carnival of carabets and clubs, and as the playground of New York's rich and famous. The area boasted seven neighborhood motion picture venues, six cinema palaces, and about twelve night clubs. The Renaissance Theater was the premier motion picture house, and the Cotton Club, dubbed the "Aristocrat of Harlem," was the nightclub of choice among Manhattan's sophisticates. There, Lady Mountbatten, wife of the English nobleman, and New York City mayor, Jimmy Walker, were entertained. And it was at the Cotton Club that Duke Ellington began his rise to national and international acclaim. Yet it was at the Savoy that Harlemites went to dance. The Savoy was open for twelve hours daily, from 3 p.m. to 3 a.m., with two orchestras working in sequence to provide nonstop dancing, which dance-crazy Harlemites loved. For sixty-

⁸³Anderson, 145–151.

⁸⁴Bercovici, 618.

five cents, a person could dance all night at the Savoy.⁸⁵ The Lenox Club stood out for its Monday morning breakfast dance, after which patrons went off to work.⁸⁶

As the 1920s dawned, so did the jazz age. Heretofore, ragtime had reigned supreme, capturing the antiwar sentiments and Black nationalist ferment of the late 1910s, albeit in subdued tones. With jazz, caution and circumspection were thrown to the wind, and spontaneity and improvisation took over. New Yorkers of every race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status fell in love with jazz, heading to Harlem, the “city that woke up at night,” to get their fill. The main thoroughfares of Harlem, always clogged during the day, exploded at nights with “lines of taxicabs and limousines standing under the sparkling lights of the entrances to the famous night clubs, the subway kiosks swallowing and disgorging crowds all night long.”⁸⁷ The flurry of activity was another defining feature of 1920s Harlem, whose residents, “by nature a pleasure-loving people,” did not hesitate to satisfy their appetite for enjoyment.⁸⁸

Also typical of the fun and gaiety of 1920s Harlem, an era that Franklin Delano Roosevelt called the decade of debauchery, were the after-hours clubs that catered to a transient clientele and the house-rent parties that were especially attractive to the working class. With their affordable entrance fee and unpretentious ambiance, house-rent parties were a necessary evil brought about by economic and

⁸⁵Anderson, 145–151.

⁸⁶Frank Dolan, “Harlem Breakfast Caps Gotham Night,” *The Daily News*, Vol. 11, No. 109, Thursday, October 31, 1929, 2.

⁸⁷James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, 161.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 161–162.

social conditions, and were as important to the lower classes of Harlem as the high class affairs thrown and patronized by the upper classes. House-rent parties were usually held in small, dimly-lit apartments, and were advertised by word of mouth and little invitations or business cards that were distributed on the streets by women looking for work and a good time. Intended only for Blacks because they were illegal,⁸⁹ a nominal admission fee was charged to raise money to help the host pay his or her rent. Refreshments were sold to help bolster the sum raised through ticket sales.

Langston Hughes loved house-rent parties, seeking one out every Saturday night he was in Harlem because he found them more amusing than the night clubs, and because they provided him with material for many of his poems. Additionally, he found house-rent parties pleasing because Blacks were able to enjoy themselves without being gawked at by Whites from downtown.⁹⁰

Of the elegant parties thrown in Harlem during the 1920s, none could come close in grandeur to those of A'Lelia Walker, whose mansion on West 139th Street, indisputably one of Harlem's most imposing addresses, could hold a hundred people at a time. Known as the "Joy-goddess" of Harlem's rich, famous, and powerful, A'Lelia had assumed a controlling interest in her mother's hair-straightening empire, along with major pieces of real estate that included property in upstate New York. She lacked the intellectual and artistic skills that drove the Harlem Renaissance, but

⁸⁹Police records indicate that Harlem had no more crime than other New York City neighborhoods. *The Saturday Evening Post*, August 8, 1925, 93–94.

⁹⁰Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1940), 229.

that did not stop her from throwing the lavish parties to entertain its main personalities. In time, her parties became legendary. Allegedly, a Scandinavian prince tried to get into one of her parties once, but the best that A'Lelia was able to do was to send him some refreshments through the crowded lobby. A'Lelia's funeral was by invitation only, but, like her parties, many more than the invited guests showed up, causing pandemonium to break out on Seventh Avenue.⁹¹

While it must be admitted that Harlemites found immense pleasure in the night life, they also enjoyed simpler, less expensive, and less exotic activities. For example, ambling along the principal streets of the area, especially on summer evenings and on weekends, was a pastime activity that Harlemites elevated to an art form. On a Sunday, the activity required that one put on one's "Sunday best" clothes. Strolling the tree-lined boulevards, one was sure to encounter friends, relatives, and newly-arrived immigrants, whose stories of conditions and occurrences "back home" almost always delighted and enthralled. In addition, the stroller was bound to encounter side-walk lecturers, preachers, and comedians, whose pronouncements either educated or entertained. Parades, also a staple of 1920s Harlem, were community events that none could treat with benign neglect. In short, taking an evening stroll in 1920s Harlem was anything but a boring activity.⁹²

The Harlem Renaissance

Representative of the cultural revival that swept through Harlem beginning in

⁹¹Ibid., 245.

⁹²James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, 162–163.

the 1910s and continuing right on through the 1920s was the movement that came to be called the New Negro Renaissance, and for which the period and place are best known. Dominated mostly by writers—poets, novelists, playwrights, and essayists—the artistic revolution got underway in 1917 with the publication of James Weldon Johnson's⁹³ book of poems, *Fifty Years and Other Poems*, and Claude McKay's sonnet, *The Harlem Dancer*. A Jamaican by birth, McKay represented a shift away from the sanguine, tranquil style of earlier Black writers, and initially was told that he would have to sanitize and tone down his bold references to the Black urban experience if his works were to sell.⁹⁴

Four years after the appearance of McKay's watershed work, Langston Hughes, then a nineteen-year-old recent high school graduate, published "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" in the official organ of the NAACP, *The Crisis*. That same year, 1921, Johnson began work on an anthology of poetry by African Americans. Johnson's anthology, *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, was published early in 1922, the year in which McKay's immortal work, *Harlem Shadows*, hit the market. By then, the Negro literary movement was fully on.

McKay was twenty-one years old when he disembarked in New York harbor

⁹³Poet, songwriter, essayist, novelist, and literary critic, James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938) was an extremely talented and versatile African American. Initially a school principal who went on to earn a law degree, Johnson passed the Florida bar exam in spite of the racist behavior of the examiner. He became a United States diplomat, serving as consul general at the U.S. Embassy in Venezuela and Nicaragua, where his fluency in Spanish served him well. Known as the first *modern* African American, he also served as professor of Creative Literature at Fisk University, and as the general secretary of the NAACP from 1920–1930.

⁹⁴Claude McKay, *A Long Way From Home: An Autobiography* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1970), 27.

from his native Jamaica in 1912, four years before a fellow Jamaican, Marcus Garvey, followed suit. Yet a common Jamaican ancestry was about the only thing the two West Indians had in common. McKay was quintessentially urbane, cultured and lettered, counting among his friends and acquaintances some of New York's leading literary personalities. To be sure, he never finished college, aborting the endeavor when "the lust to wander and wonder" gripped him. Yet McKay's capacity to spin phrases and his keen sensitivity opened paths that led to an associate editorship at *The Liberator*, a leading pro-Marxist publication of the time. Garvey, on the other hand, was the consummate islander, who, his appeal with the masses notwithstanding, was never accepted by the Establishment. McKay himself branded Garvey a charlatan. Unlike Garvey, McKay was accepted by Whites and African Americans, though it was James Weldon Johnson who mid-wifed and nursed McKay's acceptance among indigenous African Americans.⁹⁵

McKay particularly liked W. E. B. Du Bois, whose *The Souls of Black Folk* he had read as a student at Kansas State College, the book shaking him like an earthquake. Yet he was unimpressed on first meeting Du Bois in person, saying that the African American senior statesman "seemed possessed of a cold, acid hauteur of spirit, which is not lessened even when he vouchsafes a smile." But the magnetism of Du Bois's polemic, if not his personality, ultimately captivated McKay, so much so that he argued for America honoring and exalting Du Bois.⁹⁶

As the artistic and cultural revolution was picking up steam in 1921, *Shuffle*

⁹⁵James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson* (New York: The Viking Press, 1933), 376.

⁹⁶McKay, *A Long Way From Home: An Autobiography*, 110.

Along, a musical comedy written, produced and performed by African Americans, opened in Manhattan to the rave reviews of the general public. A scorching combination of singing and dancing that New York had not encountered before, the musical captivated the attention of New York for over a year before going on the road for two years. Many of its songs became runaway hits, with some becoming familiar worldwide. Before going on the road *Shuffle Along* succeeded in making the street on which it played one-way. More importantly, it set the tone for Black theatricals in the decade, instilling in African Americans a sense of pride and providing telling evidence of their artistic genius and prowess.⁹⁷

The Harlem Renaissance was crystallized on March 21, 1924 when a “coming out party” was held at the Civic Club by the New York Writers Guild to commemorate the release of Jessie Fauset’s novel, *There is Confusion*. Fauset was a long time associate of Du Bois, serving as associate editor at *The Crisis*. Among those at the affair at the Civic Club were Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Jessie Fauset, Eric Wolroad, and Regina Anderson. After a brief introduction by Charles Johnson, editor of *Opportunity* magazine, Alain Locke, the first Black Rhodes scholar and Harvard graduate who was serving as Master of Ceremonies, interpreted the new currents in the literature of what he termed the “New School.” He stated that this group possessed a “spiritual wealth” which would make for a “new judgement and re-appraisal of the race.” Horace Liveright, a publisher, bemoaned the difficulty of Blacks marketing books of superior quality, and W. E. B. Du Bois informed the gathering that prejudice against African American writers had had an

⁹⁷Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 223.

impact on the style of previous Black authors. James Weldon Johnson, introduced as an anthologist of African American verse who had given invaluable service and encouragement to the work of the younger group, made remarks, and Countee Cullen read a selection of original poems for which he received a standing ovation.⁹⁸

Earlier in 1924, Du Bois and Locke had rejoiced that their previous lament that American literary genius was thinning was wrong. In Langston Hughes' work they had seen "exquisite abandon," in Countee Cullen a realism "true to life itself," in Claude McKay "a strain martial and mutinous," and in Jean Toomer the liberator of African American conventional sexual mores.⁹⁹

Opportunity magazine certainly did its part in facilitating the Renaissance, sponsoring several literary contests beginning in late 1924 with a view to stimulating "creative effort among Negroes." The categories for the first contest were short story, poetry, plays, essays, and personal sketches, with first, second and third prizes offered in each category. The judges included a cross-section of American writers, among them John Farrar, editor of *Bookman*, Carl Van Doren, editor of *Century Magazine*, Robert Benchley, dramatic critic and editor of *Life*, and Montgomery Gregory, director of the Department of Dramatics at Howard University.¹⁰⁰

Meeting on May 1, 1925, the judges pored over the 732 entries in the five

⁹⁸*Opportunity*, Vol. 2, No. 17, May 1924, 143.

⁹⁹W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke, "The Younger Literary Movement," *The Crisis*, Vol. 27, No. 4, February 1924, 161–163.

¹⁰⁰*Opportunity*, Vol. 2, No. 21, September 1924, 277, 279.

categories, awarding Langston Hughes First Prize in poetry and Countee Cullen¹⁰¹ Second Prize in the same category. Both individuals tied for the Third Prize, too. The May issue of *Opportunity* carried the winning entries in all categories, and the pictures of winners appeared in the following issue.¹⁰² The magazine heralded what it called “ a Negro Renaissance,”¹⁰³ the term being used for the first time, and it applauded the fact that the writers were standing squarely on their own.¹⁰⁴ *Opportunity* sponsored other contests over the next two years, discovering and promoting new talent with each contest.¹⁰⁵

Alain Locke’s anthology of Black creative and historical writing, *The New*

¹⁰¹Countee Cullen was a native New Yorker who published his first poems while still a student at DeWitt Clinton High School in Brooklyn. The adopted son of the Reverend Cullen of Salem Methodist Episcopal Church in Harlem, Countee distinguished himself as a student at New York University, and later married the only daughter and child of W. E. B. Du Bois. His poems graced the pages of many newspapers and magazines, and he is best known for *Color*, a book of poems published by Harper & Brothers in 1925. For an incisive and illuminating look at his work, see Gerald Early, *My Soul’s High Song: The Collected Writings of Countee Cullen, Voice of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

¹⁰²*Opportunity*, Vol. 3, No. 29, May 1925, 142–143; Vol. 3, No. 30, June 1925, 186–187.

¹⁰³Some books that deftly depict the genius and scope of the Renaissance are Arna Bontemps, *The Harlem Renaissance Remembered* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1971); Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Victor A. Kramer and Robert A. Russ, *Harlem Renaissance Re-examined* (Troy, N.Y.: Whitson Publishers, 1997); Steven Watson, *The Harlem Renaissance: Hub of African American Culture, 1920–1930* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995); Mark Irving Helbling, *The Harlem Renaissance: The One and the Many* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999); Cary D. Wintz, *The Harlem Renaissance, 1920–1940* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1996).

¹⁰⁴*Opportunity*, Vol. 3, No. 30, June 1925, 186–187.

¹⁰⁵*Opportunity*, Vol. 4, No. 42, June 1926, 188–189.

Negro, a seminal work that gave form and context to the Harlem Renaissance, also galvanized it into prominence. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Harvard University, Locke was an eminent scholar and literary critic on the faculty of Howard University, where he delighted in mentoring young African Americans of talent and ambition. He was an avid, voracious reader who had been impressed with the poetry and prose of young Black writers like Hughes,¹⁰⁶ and who had become fully convinced that the creativity and ingenuity palpably evident in the African American thinkers, artists, and writers in Harlem at that time could serve as the backdrop for a distinctive Black cultural movement. Locke was the inspiration and guiding force of the Harlem Renaissance.¹⁰⁷ Helping him in the endeavor were Jessie Fauset, Du Bois's assistant at *The Crisis*; Charles S. Johnson, editor of *Opportunity*; Casper Holstein, the West Indian whose money helped fund the Renaissance; Walter White, head of the NAACP; and James Weldon Johnson, the African American senior statesman.

African American writers sought to capture the lives of every-day African Americans in their work. They resonated with this life, having been proletarian themselves and knowing firsthand the struggles of the working class. "New Negro" writers had some major concerns, including the rediscovery of Africa as a source of racial pride, the utilization of African Americans in American history as heroes, propaganda as protest, the treatment of the broader African American community,

¹⁰⁶Hughes initially rebuffed Locke's overtures, ostensibly because he was "afraid of learned people in those days," and was aghast at the prospect of meeting W.E.B. Du Bois, whose *The Souls of Black Folk* had "stirred" his youth. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 93.

¹⁰⁷David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 119–155.

and a candid, more profound self-disclosure.¹⁰⁸ Yet “New Negro” writers had to contend with two opposing forces: the absence of a market among the masses for their work, and the skepticism of influential African Americans as to the reality and objectives of the Negro Renaissance.

In 1926 Carl Van Vechten, a former reviewer of classical music for *The New York Times*, published a book that rocked the literary world and sent Harlem reeling. Born and raised in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Van Vechten had had little contact with African Americans while growing up, a fact that caused his motives in helping Black writers to be continuously suspect. It was Van Vechten who had helped Langston Hughes get published, and it was he who in time had become a well-known figure in and around Harlem. Van Vechten’s book, *Nigger Heaven*, generated a firestorm of protest in Harlem, with the African American press leading the fray. Critics and detractors tore the novel to threads, claiming that its focus on the seedier side of Harlem was inaccurate and that its title was patently and palpably demeaning.¹⁰⁹

James Weldon Johnson thought otherwise, saying that the novel was an “absorbing story of American Negro Life under metropolitan conditions that drew on the components of that life from the dregs to the froth.” Arguing that Van Vechten did not “stoop to burlesque or caricature” his characterizations, Johnson claimed that the author painted “scenes of gay life, of night life” and gave “glimpses of the underworld, with all their tinsel, their licentiousness, their depravity” that actually

¹⁰⁸Sterling A. Brown, *The Negro in American Fiction* (Washington, D.C.: The Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1937), 131–150.

¹⁰⁹For a discussion of Carl Van Vechten and the role he played in the Harlem Renaissance, see Leon Coleman, *Carl Van Vechten and the Harlem Renaissance: A Critical Assessment* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1998).

was a needed counterbalance to the “decent, cultured, intellectual life of Negro Harlem.” He stated that if the novel had a thesis, it was that African Americans were normal, regular folk with the same “shortcomings, the same aspirations, the same graduations of social strata as other people.”¹¹⁰

Joining Johnson in defending Van Vechten was Langston Hughes, who thought the novel was anything but exploitative. He characterized reviews of *Nigger Heaven* in the African American community as hysterical and absurd, called condemnation of Van Vechten “sheer poppycock,” and pointed out that negative reviews had unwittingly led more African Americans to purchase the book than any that had been authored by a Black. Hughes did not bewail the book’s high sales, stressing that it was not a bad book, and that it would broaden the minds of people who took the time to read it.¹¹¹

Yet if *Nigger Heaven* rocked Harlem, *Home to Harlem* by Claude McKay, loosely based on the author’s own travels and experiences, almost shattered it.¹¹² McKay, who in the first half of the 1920s had traveled to England, Russia, and France, meeting political and cultural leaders along the way, published his work of fiction in 1928 at the height of the Renaissance. Like *Nigger Heaven*, the novel depicted the underside of Harlem, its characters, almost to the last one, existing on the fringes of a society, where, undoubtedly as a consequence of their lack of

¹¹⁰James Weldon Johnson, “Romance and Tragedy in Harlem—A Review,” *Opportunity*, Vol. 4, No. 46, October 1926, 316.

¹¹¹Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 268–272.

¹¹²For a useful depiction of Claude McKay see, Wayne F. Cooper, *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Schocken Books, 1987).

education, they lived in “rooming houses.” The novel’s women were loud, passionate creatures wholly given over to taking care of their men with money they earned as domestics, entertainers, and part-time prostitutes. Its men were always in the mood for a good time, with not a few of them more than willing to indulge their women’s desire to retire them from ever having to work again. Love relationships were hot, seamy, and short-lived, and cultivated for the most part in the nightclubs, carabets, pool halls, and cheap hotels of Harlem.

Returning home to Harlem after an absence of two years, Jake, the novel’s chief character, immediately caught the “contagious fever of Harlem” that continuously burned “everywhere in dark-eyed Harlem.” He described Harlem as chocolaty, sweet, and incomparable, and was not put off by its noises and “sugared laughter.” Its restlessness and never-ending singing and dancing found a responsive chord in his soul.¹¹³

Yet *Home to Harlem* was not all about debauchery and decay. Evident through the quagmire was a resilient and irrepressible will to live, if only for a short time, in a society violently struggling with racism, classism, and other forms of oppression. Thus, Jake refuses to cross picket lines or join a union riddled with racist tendencies, if not policies. Later, he works for the railroad, showing that not all African American men from Harlem were loafers and inveterate shifters, and in befriending a college-educated waiter from Haiti on the train, Jake gives proof that he could hold his own in philosophical debates. In the end, McKay’s novel vividly portrayed a segment of Harlem society woefully overlooked by most, and taken for

¹¹³ Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928), 12–15.

granted by the rest. In African American men like Jake a combination of hard realism and a soft spirit that helped them negotiate the difficult paradoxes that dogged their path to self-determination and empowerment could be seen. As he had done for Van Vechten's novel, James Weldon Johnson was gratuitous in his assessment, if not praise, of McKay's.¹¹⁴

The Harlem Renaissance substantively transformed the African Americans who were a part of it from creatures of condescension to people of decisive action. No longer were they inclined to a stifling conventionality and conservatism. Displaying a healthy, if not arrogant, self-confidence, they took their places beside others in the field, delving into hitherto unentered areas such as social injustice and intolerance. Harlem came into its own as a throbbing cultural and artistic community by the end of the 1920s. It was the place many of the "New Negro" artists lived and worked, and the focus of many of their works. More importantly, as the cultural and artistic Mecca of Black America, Harlem influenced the national culture in fundamentally significant ways.

The End of the 1920s

Harlem, like the rest of the country, was decimated by the Depression, which, according to Hughes, "brought everybody down a peg or two." Given that African Americans "had but a few pegs to fall," they did not fall far.¹¹⁵ Ravaged by economic hardship, Harlemites staggered into the 1930s unsure of their future. Yet, few African

¹¹⁴James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way*, 381.

¹¹⁵Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 247.

Americans in Harlem would admit of the negative phenomena that were settling in and beginning to blight the area. A mood of euphoria, enlightenment and emancipation permeated the atmosphere, and the few gains made by some African Americans were generally heralded and trumpeted far and wide as major success stories.¹¹⁶

The few who were willing to admit that beneath the veneer of good times were troubling signs of decay hastened to point out that Harlem was still in the process of making, and one of the most exciting communities in America that in a true sense transcended the accepted definition and understanding of community. Still deficient in many things, including economic development which had not kept pace with its “development in politics, in the professions, and in the arts,” Harlem was a “large-scale laboratory experiment in the race problem” where things were sure to get better.¹¹⁷ Cast as a playground by writers, it needed to be recast as an important community in which “fundamental, relentless forces” were at work.¹¹⁸

Summary

Harlem, New York did not evolve as a distinctly African American community in a vacuum but in the context of unprecedented developments in patterns of race relations sweeping the United States in the early twentieth century. Harlem was once Dutch, then Irish, German and Jewish before becoming overwhelmingly

¹¹⁶James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, 153–154; David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 109–113.

¹¹⁷James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, 281.

¹¹⁸James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way*, 381.

African American. By 1924, it was without its *Gemutlichkeit*, *Weinstuben*, *Liedertafel*, and *Turnvereins*.¹¹⁹ The changes in race relations that occurred in Harlem took place in the context of changes in the social and economic climate of the broader American society. The urbanization of African Americans, for example, was a product of the increased discrimination that Blacks experienced as they moved to the North, and Harlem's night life was not so much a symptom of the economic health and vitality of the African American population as it was stark witness to the exploitation of the area's residents.

By the 1920s Harlem was the quintessential African American community, professedly a symbol of self-actualization and opportunity for Blacks. Those who streamed into Harlem sent word back that it boasted its own educational institutions, churches, stores, newspapers and other publications, and a host of lodges and organizations that catered to and were operated exclusively by people of color. To the newcomer and the uninformed, the community appeared self-contained and self-sufficient, an oasis of Black control in the midst of oppression, alienation and powerlessness. Yet 1920s Harlem was anything but self-contained and self-sufficient, and no one was more acutely and painfully aware that it was that way than the thousands of African Americans who lived there.

James K. Humphrey, therefore, ministered in Harlem in a time of volatility and change. The old Black community of New York City had undergone tremendous change, moving from the southern tip of Manhattan island to its northern tip. This community had been transformed from a colonial one to a community of people who

¹¹⁹Bercovici, 623.

in spite of a shared racial heritage was culturally diverse. The diversity of cultures in the African American community in which Humphrey lived and worked presented him with some unique challenges. Yet notwithstanding cultural differences, African Americans living in Harlem in the first three decades of the twentieth century had a shared experience of discrimination. Economic and political opportunities were only extended to them reluctantly, as were religious ones. There was a common struggle for acceptance and respectability. African Americans, especially the few who were able to acquire an education beyond the high school level and those who experienced a measure of success as entrepreneurs and property owners, yearned to be recognized as legitimate members of the middle class. More often than not, their attempts were frustrated by a society bent on keeping them on its fringes. It is far from surprising that African Americans flocked to the standard of individuals like Marcus Garvey, who held out hope of a better tomorrow and spoke unashamedly of racial pride, and James K. Humphrey, who agitated for self-determination for his people.

CHAPTER III

THE WEST INDIAN COMMUNITY IN HARLEM, 1900–1930

James K. Humphrey lived and worked in Harlem during its ascendancy as the Black capital of the United States. He was a Jamaican who, like thousands of other West Indians, migrated to the United States and settled in Harlem in the years between 1900 and 1930. More significantly, he was a West Indian who rose to leadership in his denomination. Yet Humphrey was not the only West Indian leader in Harlem during this pivotal time, but part of a generation of ambitious West Indian men who agitated and lobbied for the rights of people of African descent. Included in this group were Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay, and James Weldon Johnson, who, even though born in the United States, was of West Indian stock. West Indians were anything but the shy, retiring, shrinking individuals they were thought to be and that other immigrant groups generally were. In Harlem, at least, they were a visible ethnic group that refused to be ignored by either the indigenous African American population or the broader American society.

What accounted for the West Indian rise to leadership in Harlem between 1900 and 1930? What was the shape of the West Indian's rise to leadership? Were West Indians an inherently ambitious group bent on competing with American Blacks? What about the sensitivity of indigenous Blacks toward West Indians? What were the avenues West Indians used for social and economic progress in New York City during this time? And was there collusion and collaboration with native Blacks

for respectability? These are some of the questions and issues that will be addressed in this chapter. In so doing, this researcher will explore, among other things, the myth of West Indian superiority, looking at the West Indian characteristics believed to have set them apart, if not above, the native Black population. What was the foundation of this myth? Was the myth fostered by West Indian hard work and achievement in the professions? Were the West Indians who migrated to the United States the cream of the crop of their island countries? And what about the migration experience engendered the radical bent in West Indians in Harlem? While I do not believe in the myth of West Indian superiority, I shall argue that West Indian hard work and achievement, and the radicalness of the migration experience itself, did fuel the myth.

West Indian Migration Into New York City, 1900–1930

There were approximately 9,500 foreign-born Blacks in the United States in 1870, sixteen percent of whom had migrated from the West Indies.¹ By 1930, the number of foreign-born Blacks in the United States was nearing 100,000 (Table 1). Between 1900 and 1930, the Black foreign-born population increased more rapidly than both the foreign-born White and native-born Black population. While during that period the indigenous Black population increased by about thirty-four percent,

¹The West Indies is a group of islands and countries inhabited by people who speak a diversity of languages, including English, Spanish and French, and who have a diversity of racial heritages. Yet West Indians who migrated to the United States during 1900 and 1930 tended to be of African ancestry and speak English dominantly, a fact that holds true to this time. Today, two Caribbean nations—Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago—have populations that are more than 50 percent East Indian. Once the downtrodden people of both societies, East Indians, especially those in Trinidad, now have and wield much power and influence. Consequently, they are less prone to migrate. When they do migrate, it is generally to Canada, where the Black population is smaller than in the United States.

the indigenous White population by 68.4 percent, and the foreign-born White population by 30.6 percent, the foreign-born Black population increased by an incredible 232 percent. More significantly, by 1930, seventy-three percent of Black immigrants had been born in the West Indies.²

Table 1
The Foreign-born Black Population of the United States³

Year	Number	Percentage of Total Black Population
1890	19,979	0.3
1900	20,336	0.2
1910	40,339	0.4
1920	73,803	0.7
1930	98,620	0.8

West Indians began migrating to the United States in significant numbers around 1900, continuing to do so until 1924 when a change in the country's immigration laws precipitated a decline in their numbers. They came in the hundreds during the first three years of the twentieth century, and in the thousands from then on up to 1924, when a little over 12,000 West Indians arrived in the United States.⁴ By 1925, West Indian Blacks made up approximately twenty-one percent of New

²Ira de Augustine Reid, *The Negro Immigrant: His Background, Characteristics and Social Adjustment, 1899-1937* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 44.

³Philip Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and the Politics of Race* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), 24.

⁴Kasinitz, 25.

York City's Black population⁵ (Table 2).

Table 2
New York City's Black Population, 1900–1930⁶

Year	Black Population	Foreign Black Population
1900	60,666	—
1910	91,709	11,757
1920	152,467	36,613
1930	327,706	54,754

The majority of Blacks who immigrated from the West Indies to the United States during this period were in the 14–44 age group. In 1899, seventy-one percent of Black immigrants were in this age range, the figure rising to eighty to eighty-six percent between 1900 and World War I. Children under fourteen constituted from twelve to twenty-three percent of these numbers.⁷ Slightly more West Indian males than females came to these shores, and, not surprisingly, when compared to the indigenous African American population, West Indians had a higher percentage of augmented families and an almost equal amount of extended families constituting

⁵Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), 511.

⁶Kasinitz, 41.

⁷Reid, 79.

their households as nuclear families.⁸

West Indians were drawn to America in general and Harlem in particular by several factors. At first the affordable passage (\$25 around the turn of the twentieth century for a second class ticket) made the trip attractive and possible. Overcrowding in the islands (as was the case with Barbados which had a population of 122,000 in the mid nineteenth century), natural disasters (Jamaica was rocked by an earthquake in 1907 and by hurricanes in 1912, 1915, 1916, and 1917), and government policies which triggered instability in the sugar industry and, concomitantly, poverty in the islands, also contributed to the exodus of Blacks from the region. Yet what played no small role in the exodus were the reports sent back to the islands by West Indians themselves, whose stories of unlimited wealth and opportunities failed to mention the daunting challenges they were facing in their new home. Harlem and its spots became as well known in the islands as their local places. The result was that most West Indians desired coming to Harlem, the Black capital of the world.⁹

West Indians in Harlem were prone to boast that the islands of their origin were advanced culturally, even going so far as labeling Barbados “Little England”; Cuba, the “Pearl of the Antilles”; and Trinidad, the “New York of the Antilles.” Yet the truth is that the islands were predominantly agricultural, with sugar reigning as king. Diversity of crops was a long way in coming. So dominant were the agriculture and sugar industries in the islands that they were known as “sugar islands.” Almost

⁸Gutman, 515.

⁹Calvin B. Holder, “The Causes and Composition of West Indian Immigration to New York City, 1900–1952,” *Afro-Americans in New York City Life and History*, Vol. 11, No. 1, January 1987, 7–27.

without exception, the islands and countries of the West Indies depended heavily upon their colonial masters—England, France, and Holland—for the manufactured products and expertise to negotiate and understand the uncertainties and nuances of *laissez faire* capitalism. One reason for the deluge of immigrants in the late 1910s and early 1920s was the almost total breakdown of the sugar market in the aftermath of World War I, and even a reorganization of the plantation system that saw much of the land end up in the hands of native planters did not stop Black West Indians from leaving.¹⁰

Although they came to America to better themselves economically, West Indians were generally able to pay their passage here. Additionally, more of them brought \$50 or more than did individuals from other immigrant groups, albeit on the average they came with less money than all immigrants combined.¹¹

The West Indian immigrant to America encountered phenomena that tested his or her ability and resolve to survive in a strange land, not the least of which was the racism that permeated, if not characterized, American society. Their attitudes and responses to these new realities ran the gamut from wholesale acceptance to downright rejection. Whatever their response, West Indians early realized that more than anything else, race was the single most important element in American life, shaping and coloring all of its facets.

One area in which West Indians encountered stark racism was the housing market, which was not only segregated but uncongenial to all Blacks. It left them and

¹⁰Reid, 47–48.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 77–78.

the thousands of indigenous African Americans from the South who were flooding New York City during this period with few options for affordable, comfortable dwelling places. Two areas of the city open to them at the time were the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn and Harlem, where exorbitant rents and overcrowding made life challenging. Harlem, in its heyday during the “Roaring Twenties,” was the preference of not a few West Indians, in part because of its indisputable reputation as the “Negro capital of the world” and the successful marketing of the area by those who had settled there previously. Yet West Indians were also drawn to Harlem because it was home to several of its political and social icons, including Claude McKay and Marcus Garvey.¹²

The West Indians who saturated New York City in what has been called the first wave of West Indian immigration were by no means a homogenous group that marched to the beat of the same drummer. Though they were mostly of African descent and spoke English, they came from a motley group of islands and countries with a diversity of regional and ethnic nuances to which they tenaciously clung. Not surprisingly, they had their differences and rivalries that polarized and weakened them socially and politically. Yet they joined forces when they were attacked as foreigners and outsiders by Whites or the indigenous African American population. This was especially so among the English-speaking West Indians.¹³

¹²Kasinitz, 41–44.

¹³Anderson, 299.

West Indian Life in Harlem

West Indians differed from their American counterparts in significant ways. One was their perspective on the family, for them a sacrosanct institution ruled by a father who worked hard to provide for his posterity. West Indian men worked hard, at times at two and three jobs to make ends meet.¹⁴ As the head of the home, fathers accepted no disrespect from their children, who married only after extended courtships and after they had received parental endorsement. Premarital sexual relations were frowned upon, and a person engaged in forbidden sexual relations at the peril of being disowned.

Issue may be made as to whether slavery made family dysfunctionality a defining feature of Black life, but issue may hardly be made with the fact that West Indians had a different orientation and approach to religious life than native Blacks. From the days it existed as the “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South, the church of the indigenous African American functioned, among other things, as an agency of social reform that nurtured Black leadership. Its worship intentionally veered away from the formalism of the established church, choosing to demonstrate its freedom by being emotive and expressive. West Indians found African American worship difficult to resonate with, its liturgical spontaneity and energy offensive to their British formalism and ritualism. To be sure, that they opted to remain faithful to the pomp and rigor of their churches may have been due to the uncertainty and fluidity of their status in America. Yet, given the racism that was the portion of every

¹⁴“Harlem—1920's Mecca for West Indians,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Saturday, September 6, 1980, 9.

person of African descent in America, that does not explain why they accepted white pastors, a move that native Blacks could neither understand nor sanction.

West Indians worshiped in the Roman Catholic and Episcopal (Anglican) churches, though a spattering of them could be found in the Baptist and Methodist churches, too. In 1928, St. Martin's Episcopal Church was established to meet their needs.¹⁵ Regardless of where they worshiped, church for the West Indian was a place to meet and mingle with acquaintances from the old country. Yet the church performed another key role in the life of West Indian immigrants. It helped extend their culture and traditions. Harlem churches with overwhelmingly large West Indian populations celebrated some West Indian holidays and festivals, engendering a sense of connectedness and belonging to their native land. On these occasions congregants were encouraged not to forget from whence they originated, and to give tangible evidence of their memory by donating generously to causes back home. When King George V was ill in 1928 and 1929, several of Harlem's churches with West Indians offered up prayers for his recovery.¹⁶

In the workplace West Indians experienced discrimination in two critical aspects. First they had to accept menial jobs at low wages. Working for low wages was bad enough, but working at menial jobs when they had been used to working as artisans in the West Indies was especially disconcerting. Second, West Indian women worked outside the home, a first for many of them. These two realities affected the West Indian family in fundamental ways. For men, it meant dealing with feelings of

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Reid, 133.

frustration; for women, it meant economic and social power.

In 1925, native Black males in Manhattan outnumbered West Indian Black males in the unskilled laborers and service workers category by an average of three to one. As chauffeurs they outnumbered their foreign counterparts five to one, and over ten to one as railroad porters. Only as factory workers did West Indians approximate the numbers of native Blacks.¹⁷ The situation was much the same as it relates to skilled workers, with three exceptions. West Indians outnumbered native Blacks as carpenters, cigar makers, and shoemakers, and almost equaled them as printers and tailors.¹⁸

It is not surprising that West Indians were skilled as artisans. Coming from islands and countries in which they were in the majority, they had enjoyed access to trades to which Blacks in the South had only had limited access. The result was that they landed in New York City skilled in carpentry, masonry, printing, and welding. Yet they also pursued higher education, in time becoming doctors, dentists, lawyers, and engineers in such significant numbers that by 1930 they numbered a third of Harlem's professional working force.¹⁹

The thinking in Harlem during this era was that West Indians had not been exposed in their homelands to the legal barriers to social and occupational opportunities that indigenous African Americans had encountered. Consequently, West Indians found it difficult and in some instances impossible to accept tasks in

¹⁷Gutman, 512.

¹⁸Ibid., 513.

¹⁹Roi Ottley, *New World A-Coming* (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1968), 46.

America that were reserved exclusively for Blacks. Ostensibly, they despised service sector labor, viewing it as menial and belittling, and broke conventions by applying for jobs heretofore restricted to Whites.²⁰ This pioneering spirit was not the exclusive domain of men, as West Indian women, displaying competency and dexterity, forged new trails in the garment industry.²¹

Yet the West Indians who migrated to New York City in the beginning of the twentieth century were not primarily of the professional ilk. More likely to be laborers or servants, they did not differ markedly from the Blacks from the South in terms of occupational status. Still, they were decidedly more urbane than their American counterparts and more aggressive in pursuing opportunities to improve their lot economically, socially, and politically. Between 1900 and 1930, when they made up a mere ten percent of the Manhattan population, they owned and operated twenty percent of the Black businesses in the borough, a fact that contributed in no small way to comparisons to Jews. Also during this time they had a lower crime and fertility rate than the indigenous African American population,²²

While indigenous African Americans were involved in business ventures like pool rooms and barber shops that catered primarily to the Black population, West

²⁰It was alleged that West Indians resented being called by the derogatory names by which Whites referred to Blacks. This precluded their landing some of the jobs Blacks had a lock on. In particular, the Pullman Company was less than enthusiastic to employ West Indians, because, ostensibly, West Indians did not passively accept the indignities and contemptuous behavior of White passengers.

²¹W. A. Domingo, "The Gift of the Tropics" in *The New Negro*, edited by Alain Locke (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968), 344–345.

²²Thomas Sowell, *Ethnic America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1981), 219.

Indians focused on mercantile operations in which there was competition from Whites, such as jewelry stores and food and vegetable shops. They did not shun even more risky business ventures and initiatives like real estate and insurance, and operated the only Black-owned casino and moving picture theater in Harlem during the 1920s.²³

West Indians did not hide or deny that they had come to the United States with a view to bettering themselves economically. Consequently, they worked hard and saved their money. As an ethnic group they were the largest number of depositors at the Harlem branch of the Postal Savings Bank.²⁴ The word on the street was that as soon as a West Indian had “a dime more than a beggar,” he or she would start a business that could range from a small fruit stand to a brokerage firm.²⁵ Classic among the tales told about the business acumen of the West Indian was the Barbadian woman operating a rooming house.²⁶

Three values shaped the West Indian experience in New York City during the first wave of their immigration to the United States: ambition, education and pride. To the West Indian, ambition was setting realistic yet high goals and pursuing them with resolve and purpose. A necessary element of ambition was education, without which West Indians believed nothing worthwhile could ever be accomplished in life.

²³Domingo, 345.

²⁴Roi Ottley and William Weatherby, eds., *The Negro in New York* (New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1967), 192.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶*New York Amsterdam News*, Sept. 6, 1980, 9.

West Indians pursued higher education with a determination that bordered on frenzy, seeing in educational attainments a source of both national and personal pride, and, more importantly, a way of moving up a few notches on the social ladder. Their desire to surge ahead educationally was evidenced by their preponderance at Harlem's libraries and the ubiquitous intellectual and social forums of the era. Dark-skinned West Indians believed that education inoculated them against racism and discrimination. Regrettably, West Indians sometimes indicted indigenous African Americans for having little or no ambition, desiring little education, and showing no racial or personal pride.²⁷

With educational opportunities ostensibly available to all, West Indians could not fathom why all Blacks could not avail themselves of these opportunities. Coming to America poor, the last thing they wanted was to return home poor. In fact, they considered poverty and America as being mutually exclusive. For this reason, they denied themselves some luxuries that other racial and ethnic groups were known to indulge, opting to invest in property and savings. Additionally, they sent shipments of American goods back home to prove how well they were doing and as convincing evidence that America was truly the land of opportunity.²⁸

Between 1915 and 1932, four volumes of *Who's Who in Colored America* appeared, showing West Indian representation to be disproportionately high, especially in the business and professional areas. Typical of the business success of

²⁷Lennox Raphael, "West Indians and Afro-Americans," *Freedomways*, Vol. 4, No. 3, Summer 1964, 442.

²⁸Orde Coombs, "West Indians in New York: Moving Beyond the Limbo Pole," *New York*, Vol. 3, No. 28, July 13, 1970, 28-32.

the West Indian were the Antillean Realty Company, the Victory Life Insurance Company, the United States Mutual Insurance Company, and the Hamilton and Peters Taxicab Company. The first Black department store in Harlem, Hart's, had been founded by a West Indian.²⁹ Even if it is allowed that West Indians did not dominate or monopolize certain businesses, industries, or services in Harlem, they certainly made their mark in several, and boasted the biggest names in others. For example, the Jamaican Claude McKay was among the progenitors of the Harlem Renaissance, and W. A. Domingo and Marcus Garvey, fellow Jamaicans, were major forces in the promulgation of Black nationalist and left-wing sentiments in Harlem after World War I. *Freedom's Journal*, the first Black newspaper published in the United States, was the brainchild of John B. Russwurm, a Jamaican who had immigrated to New York in 1827.³⁰

A number of scholars have studied the relative economic success of West Indians in the United States, and today the issue continues to pique the fancy of West Indian and American alike.³¹ Some have concluded that the answer lies in the type of slavery that existed in the West Indies, arguing that it was not as brutal as that which

²⁹John C. Walter and Jill Louise Ansheles, "The Role of the Caribbean Immigrant in the Harlem Renaissance," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1977, 52.

³⁰Anderson, 302–303.

³¹Ransford W. Palmer, *Pilgrims from the Sun: West Indian Migration to America* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 31–43.

existed on the North American continent.³² Yet in many respects slavery in the West Indies was worse than in North America, particularly in regard to overwork and the devaluation of blackness. To be sure, slaves in the West Indies were allowed to grow and barter their own food and to use some of the proceeds from the sale of foodstuff to purchase an array of life's conveniences for themselves. As a result, West Indian Blacks could speak of a history of attending to their economic needs, their experience in a market economy supplying them with critical knowledge and, more importantly, motivation to negotiate and navigate in the world of business.³³

Others searching for reasons for the greater success of West Indians in the United States have pointed out that West Indians never had to endure a Civil War to gain their freedom, and that even in slavery there was never so many White lords around that their sanity and sense of self-worth were destroyed. Additionally, they did not suffer through a rehabilitation from slavery like Black Americans had to endure during Reconstruction.³⁴

Tending more toward pragmatism, some scholars have argued that the West Indians who came to America were the cream of the crop, and that the long journey

³²For an enlightening and provocative discussion of slavery, see Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), in which the author, a Jamaican historian/sociologist on the faculty of Harvard University, argues that slavery is without honor.

³³Sowell, 218.

³⁴Coombs, 28–32.

here sifted out the faint of heart and weak of character.³⁵ Inarguably, immigration often attracts the most resilient and resourceful people. West Indians were helped all the more because they settled in urban areas where they were able to command traditionally high urban wages.³⁶ Yet West Indians encountered one stark reality in America that immigrant groups from Europe and other parts of the world did not: discrimination based on color. Other groups joined the White majority. West Indians could not and did not. Many of them returned home, while others formed and joined clubs and organizations in attempts to maintain the majority status they had experienced in their countries. West Indians themselves attributed their success in the United States to their sense of “West Indianness,” by which they remained focused on their primary reason for coming to this country.³⁷

A comparison of the relative success of West Indians in New York with those who later migrated to Great Britain showed that in New York they experienced greater success, casting doubt on the theory and argument that their success in New York was due to any inherent business drive, acumen, immigrant status, or cultural heritage. Neither did the phenomenon known as revolving credit unions account for their economic success in Harlem, since when they started migrating to England in the mid twentieth century they utilized this self-help venture there too to establish

³⁵“A Caribbean Issue,” Editorial, *Opportunity*, Vol. 4, No. 47, November 1926, 334.

³⁶Ransford W. Palmer, “In Search of a Better Life: Caribbean Migration to America,” in *U.S.–Caribbean Relations: Their Impact on People and Culture*, Ransford W. Palmer, ed. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 65.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 65–66.

themselves.³⁸ What accounted more than anything else for their success in Harlem was the presence of a larger Black community. Simply put, in Harlem the West Indian had a made-to-order Black constituency.³⁹

Whatever the basis or cause for the success of West Indians in the economic sphere, the fact remains that it was the burgeoning African American community that provided them with a favorable confluence of circumstances. Concomitant with the marked increase in the Black population was the development of a Black consumer market that beckoned for goods and services that Whites had previously supplied and monopolized. Enterprising West Indians saw and exploited this niche in the market, in time monopolizing some businesses and dominating the competition in others.⁴⁰ Given their penchant for pursuing higher education, not a few of them matriculated at universities in metropolitan New York and elsewhere, obtaining terminal degrees in the sciences and arts that they used to achieve economic success.

Perpetuation of West Indian Culture

In keeping with the scientific evidence that people socialized in one culture are never fully absorbed into another one even when they relocate, West Indians did

³⁸For an enlightening study of the role of credit unions in the experience of immigrant West Indians, see Aubrey Bonnett, *Institutional Adaptation of West Indian Immigrants to America: An Analysis of Rotating Credit Unions* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982).

³⁹Nancy Foner, "West Indians in New York City and London: A Comparative Analysis," *International Migration Review*, Vol. XIII, Number 2, Summer 1979, 284–297.

⁴⁰Kasinitz, 94–95.

not give up their folkways in coming to America.⁴¹ The physical world they left behind had a different climate and geography. It was as different economically, socially, and politically as the one they encountered in the United States, where they ran head on into a diversity of unreconciled social mores. Cultural reorientation was made all the more challenging for them because of the issue of race.⁴²

Some West Indians did not readily identify or resonate with the indigenous African American experience because they did not consider themselves Black. Distancing themselves from their American counterparts, they asserted that in the West Indies, where anyone seventy-five percent White was considered White, there were no distinctions of color.⁴³ They contended that they were free in the West Indies, anesthetizing themselves into believing that they were also free in the United States. They ignored the fact that freedom in the United States, like in the West Indies, was a function of, among other things, economic status. Some West Indians failed, or perhaps refused, to put themselves in the shoes of indigenous African Americans, and were known to summarily and matter-of-factly wonder aloud why their American counterparts could not just do what they were doing, which was buying and owning property. Knowing that they could abort their quest for economic

⁴¹To be sure, neither do immigrants completely hold on to their old customs and folkways wholesale. Inevitably and invariably, time modifies, blunts, and softens the old ways of doing things. Moreover, even as the immigrant adapts to the new environment he or she invents and creates other ways, almost always of a defensive nature, to help him or her survive the special conditions under which life must now be lived.

⁴²Reid, 26, 35.

⁴³Mulatto or light skinned West Indian women advertised themselves as such for work in Harlem. Chester T. Crowell, "The World's Largest Negro City," *Saturday Evening Post*, August 8, 1925, 97.

advancement and return to their countries at any time in part accounted for this attitude, which distressed and angered native Blacks to no end.⁴⁴

West Indians were conspicuous in Harlem because of the way they dressed, which was in tropical materials and bright, colorful prints. Their accents, which no amount of camouflaging could hide, only served to highlight their difference and distinctiveness from the native Black population. The West Indian accent was so thick that on first hearing West Indians talk some Whites thought that the West Indians were trying to entertain them.⁴⁵ Yet the accents of West Indians presented them with unique challenges in the area of education, making it difficult for them to excel and achieve in the classroom at least on the elementary and high school level.⁴⁶

Between 1920 and 1930, West Indians could procure in Harlem's food stores items from the Caribbean, including pigeon peas, breadfruit, cassava, tannias, eddoes, guavas, and mangoes. To be sure, they paid hefty prices for these fruits and vegetables, which they used to cook West Indian dishes they had learned to love. In Harlem, they continued to cook cockoo, a Barbadian dish made with corn meal and okra and served with fish; pelau, a Trinidadian delicacy consisting of rice and meat flavored with spices; and callaloo, another Trinidadian dish made from okra and the leaves of a bush called dasheen and flavored with crab meat or pieces of ham. Sweet

⁴⁴Raphael, 438–445.

⁴⁵Crowell, 93–94.

⁴⁶Parsram Sri Thakur, *A Comparison of West Indian and American Undergraduates on Selected Cognitive Factors*, (New York: New York University Press, 1975). Thakur argues that the West Indian dialect does not serve their cognitive needs, adversely affecting them in the areas of verbal comprehension, general reasoning, spatial scanning, and inductive thinking.

bread was a staple, as were ginger beer, sorrel, and mauby, a drink made from the bark of a tree which the taste buds of the local population found difficult to stomach because of its bitterness. Refusing to eat any leftovers, which they condemned as stale food to be discarded, West Indians believed in cooking everyday, a practice that contributed to their being labeled as haughty, proud and arrogant.⁴⁷

A rhythmic, musical people, West Indians brought their distinctive tempo and lyrics to New York City, too. The Trinidadian calypso was sung around Harlem, as were West Indian folk songs. The latter were used, as they had been for a generation earlier, to teach West Indian children the fundamentals of reading.⁴⁸

Another area in which West Indians perpetuated their culture was in the way they conducted funerals and the wakes that attended them. The death of a West Indian in Harlem provided the perfect forum for socializing and reminiscing about the homeland. Almost always attended by scores if not hundreds, the merriment would continue for days after the body was interred. Admittedly, the tone and scope of the partying were contingent upon the religious and moral proclivities of the family of the diseased. Yet few of these occasions were “dry,” the West Indian penchant for socializing with a drink unable to resist the temptation.

West Indian weddings were grand occasions that came about only after a lengthy courtship. Averse to marrying downtown at City Hall or by anyone but a minister of the gospel, West Indians went to church to be married. Their weddings were elaborate affairs usually attended by hundreds who strictly observed the rules of

⁴⁷Reid, 130–131.

⁴⁸Ibid., 135–136.

etiquette and formal attire, with the result that the florist, caterer, baker, tailor, and other businesses did very well. When they did intermarry, that is culturally, more often than not it was a West Indian man who married a native Black, the reason being that there were more native women than native men in New York City between 1900 and 1930.⁴⁹ Not uncommonly, the intermarriage of a West Indian man and a native Black generated feelings among both groups that approximated those triggered when Catholics married Jews. In the indigenous African American population, flashbacks of what happened during slavery when White slavers exploited Black women were known to occur.⁵⁰

Nowhere in the United States did the game of cricket refuse to die as in New York City, where the West Indian population continued to play the sport with gusto, and where St. Martin's Episcopal Church at 122 Street and Lenox Avenue held an annual special service for cricketers every Spring. On any given Sunday Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx hosted a cricket match, called a fixture. The teams struck to convention by dressing in the traditional white from head to toe. Several hundred West Indians from Harlem would jam the trains to Van Cortlandt Park, weighted down with ethnic food like mauby, breadfruit, and an assortment of patties. Before leaving for their destination, they almost always prayed for the "king's weather."⁵¹ Most games started at 2 p.m. and ended before dark, in contrast to English games which went on for days. The crowd, always nattily attired in distinctly West Indian

⁴⁹Ibid., 144.

⁵⁰Anderson, 303.

⁵¹The "king's weather" was good weather.

colors and wear, was vocal and intense. The game's umpires, like the players, were dressed in white tunics. So much a part of the West Indian culture in Harlem was cricket, that several cricket clubs and leagues facilitated the sport. The Cosmopolitan League of Manhattan was formed in 1913, and the New York League in 1919.⁵²

On Saturday, October 15, 1927, a watershed events of sorts took place in the West Indian Harlem community. On that date *The West Indian-American* began publication. The front page of the newspaper/periodical was a huge advertisement calling upon all readers to remember Marcus Garvey, whom it claimed was the heart of the colored world and was languishing in an Atlanta jail. Costing ten cents an issue and \$1 for a yearly subscription, the newspaper featured a "West Indian Affairs" column, in which news from the various islands were featured. Published monthly by the West Indian-American Publishing Company, located at 556 West 145th Street, it considered the reasons for its existence so obvious that listing them was unnecessary. Still, it called upon West Indians to embrace its all-for-one and one-for-all philosophy, and applauded the improvement over the previous twenty years in West Indian-American relations.⁵³ Letters welcoming and praising the appearance of the paper were published in the next issue, asserting that the paper would meet a long-felt need in the West Indian community in Harlem, and would lead to a better understanding between West Indians and Americans.⁵⁴

Much as they tried to transmit and perpetuate the culture of the Caribbean,

⁵²J. M. Flagler, "Well Caught, Mr. Holder," *The New Yorker*, September 25, 1954, 66.

⁵³*The West Indian-American*, Vol. 1, No. 1, October 15, 1927.

⁵⁴*The West Indian-American*, Vol. 1, No. 2, November 1927.

West Indian parents experienced difficulty in getting their children to remain loyal to it. Their children responded more readily to the institutions and traditions of the African American community, frowning upon their parents' way of doing things. In the process, they triggered discord between their parents and themselves, as well as between native Blacks and themselves. Tension between West Indian parents and their children centered around discipline. Ostensibly because of their British backgrounds, West Indian parents tended to be strict disciplinarians who were loathe to relinquish control. Exacerbating matters was the fact that many West Indian women were working outside the home for the first time, which reduced the amount of time they had to spend with their children. West Indian parents also did not appreciate that their children preferred American socialization over West Indian.⁵⁵

Civic and Political Organizations

Blacks from the West Indies arrived in Harlem unprepared for the social and political conditions they encountered. Their predecessors had failed to alert them to the oppression and racism in North America. In an attempt to adjust to their alien, hostile environment they inaugurated social networks and organizations, much like the Jewish Landsmanschaft societies that integrated Jews into their new homes while perpetuating the traditions of the mother countries. These organizations were more than just voluntary groupings that offered a sense of solidarity to the newly-arrived immigrant groupings. Called benevolent and progressive associations, these bodies functioned in a number of ways, including surrogate family and integrating force in an

⁵⁵Reid, 144–145.

otherwise disassociating society. To be sure, the associations appeared parochial and provincial on the surface, their names seeming to suggest that membership and involvement were restricted to their kind. Yet the associations, in addition to providing crucial connecting linkages between the newly arrived and the homeland and being a vital arena for social intercourse here, were all about economic survival, too. Thus, these organizations were attempts by West Indians to reconstruct their world.⁵⁶

Illustrative of the benevolent associations and mutual aid societies of West Indians in Harlem during this time was the St. Vincent Benevolent Association, founded on August 14, 1920, by Cornwall John, seven years after he arrived in New York City. The organization was incorporated in 1924, later spawning the St. Vincent Cricket Association in 1925 and The Flambeau Cricket Club.⁵⁷ There were the Antillean League, the Caribbean Union, the Dominica Benevolent Society, British Jamaicans' Benevolent Association, Grenada Mutual Association, Daughters of St. Christopher, Sons and Daughters of Nevis, Sons and Daughters of Barbados, Montserrat Progressive Society, St. Lucia United Association, and the Trinidad Benevolent Association.⁵⁸ The West Indian Protective Society of America, located at 178 West 135th Street, was established to look after the interests of colored people

⁵⁶Bert J. Thomas, "Historical Functions of Caribbean-American Benevolent/Progressive Associations," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, Vol. 12, No. 2, July 1988, 45-58; Ottley and Weatherby, 193.

⁵⁷John Norris Quow, "Attitudes of British West Indian Immigrants Towards Black Americans and Black American Culture," M.A. Thesis (New York: Department of Sociology, City University of New York, 1974), 65-66.

⁵⁸Ottley and Weatherby, 194.

of foreign birth. On June 21, 1918, it invited African Americans, foreign-born and native, to a “get-together” at a Harlem Church, informing all that representatives from the British, French and Dutch Consulates would be on hand to provide information affecting their interests.⁵⁹

Advocacy action clubs and organizations were also formed. The Negro Foreign-Born Citizen League of New York City was a political, non-partisan organization restricted to foreign-born Blacks, their children, and spouses. One of its major objectives was improving relations with native Blacks. It also wanted to see more Blacks elected to Congress, City and State government, the local police force and the fire department. Additionally, it fought for more liberal immigration laws and the election of more Black judges. The Afro-American Voters Coalition was an all-inclusive organization which had as its objective the promotion of naturalization and political involvement of West Indians.⁶⁰ Caribbean Fisheries was established to engender the development of commerce in sea food between the United States and the Caribbean, and The West Indies Communities Development League to foster colonization in British Guiana. Established primarily to meet critical economic and political needs in the West Indian community, these clubs provided a context for

⁵⁹Display at Schomburg Library, New York City, March 2000.

⁶⁰Indigenous African Americans complained that West Indians limped toward naturalization. In 1930, approximately a quarter of Black immigrants were naturalized citizens, as opposed to sixty percent of White immigrants. One reason offered by West Indians for their reticence toward naturalization was that it brought no change in their social and economic status. Reid, 162–163.

social interaction even when they failed to meet their stated primary objectives.⁶¹

The Harlem West Indian organizations were not restricted to promoting the welfare of West Indians in the United States. At least one, the Hamitic League, was a Pan-Africanist organization. It was one of three Black world groups which in 1918 emerged as a rival to W. E. B. Du Bois and the NAACP. Among its members were G. McLean Ogle of British Guiana, Arthur Schomburg, and John E. Bruce, a journalist and later supporter of Marcus Garvey.⁶²

In spite of their attempts to resolve the social disorganization that attended their migration to the United States through benevolent associations and mutual aid societies, West Indians saw their efforts frustrated by their own entrenched classism and nationalism. Black and White Americans alike lumped all West Indians together, mistakenly assuming that they were a homogenous group that shared the same traditions and culture and that marched to the beat of the same drummer. Yet that was not the case. If nothing else, the number of mutual aid societies and benevolent societies betrayed a stubborn ethnocentricity and nationalism that made unity both an impossibility and improbability. Nor was the difficulty at achieving consensus among West Indians a consequence of any language barrier. To be sure, the French speaking West Indians had cultural characteristics dissimilar to those of British West Indians. Yet division was evident even among British West Indians.

Classism also played a role in slowing solidarity in the West Indian community. Some middle-class West Indians continued to treat those from the lower

⁶¹Reid, 165–166; Kasinitz, 112.

⁶²Clarence G. Contee, "Du Bois, the NAACP, and the Pan African Congress of 1919," *Journal of Negro History*, Vol. LVII, No. 1, January, 1972, 18.

class with disdain and contempt. One West Indian club in Harlem was known to have functions for its middle-class members on one floor while a mutual benevolent association, composed primarily of immigrants from the lower class, convened its meeting on another floor. This did not continue long because the lower-class immigrants, unwilling to be victimized in a land of opportunities, took to the streets. In clear tones, they offered an analysis of the social woes crippling the nation in general and Blacks in particular, offering a prescription for the better.⁶³

Although West Indians were not known to have had many fraternal organizations in the islands from which they hailed it is hardly surprising that, given the purpose and utility of these organizations, Harlem between 1900 and 1930 had a fair share of them. Fraternal organizations provided newcomers with critical information about employment and housing, served as a context for the perpetuation of old friendships, and, by extension, the home culture. Additionally, they offered a way for the expatriate to continue influencing the politics of his or her birthplace. More importantly, they represented a strain in the broader Black community for modalities of self evaluation that did not emanate from the dominant White culture.⁶⁴

West Indians and Politics Up to 1930

West Indians played pivotal roles in the struggle of Blacks for freedom in the United States long before Marcus Garvey landed in New York. Two West Indians,

⁶³Reid, 147.

⁶⁴Kasinitz, 112.

Prince Hall,⁶⁵ a Barbadian, and John B. Russwurm, a Jamaican, were key figures during the nineteenth century for liberty and justice. Russwurm was the first Black man to graduate from Bowdoin College, and, with Samuel E. Comish of Delaware, published a newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, in 1827. Hall became the progenitor of secret societies in America and was instrumental in the abolition of the slave trade in Massachusetts. It was a West Indian, H. Sylvester Williams, who in 1900 organized the first Pan-African Congress in London. This meeting drew delegates from the West Indies, England, and America, whose delegation was led by none other than W. E. B. Du Bois.

West Indians were actively involved in New York City politics from 1900 to 1930, their involvement the result of their drive and accurate read of the political scene in New York City. During the first three decades of the twentieth century Blacks in New York City remained loyal to the Republican party, doing so in spite of the fact that the Republicans had all but turned their backs on Black support. Mired in social, economic and political isolation, Blacks still saw their best chances for rescue and inclusion in the Republican party. Yet during this time the Democrats made intentional overtures at captivating the Black vote, most noticeably through an organization they had created in 1898 called the United Colored Democracy. Rumored to be a "Tammany Club," the United Colored Democracy funneled Black votes into the Democratic party in exchange for token patronage jobs that represented neither political leverage nor economic empowerment.⁶⁶ W. T. R.

⁶⁵It is not clear Prince Hall was born in Barbados.

⁶⁶Kasinitz, 212.

Richardson, a West Indian who had migrated to the United States in 1884, was among the founders of the United Colored Democracy.

Initially, West Indians registered with and supported both the Republican and Democratic parties, though they campaigned hard for Theodore Roosevelt in 1912. They knocked on doors, speaking on Roosevelt's behalf and encouraging Blacks, West Indians included, to register and vote.⁶⁷ Yet by the 1920s they tended toward the Democrats, in part because they had no axe to grind with the Democrats. Putting pragmatism over ideology, West Indians concluded that since neither party was serious about addressing the concerns of the Black community they would at least get what they could from the Democrats, which was jobs. By 1930 they were moving away from the Republicans, especially at the state and local level, with a group of them, called the New Democrats, feeling no allegiance at all to the Republicans.⁶⁸ The two West Indians who rose to prominence in the Republican and Democratic parties were William Derrick and John W. A. Shaw respectively. Born in Antigua, Derrick, until his death in 1913, was among the most powerful West Indians in Harlem. He was the presiding bishop of the New York Diocese of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and pastor of Bethel AME. As the spiritual head of thousands of Black New Yorkers, Derrick, a leader of uncommon oratorical skills and commanding personality, wielded an influence way beyond the boundaries of his parish. Shaw, who for a time published a newspaper in the city, rallied not a few

⁶⁷ Calvin B. Holder, "The Rise of the West Indian Politician in New York City, 1900–1952," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, Vol. 4, No. 1, January 1980, 45–59.

⁶⁸ John C. Walter, *The Harlem Fox: J. Raymond Jones and Tammany, 1920–1970* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press), 51.

West Indians to the Democratic party, which rewarded with him an appointment as Deputy Tax Assessor for Queens.⁶⁹

The first West Indian to run for State Assembly was H. Adolph Howell, a funeral director who had come to America from Barbados before 1900 and was well liked by both native and foreign-born Blacks. The year was 1926. In 1930, Edwin O. Austin won the Twenty-first Assembly Seat. Also in 1930, James S. Watson, who in 1905 had migrated from Jamaica and was one of the first Black West Indians to be admitted to the bar, was elected a judge in New York City as a result of an overwhelming turnout of West Indian voters.⁷⁰

Another West Indian who began to make his mark in New York City politics during this time was J. Raymond Jones, who was born in St. Thomas on November 19, 1899 and migrated to New York City by way of Puerto Rico in 1918. Almost immediately, Jones began to dabble in politics, first as an aide to Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), and then on the city and state levels. In 1921, he was a leader in the drive to garner Black votes for the Democratic mayoral candidate. One of the campaign issues was the subway fare, which the Democratic candidate did not want to see go up. Jones was happy when Hylan triumphed, but when Jones' hopes of procuring a few patronage jobs did not materialize, he felt betrayed. As a consequence, he redoubled his efforts to bring about lasting change in the Democratic party, working hard on behalf of Blacks to

⁶⁹Holder, "The Rise of the West Indian Politician in New York City, 1900-1952," 46.

⁷⁰Ibid., 48.

assure that their voices were heard and their labor and votes rewarded.⁷¹

West Indians constituted the majority of the Five Cent Fare Club, a Democratic Party club that was instrumental in John F. Hylan's successful run for New York City mayor in 1921. Unfortunately, the Five Cent Fare Club was viewed as the rival of the United Colored Democracy, which was composed mostly of indigenous African Americans. Yet these two organizations worked together on key issues even as they jockeyed for the position of chief spokesman and official organ of Harlem's Black population.

Political clubs found a ready clientele among West Indians, who resisted their marginalized status in the society. There was the Twenty-first Assembly District Socialist Club, an eclectic blend of disproportionately West Indian men and one woman who maintained only minimum contact with their national branch downtown. This club chartered its own course, establishing, among other things, the People's Educational Forum with a view to bringing enlightenment on political, economic and social issues to the public. There was also the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB), whose inception is shrouded in uncertainty but whose intentions were clear. Started between 1917 and 1919, the ABB, like the UNIA, was committed to the liberation of

⁷¹Jones, who went on to lead Tammany Hall in the 1960s, worked as a porter soon after arriving in the United States. On a trip through the South he had his first encounter with racism, being called "boy" and "Nigger" by Whites who objected to his using too strong a solution to sanitize their car. Unaccustomed to harassment of this type, Jones verbally registered his discomfort and resentment of the insults. Yet his actions were misunderstood by Blacks and Whites alike, the Southern Blacks on board branding him a troublemaker who did not know his place. Jones was physically attacked by some Blacks with a view to being put in his place. In time he purchased a gun to defend himself. The experience was a teacher, showing him, among other things, that West Indians dealt with such insults and indignities differently. Walter, *The Harlem Fox*.

Black people the world over. Also like the UNIA, it drew heavily from the West Indian population in Harlem.

Besides those West Indians who remained loyal to mainstream American politics in the Republican and Democratic parties were several who pioneered in the radical movement of protest and confrontation. As early as 1902, Hubert Harrison, from the Virgin Islands, was preaching radicalism on the streets of Harlem. Harrison founded *The Voice*, America's first militant Black newspaper, and authored two books, *The Negro and the Nation* (1917) and *When Africa Awakes* (1920) before his death in 1927.⁷² A. Philip Randolph was mentored in socialism by Harrison. Yet it was W. A. Domingo, a Jamaican, who was considered the father of Harlem radicalism. Domingo served as associate editor of Garvey's *Negro World* before publishing his own newspaper, *The Emancipator*, in which he continued his radical writings. William Bridges' *The Challenge* and Cyril Briggs' *The Crusader* were two other Black socialist periodicals of the era. A former chief acting-editor of *The Amsterdam News*, Briggs launched the *Crusader* in 1918 in sympathy for Bolshevism. Eric Walrond, from British Guiana, served as associate editor of Garvey's *Negro World*, though he eventually joined *Opportunity* magazine. And Claude McKay for a time edited *The Liberator*, a white Marxist newspaper. The names of these periodicals tell the story of their objectives and activities. The United States government was so concerned with these publications that it took steps to suppress them, including the issuance of a report in 1919 entitled "Radicalism and Sedition

⁷²For a scholarly treatment of Hubert H. Harrison, particularly as it relates to Black uplift ideology, see Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 234–260.

among the Negroes as Reflected in their Publications.”⁷³

Hubert Harrison had a profound effect on Richard Benjamin Moore, who was born on August 9, 1893 in Barbados, where he spent the first sixteen years of his life. Like many Barbadians, he left the island in search of a better life in the United States, disembarking in New York harbor on July 4, 1909. The Independence Day celebrations he encountered unnerved the staid, serious teenager. A voracious reader, Moore availed himself of books on a wide array of subjects, and was often seen ruminating on the arguments of street corner pundits in lower Manhattan. He was struck by the clear penetrating oratory of Hubert H. Harrison, and when the Twenty first Assembly District formed a branch of the Socialist Party in 1918, Moore became a foundation member. That year Moore took to the streets of Harlem preaching socialism.

Moore was a gifted orator whose commanding presence and political skills distinguished him from other West Indian radicals in 1920s Harlem. His speeches, whether delivered from a podium, lecturn, or the street corner, were forceful and fervent, and held audiences transfixed. Moore’s oratory provided fodder for other West Indian writers, including Claude McKay, who dedicated his poem “You are the Thunder” to Moore. Extemporaneous speaking was Moore’s strength. He could speak without written notes for hours without boring his listeners, and he was

⁷³Walter and Ansheles, “ The Role of the Caribbean Immigrant in the Harlem Renaissance,” *Afro-American in New York Life and History*, Vol, I, No. 1, January 1977, 56–58.

especially gifted as a debater, a role he relished.⁷⁴

Moore ran unsuccessfully on the Communist Party ticket for the congressional seat representing the Twenty-first Assembly District in 1928, and for attorney general of New York State in 1930. That he ran for attorney general with no formal education or training in the law is noteworthy. Moore was more successful as president of the Harlem Tenant's League, which he helped organize in 1928 to protest the evictions, violations of housing codes, and rent increases with which Harlemites had to contend. He viewed the problem of housing as one of the most critical Blacks in Harlem faced, seeing a disturbing correlation between it and infant mortality rates. He lambasted the "rent hogs and landlord sharks" who exploited the vulnerability of a population "caught in the meshes of this vicious and lethal system."⁷⁵

West Indian political radicalism was not limited to elective politics on the state, local and national levels. It penetrated labor organizations as well. Ashley L. Totten and Frank R. Crosswaithe were standouts in this regard. Totten, from St. Croix, had migrated to the United States in 1915, immediately finding work with the Pullman Sleeping Car Company. Conditions in the company made him yearn for an organization that would speak to the issues of higher wages and less working hours, as well as work toward eliminating the contumely heaped on Black workers. His efforts finally led to the creation of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and

⁷⁴W. Burghardt Turner and Joyce Moore Turner, *Richard B. Moore, Caribbean Militant in Harlem* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

⁷⁵Richard B. Moore, "Housing and the Negro Masses," *The Negro Champion*, Vol. I, No. 15, September 8, 1928, 8.

Maids. By 1925 Totten was known around Harlem as a firebrand. Also from the Virgin Islands was Frank S. Crosswaithe, who in 1925 formed The Trade Union Committee to Organize Black Workers. This body urged African American workers to join trade unions and pursue equal pay and work conditions. Crosswaithe was so prominent in the labor union movement that during World War I former president Teddy Roosevelt make an appearance at the Palace Casino on 135th Street to denounce him and some fellow West Indian radicals.⁷⁶

Because they had as little to lose as they had as much to gain, West Indians were at the helm of activities to better the economic, social and political lives of the African American community. They did not much appreciate their loss of status in America, responding by aggressively fighting for their rights. West Indian women led out in the fight to integrate the garment industry in New York City, and Haitians played key roles in penetrating the fur industry toward the close of the 1920s. David E. Grange, a combative Jamaican, was the force behind one of the major strikes of the International Seaman's Union when he served as vice president. And it was Ashley Totten from the Virgin Islands who, as an officer of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, mentored A. Philip Randolph. West Indians pioneered and provided leadership in the growth of left wing economic and political organizations in the country at large and Harlem in particular not because they were innately leftist in

⁷⁶John C. Walter, "Black Immigrants and Political Radicalism in the Harlem Renaissance," *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, June 1977, 131–141. In his analysis of the Harlem Renaissance, Walker points out that it was not all about art and artists. Included in his analysis is a look at the immigrant impulse, the distinctive elements of its rhetoric, and its role and legacy. See also, "Frank Crosswaithe: Pioneering Pullman Porter," *The West Indian-American*, Vol. 1, No. 4, January 1928.

orientation and outlook, but in part because such forms of protest provided them with status.⁷⁷

Detractors have attempted to discount the radicalism of West Indians, saying that in the Caribbean they were conservatives and that they only embraced radicalism when they came to the United States. The radicalism of the West Indian was thought to be insincere, the product of naivete or ignorance, and the reckless abandonment of sanity and prudence by the temporary resident.⁷⁸ Yet political radicalism in Harlem did not occur in a vacuum, but against a backdrop of overt and covert racism that West Indians found intolerable. Jim Crowism was rife, and Booker T. Washington's accommodationism did not sit well with West Indians. President Woodrow Wilson, his progressivism and campaign promises to African Americans notwithstanding, was responsible for an avalanche of segregationist legislation and practices in the federal government and nation that may have been the cause of the upswing in lynchings and was definitely a factor in the increase of Ku Klux Klan activity in the nation. Given that migrating itself is a radical act, representing a break with tradition, culture, and the past, it is far from surprising that West Indians did not cower in the face of

⁷⁷Reid, 122.

⁷⁸For an intelligent and balanced discussion of the issue, see Keith Henry's "Caribbean Migrants in New York: The Passage from Political Quiescence to Radicalism," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, Vol. 2, No. 2, July 1978, 29–46. Henry argues that the Caribbean immigrant lacked credible modes of protest in the Caribbean, where sedition charges were frequently made after World War I. He cites the punitive and pre-emptory measures against Garvey on his return to Jamaica as evidence of the lack of personal and political freedom in the West Indies during this time.

American racism.⁷⁹

Moore, Domingo, McKay, Briggs, Garvey, and others were part of a generation of educated, enlightened West Indians who, beginning in the 1880s, had emerged to protest the inherently oppressive nature of English colonialism. Products of the British educational system, they were proficient in the literature of English literary giants like Shakespeare, whom they quoted and recited lavishly. They were also adroit in the processes and procedures of politics, reveling in the bare knuckles world of political debates, sometimes for the sheer fun of displaying their competencies. Yet what troubled them most and provoked their strongest reactions was the disparity they saw in the society between the ruling minority and the majority. Although they lacked the financial and political wherewithal to effect change on a radical level, they nonetheless agitated for change, transcending their dismal socioeconomic levels in the process. In the end, these West Indian leaders in Harlem realized that in the political arena race more than ethnicity made for the amalgamation and contours of the African American community, and that those who ventured into politics were seen and accepted not just as the spokespersons for West Indian interests, but as the de facto representatives of the wider Black constituency.⁸⁰

The radical and socialist leanings of some of the West Indian leaders in Harlem did not totally erase their religious propensities. In 1920, W. A. Domingo convinced Moore that they should organize a church. The result was the Harlem Community Church, launched in the spring of 1920 with members who had been

⁷⁹*The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 131–141.

⁸⁰Kasinitz, 209–222.

affiliated with the Unitarians before. Moore, Domingo, and Frank A. Crosswaithe were among the new church's charter members, with Moore serving as a lay preacher for most of the decade. A Jamaican expatriate, E. Ethelred Brown, was appointed as pastor of the church, which never flourished. Moore saw or sensed no tension between his avowed socialism and organized religious activities initially, arguing that the two were necessary elements of his total development. Yet by 1929 Moore was disillusioned enough with organized religion to preach a sermon entitled "How I Lost Jesus." He permanently severed his relationship with the Harlem Community Church shortly thereafter.⁸¹

Marcus Garvey and the Universal Improvement Negro Association (UNIA)

Marcus Manasseh Garvey was born in Jamaica in 1887, professedly the grandson of an African slave. It was a claim he would use as currency against other Blacks unsure of their heritage. Dark-skinned, he was the butt of crude jokes and remarks as a child, a situation that was not helped by the color caste system in which he was socialized. If anything, it made Garvey embark as a child on a journey to prove to the world that blackness was not an impediment. His odyssey for acceptance first took him to England, where his association with Africans there heightened his consciousness level with respect to conditions in Africa. He returned to Jamaica still searching for success, leading a printer's strike in the process.

One reason Garvey came to America was because of the frustration he experienced trying to motivate the peasantry in Jamaica to accept the notion of racial

⁸¹Turner and Turner, 40.

consciousness. Asserting that Blacks in his homeland were victims of a sociological hypocrisy that negated the consciousness of race, Garvey experienced greater hospitality for his views among Blacks in the United States, who were searching for a Black Moses at the time of his arrival.⁸² Yet Garvey never intended to dabble in politics. When he launched the UNIA in Jamaica in 1914, he repudiated involvement in Jamaican politics, asserting that among the organization's primary objectives was the establishment of a humanitarianism that would serve as an antidote to the social pathologies and ills plaguing his society. As such, the UNIA initially functioned as a fraternal organization, espousing and promoting mutual improvement and strategic benevolence, and covenanting to develop the physical and psychological powers of its members. Ultimately, Garvey eschewed his repudiation of politics, a reversal that was triggered in part by the harsh realities of the race situation in America. In time Garvey began to elucidate a philosophy for the redemption of Africa.

Garvey landed in New York on March 23, 1916. First, he went on a cross-continental tour of the United States, visiting no less than thirty-eight states to survey the social conditions of African Americans. The tour took fifteen months, so that it was not until June 1917 that he alighted in Harlem. Like the majority of West Indians who came to America between 1900 and 1920, he was drawn to Harlem by the sheer mass of its Black people and by its notoriety. Almost immediately, he joined the motley band of street vendors and peddlers of ideas in Harlem, lecturing first as the guest of the Black radical Hubert Harrison. Garvey's rise to prominence coincided

⁸²Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Vol 1, 1826–Aug. 1919 (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1983), xxxviii.

with Harlem's ascent as the Black capital of the world. As Blacks poured into the area, they seemed intent on grasping the elements of success so long denied them, making Garvey's doctrine of self-help and success especially appealing and addictive. A self-made individual, Garvey seemed paranoid about lapsing into poverty and failure, and held himself up as an example of what vision, industry, and sacrifice would bring to the Black race.⁸³

Garvey recruited from the radical fringe ringing Harlem for the launching of his UNIA. W. A. Domingo and Hubert Harrison were among his leaders. Headquartered in Harlem, the UNIA had as its major goal the economic emancipation and empowerment of the Black race. More specifically, it sought to consolidate Blacks of the diaspora into a cohesive, strong unit, liberate the African continent from European exploitation, create an infrastructure for the region that would see it blossom as a commercial superpower within a few years, and provide for the spiritual well-being of people of African descent through the establishment of churches. Garvey preached a gospel of the Black recapture of Africa, instilling in the Black masses a pride of race previously absent. His doctrine of race consciousness, like a drenching downpour, blanketed Harlem.⁸⁴

Bent on casting off everything White, Garvey created his own political and national order, assuming the titular role of "Provisional President-General of Africa," a title that smacked of republicanism. His hierarchal ruling structure, though, was modeled after the English monarchy, and was called the Court of Ethiopia. On his

⁸³Ibid., xl.

⁸⁴Ottley and Weatherby, 211–213.

coterie of closest and trusted aides he bestowed titles, and he established an African Legion, replete with commissioned officers, quarter masters, and commissariats. Leaving nothing to chance, Garvey had manuals on the social graces for his court personnel, as well as instruction booklets on an array of subjects that included Black history and military and self-defense tactics.⁸⁵ Yet Garvey's most presumptuous move was the creation of a Black religion. Raised a Roman Catholic, he first had been offered hospitality and a forum to dispense his ideas by a Roman Catholic church in the United States, and it was that denomination's theology, liturgy, and ritual from which Garvey's lieutenants borrowed heavily to form the foundation of his church—The African Orthodox Church. Garvey, of course, blackened everything in his church. He preached a homespun theology that boasted a Black God, a Jesus Christ who was “the Black Man of Sorrow,” and a Blessed Virgin Mary as a “Black Madonna.” In time, Garvey himself came to be viewed as the “Black Moses.”⁸⁶

Garvey was wholly given over to the idea that the Black race must be rid of

⁸⁵Ibid., 212.

⁸⁶Roi Ottley, *New World A-Coming* (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1968), 73. Scholars are divided over whether Garveyism was a religion or not, or as to its religious elements and dimensions. Arthur Huff Fauset did not include the movement in his study of Black cults in the urban north. See *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970). Yet other scholars could not help but see religious elements in the movement. See, for example, Randall K. Burkett's *Garveyism as a Religious Movement* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1978), in which Garvey is examined as a Black theologian. See also Henry J. Young's *Major Black Religious Leaders: 1755-1940* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977); Gayraud Wilmore's *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972), in which Wilmore argues that Garveyism was “in the best tradition of the Black Church in America;” and Randall K. Burkett's *Black Redemption: Churchmen Speak for the Garvey Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), in which the author posits that the Garvey movement cannot be fully understood apart from its religious dimensions.

all defilements, including cross-fertilization, he thought, with other races. So bent on racial purity was he that only people who were 100 percent Black qualified for leadership positions in his organizations. Garvey himself frowned upon mulattoes, even excoriating light-skinned Blacks like W. E. B. Du Bois, indisputably the greatest African American intellectual of the time.

Initially acclaimed, Garvey ultimately fell victim to the anti-West Indian sentiments permeating Harlem during the 1920s. The acronym UNIA stood for Ugliest Negroes in America, his detractors claimed, and Garvey was denounced as a “Jamaican Jackass.” Editorialists like the eminent W. E. B. du Bois of the *Crisis* and A. Philip Randolph of the left wing *Messenger* led the attacks on Garvey.⁸⁷ The UNIA was vilified as an organization of West Indians out of kilter with the mainstream Black community. To be sure, Garvey’s appeal found a resonant chord primarily in the West Indian community in Harlem. West Indians were victims of a caste system in the West Indies, a rampant racism in the United States, and prejudice directed at immigrants. Like leaders of mass movements before and after him, Garvey exploited the hopes and fears of his followers.

Garvey’s doctrine was a blend of intellectualism and emotionalism that appealed to the peasant population who saw in him a symbol of what it might become. That the African American intellectual had failed to assuage the deep misgivings the Black community had about the current and future state of race relations in the country made Garvey more appealing. He refused to limit himself and the possibilities of his people, passionately intoning a vision that transcended time and

⁸⁷Reid, 147–155.

the American frontier. He wanted to transform people of African descent from victims to victors, attempting to forge a sense of common identity from the various elements and segments of the Black community. He correctly reminded all Blacks of their shared heritage and underscored their shared experience of oppression. As such, Garvey was able to galvanize broad Black support for his program of self-determination and empowerment.

Garvey and Garveyism provide a critical link in the attempts of Black people to obtain justice and to experience freedom in the Americas. Before Garvey the quest of Blacks for freedom and empowerment utilized a myriad of strategies and movements, resulting in a recognizable mode of Black reflection and action in the broader society. Throughout their struggles, Blacks oscillated between disbelief and faith that change would come. Yet Garvey and Garveyism symbolized more than the historic Black struggle for freedom. They represent the marriage of two complementary Black movements for freedom—one in the West Indies and the other in the United States.

More than any other African American organization, the UNIA provoked a broad and profound interest in the plight of people of African descent in this country and around the world. Before Garvey, the African American's predicament was largely an American phenomenon and was addressed provincially for the benefit of indigenous Blacks. In the aftermath of Garvey and Garveyism, Black nationalism was conceived of in global terms. Garvey's "Back-to-Africa" movement succeeded in welding together two culturally different groups with a common ancestry and, more fundamentally significant, a shared experience of oppression and discrimination. Yet the UNIA was more successful because it satisfied the aspirations of the masses for

concrete symbols of success and meaning. To the thousands of West Indians and newly urbanized African Americans from the South it was an asylum, an oasis where they were people of value and worth in an otherwise desert of disenfranchisement.

Stereotypes and Conflict

Almost from the moment they first met, West Indian and American-born Blacks have viewed each other with a suspicion born in part by a misunderstanding and misreading of the motives of each other. By their very nature stereotypes are hardly ever based on objective, discernable, measurable criteria, but on subjective, incomplete, and inaccurate information often viewed through myopic, jaundiced eyes. West Indians were stereotyped in many ways. They were thought to be stingy and thrifty, and people who had to be monitored closely in matters of business. They were considered a haughty group who thought they were superior to indigenous Blacks, clannish, all alike, brash and talkative, quick-tempered and overly sensitive, ambitious, aggressive, litigious, serious, hard working, and eager for education. West Indian men were said to rule their homes with a heavy hand, treating their wives as property. And West Indians were said to lack racial pride. They were not race conscious.⁸⁸ Conversely, West Indians stereotyped indigenous African Americans as lazy, shiftless, loud, emotional in their religion to the neglect and detriment of rationality and sanity, and woefully mired in the past. American Black males were loafers who freeloaded off their women. Native Blacks were not forward looking or long-term planners. They were focused on the present in which they hoped to find

⁸⁸Reid, 107–108; Locke, *The New Negro*, 345–346.

instant gratification. A widespread feeling at the time was that the ethos of the West Indian stressed frugality, industry, education, and investment, and that these qualities coalesced to make the West Indian dominate in professions such as medicine, dentistry, and the law. They were said to be better prepared for medical and dental schools, with deans of several medical schools professedly saying so.⁸⁹ Even James Weldon Johnson, whose parents hailed from the British West Indies, thought that West Indians were an outstanding people, mythologizing them as above average in intelligence and sane, sober people with a knack for business.⁹⁰ Around Harlem it was alleged that West Indians had come to Harlem to teach, start a church, or create trouble. Not used to discrimination based on color or ethnicity, they were generally unaccepting of the lot of African Americans and were perpetually agitating for change in their status. Because they dominated in the Black left-wing organizations that characterized Harlem during the 1920s, a Black radical thinker was once dismissed as an overeducated West Indian in search of a job.⁹¹

Native Blacks, by no means immune from the anti-alien sentiments that permeated American society during the early twentieth century, were loathe to welcome West Indians with open arms, pejoratively dismissing them as outsiders bent on replacing them in the American mainstream. The misgivings that native Black

⁸⁹Carter Godwin Woodson, *The Negro Professional Man and the Community* (Washington, D.C.: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Inc., 1934), 83.

⁹⁰James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, 153. See also Oscar Handlin, *The Newscomers: Negroes and Puerto Ricans in a Changing Metropolis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959) in which the author contends that West Indians were better prepared for urban life and were more aggressive.

⁹¹Ottley, *New World A-Coming*, 47.

Americans harbored toward West Indians were expressed in derogative terms such as monkey-chaser and tree-climber. The West Indian's penchant for colorful clothes and unmistakable twang made him the target of crude jokes and comic misrepresentations in private and public. Street vendors particularly relished ridiculing West Indians, whom they sometimes physically assaulted. One ditty sung about West Indians had these words:

When I get on the other side
I'll buy myself a mango
Grab myself a monkey gal
And do the monkey tango

When you eat split peas and rice
You think you eatin' somethin'
But man you ain't taste nothin' yet
'Til you eat monkey hips and dumplin'.

When a monkey-chaser dies
Don't need no undertaker
Just throw him in de Harlem River
He'll float back to Jamaica.⁹²

The cause for the strained relations between West Indians and Black Americans in Harlem lay equally with both groups. Indigenous Blacks had failed to differentiate among the West Indian groups, in time assessing the best by the worst. This failure caused the American Black to assume a posture of superiority, which was replaced later by jealousy when the attainments of West Indians forced their recognition. Yet West Indians helped fuel the fires of misunderstanding, if not discord, by their unyielding attachment to their homelands and all things British. They persisted in playing British sports such as cricket, the "game of gentlemen," and in recognizing British holidays and events. British subjects that they were, they naively

⁹²Ibid., 45–46.

believed that whenever they were discriminated against in this country they could appeal to the British government for redress. West Indians seemed to place a premium on their accents, stubbornly resisting to curb or change them for fear of being mistaken for an indigenous African American and being treated as such. Others refused to alter their style of dress, opting for the tropical attire that often solicited taunts and ridicule. Still others declined the invitation of native Blacks to join their churches, opting to remain Roman Catholic and Episcopalian. Yet what really irritated indigenous Blacks was the reticence, if not refusal, of West Indians in becoming naturalized American citizens, a move that kept them out of the polling booth. Native Blacks rightly concluded that this diluted their clout in the electoral process. As African Americans saw it, the habit of West Indians in perpetuating their culture and folkways was intentional and a not-too-veiled attempt at distancing themselves from the native population.⁹³

Not all Black Americans were cool to West Indians, condescendingly viewing them with a mixture of reserve and restraint. Langston Hughes, for example, was “warmly drawn” toward them. He lyrically characterized West Indians as rambunctious, sassy, and as “little pockets of tropical dreams in alien tongues.” Hughes may have felt this way about West Indians because he had spent some time in Mexico. Yet Hughes was in the minority, the general African American feeling being one of begrudging co-existence with a group of people they thought looked down their noses at them.⁹⁴

⁹³Kasinitz, 48.

⁹⁴Anderson, 300.

In an effort to allay the fears and misunderstandings that Black West Indians and Black Americans had for each other, *Opportunity* devoted its November 1926 issue to the West Indian in New York City. Convinced that knowledge of a neighbor was a precursor to the establishment of a lasting friendship, the magazine aimed at providing indigenous African Americans with broader and deeper understandings of West Indians. The business manager of the journal, Eric Walrond, himself a West Indian from British Guiana who had already published a collection of short stories under the title *Tropic Death*, assisted in the collation and production of the articles.

W. A. Domingo, one of the best known West Indian journalists in New York City, presented an overview of the West Indies, tracing the history and development of the region from its pre-Columbus days through its colonial era. He stressed that the migration of West Indians to America was purely an economic necessity, and noted that the bond being forged between West Indian and American Blacks was born of a shared experience of discrimination. More importantly, he underscored that the survival and success of the two culturally different groups depended on intelligent reciprocity and collaboration. Casper Holstein, from the Virgin Islands, reminded readers of the legacy of resistance to oppression of West Indians, citing Denmark Vesey, a Black from the Virgin Islands who in 1822 orchestrated the infamous Charleston, South Carolina, slave uprising, as an example. E. Franklin Frazier assessed the impact of the Garvey movement, which he claimed was an asylum to the disenfranchised and dissatisfied, and Wendell Malliet, editor of the *West Indian Statesman*, waxed eloquent on the accomplishments of West Indians since the emancipation of slavery some ninety years earlier. Arthur Schomburg gave an

historical overview of some West Indian composers and musicians.⁹⁵

If, according to W. E. B. Du Bois, American born Blacks at the start of the twentieth century were a cauldron of conflicting tensions brought about by their attempts to reconcile two identities—American and Black—West Indian immigrants found themselves in a similar predicament.⁹⁶ Like Black Americans who at once wanted to be Black and American, West Indians wanted to remain West Indian even as they cast their lots with African Americans. Lennox Raphael deftly captures this “two-ishness” in relating what happened when, years later, his aunt became an American citizen. Saying it did not mean anything to her, she still wished to be known as a West Indian. Raphael calls this the standard neurosis and color complex of the average West Indian, whom he claims does not want to be considered Black. He asserts that he never met a West Indian who did not feel superior to an American Black, and that West Indians of his era seldom rented to native Blacks. Moreover, according to Raphael, West Indians believed that the British system of education was superior to the American, and that African American children not raised in a home with at least one West Indian parent were destined to be without ambition and develop behavior problems. Finally, West Indians could not understand why they could acquire property so quickly after coming to the United States while indigenous Blacks continued to complain about the lack of equal opportunity. Raphael

⁹⁵*Opportunity*, Vol. 4, No. 27, November 1926.

⁹⁶W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1931), 4–5.

thoroughly rejects this “hysteria and false pride.”⁹⁷

West Indians resisted acceptance of the minority label because of this sense of two-ness. They resisted the label because they viewed doing so as giving tacit endorsement to the notion that people of African descent were inherently inferior to other races, which was one of the last things a West Indian was willing to admit. Thus, they opted to identify themselves by nationality more than by race.⁹⁸

Their distrust of each other notwithstanding, West Indian and Black American culture did affect each other in early twentieth century America. In the religious sphere, voodoo and obeah from the West Indies did intermingle with conjure which had made its way to Harlem from the South. In time, West Indian fruits and vegetables decorated many Harlem food stores and tables. So great was the demand for these tropical products that a profitable business was spawned to make them available. Black Americans even took to West Indian music, finding in the rhythmic, pulsating tempo strains of Africa with which their souls connected and resonated. One song, “Sly Mongoose,” could be heard being belted out on phonographs as early as 1915, and calypso music grew in popularity through the 1920s. So, too, did West

⁹⁷Lennox Raphael, “The West Indian Syndrome: To be or not to be an American Negro,” *Negro Digest*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, November 1963, 30–34.

⁹⁸David A. Baptiste, Jr., Kenneth V. Hardy, and Laurie Lewis, “Clinical Practice with Caribbean Immigrant Families in the United States: The Intersection of Emigration, Immigration, Culture, and Race,” in *Caribbean Families, Diversity Among Ethnic Groups*, ed. by Jaipaul L. Roopnarine and Janet Brown (Greenwich, CT: Ablex Publishing Corp., 1997), 275–303.

Indian comedians and entertainers.⁹⁹

Yet West Indians contributed to Black life in the United States in other fundamentally significant ways. The persistent affirmation of the worth and dignity of their personhood in a society that systematically and structurally sought to discount people of African descent and to relegate them to positions of subservience is one such contribution and legacy. Generally, West Indians resisted the broader society's attempt to regularize them, to beat them into its idea of the standard. It was this attitude that in part explains the thought and activity of Marcus Garvey and Claude McKay, who immortalized this mindset when he wrote: "Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack, Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back."¹⁰⁰ This West Indian attitude was most noticeable in Jamaicans, a proud people who refused to believe that they were in any way more deficient than other human beings. Unfortunately, this spirit was often mistaken for sassiness, and even African Americans bemoaned the West Indian penchant for standing up for his or her rights even if it meant going to court. Dismissed as troublemakers, West Indians were denied employment in some industries because of this attitude.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹Ottley, *New World A-Coming*, 45–47; Joyce Toney, "Exporting Culture: Caribbean Americans in New York City" in *U.S.—Caribbean Relations: Their Impact on Peoples and Cultures*, ed. Ransford W. Palmer (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 87–96.

¹⁰⁰Locke, *The New Negro*, 349.

¹⁰¹According to Du Bois, it was the West Indian immigrant who inspired free Blacks in the North to press for full assimilation and amalgamation with the society on the same basis as other people after 1830, when slavery appeared to be irretrievably mired in the South. He says that their agitation and leadership led to a new era of self-determination and self-development, and that West Indians were
(continued...)

For all of their accomplishments, West Indians were as circumscribed in their attempts at economic emancipation and empowerment as were African Americans. Integral components of the Black community, they were destined to share in its triumphs and failures, its weal and its woes. When they aspired to leadership positions, they discovered that those that existed were restricted to the Black community. This was a rude awakening for the naive few who believed that educational and professional qualifications mattered more than the color of one's skin to the American society. More importantly, West Indians learned that ethnic identity and pride were detrimental to Black solidarity, the lesson being a primer for those who sought to serve the public sector as journalists or elected officials.¹⁰²

Challenged by their leaders to see their coolness toward each other for what it was—an absurdity often exploited by the broader society to keep them perpetually locked in the throes of conflict—West Indians and indigenous Blacks forged and maintained genuine friendships and working relationships. Especially effective in this

101(...continued)

largely responsible for the emphasis on manhood that defined nineteenth century Black protest. Du Bois also did not lose sight of the West Indian's practice of blazing new trails, citing the accomplishment of the Antiguan John W. A. Shaw, who became deputy commissioner of taxes for Queens County in New York in the early 1890s, as evidence. See DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 48. Carter G. Woodson adds that in proportion to their numbers in the United States, West Indians made a much larger contribution to the advancement of the race than native Blacks. W. A. Domingo asserted that as an inexorable army of destiny seekers who had left the verdant hills and luxurious beaches of the West Indies, West Indians had not only brought to America the "gift of the tropics," but had enriched Black life here. In Harlem they had become a "factor and a figure," not only because of their idiosyncracies and unique accents, but because of their spirit. See W. A. Domingo, "The Gift of the Tropics," in *The New Negro: His History and Literature*, Alain Locke, ed., (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1968), 341–342.

¹⁰²Kasinitz, 52.

regard were the rebukes of those West Indians who pointed out to their fellow sojourners that it was patently foolish to excoriate the society to which they had come in search of economic progress. Taking aim at the ethnocentricity that seemed a hallmark of the West Indian community at the time, one West Indian leader reminded his fellow expatriates that they were still Black and looked down upon by an America that judged by the color of the skin more than anything else.¹⁰³ In addition, both groups were reminded that even though their forebears had been dropped off in the West Indies and North America, they had been carted to these points in the same boat.

In time, West Indians and indigenous African Americans realized that there was a commonality in the treatment meted out to them by the broader American society. This realization, coupled with the fact that segregation had physically placed West Indians and native Black Americans side by side, made for a coming together to combat the issues that dogged their paths, marred their lives, and threatened to permanently relegate them to a marginalized status in American society. As such, discrimination welded the two groups together into a formidable minority that could not be treated with benign neglect.

Summary

People from the Caribbean began migrating to the United States in the early nineteenth century. They started coming in significant numbers in the early twentieth century, joining a stream of thousands of native Blacks from the South to the urban

¹⁰³Reid, 123.

centers of the North. Harlem became home to an overwhelming number of the newly-arrived Blacks. West Indians came to America principally for economic reasons, the money that they funneled back to their countries fueling the belief that in America things were indeed better. When they were able to return home, West Indians were sure to be loaded with the trappings of American success—American clothes and products.

West Indians who entered the United States did so in the dual capacity of immigrant and Black. They differed from the indigenous African American population not so much in physical characteristics as in social mores. Some West Indians tended to view race matters as a distraction from their main reason for coming to the United States, which was the enhancement of their economic well-being. For them amalgamation into American society was not a major objective, and joining the struggle to eliminate racism an infringement on time that could have been better spent working at a second or third job. West Indians, not unlike other immigrant groups, had to adjust their culture in their new land with a view toward survival and acceptance.

Yet West Indians did not accept American culture—Black or White—wholesale. Refusing to accept terms like “colored” to describe themselves, terms they viewed as inherently discriminatory and condescending, they took their grievances to the streets, giving rise to consciousness raising groups like the UNIA and leaders like Marcus Garvey. A plethora of civic and social organizations provided the West Indian immigrant asylum and sanctuary from the severe economic, social, and political dislocation they experienced in their drive for power in the United States. These organizations underscored the error of Americans lumping all West Indians

together, for just about each island and country had its own organization.¹⁰⁴ Not ordinarily a cohesive, monolithic group, West Indians were a medley of accents joined together by the contingency of circumstance. As immigrants they were forced to temporarily suspend ethnic and nationalist tendencies to fight for the common cause of survival in an often hostile environment.

When West Indians and indigenous African Americans encountered each other for the first time each reacted with a mixture of uncertainty and distrust born of ignorance. Their interactions were characterized by a complex web of likes and dislikes, attraction and repulsion. Both groups sensed differences and were disturbed, at times even offended, by them. The stereotypes they harbored about each other marred their relationship, fueling conflicts between them and engendering division in the West Indian community.

West Indians in New York City experienced several warring impulses. One was towards a larger Anglo-American culture exemplified by high church and cricket. Another was towards a unique West Indian identity, replete with West Indian cultural retentions, not shared by either Whites or American Blacks. Last was towards pan-Africanism. Yet native Blacks and West Indians of necessity developed social relationships of reciprocity and mutuality to unitedly address the social and political phenomena that confronted people of color in the United States. Both groups aimed for rapport, the West Indian sense of an alternative nationality proving quite important in this regard.

¹⁰⁴One West Indian journal numbered over thirty benevolent West Indian organizations in Harlem, quite an accomplishment given the fact that the thirty entities sought to meet the needs of West Indians from only nine political areas. See, Reid, 229.

That West Indians tended more toward radicalism is incontrovertible. Yet it was explainable given the radicalism of the act of immigration itself. Immigration is a radical act of protest against an unacceptable status in the home country. Immigrants flee to new lands in search of self-enhancement, not just as a means of escape. Hence the desire of West Indians to acquire an advanced education. With the West Indian there was an inflated preoccupation with higher education, Howard University facilitating more than a thousand of them in the first three decades of the twentieth century. This heightened awareness and pursuit of an education in turn gave rise to the stereotype of the West Indian being smarter than indigenous African Americans. The truth is that West Indian students may have been better educated to begin with and were more highly motivated whether they acquired a college degree or not.¹⁰⁵

In spite of their indictment as anti-Black, West Indians bucked the tide of the early twentieth century, which was for Blacks to patronize white lawyers. They displayed greater confidence in Black lawyers by utilizing them, and the appointment of two Black municipal court judges in Harlem toward the end of the 1920s served as a catalyst in this regard.¹⁰⁶

West Indian hard work and achievement are two elements that gave rise to the myth of West Indian superiority. That the West Indians who migrated to America tended to be the cream of the crop contributed to the perpetuation of the myth. The radicalness of migration was a significant factor in the West Indian penchant for protest during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Yet during this period

¹⁰⁵Reid, 226–227.

¹⁰⁶Woodson, *The Negro Professional Man and the Community*, 233.

Harlem had a significant number of indigenous African Americans who had also migrated there from the South.

In the end, the West Indian population in Harlem had more positive than negative effects on New York City in general and the native Black population in particular. West Indians contributed to the nation's economic life and to the perpetuation of American optimism. They provided evidence that in this country one can succeed if one is willing to work hard and make sacrifices. Both West Indians and native Blacks saw their social vision expand and their cultural sensibilities educated and enhanced as they were forced to deal with each other. More importantly, their shared experience of struggle caused them to refocus their vision. West Indians and indigenous African Americans wisely cast aside their differences to unitedly focus their energies on issues that benefitted all people of color. The result of their collaboration on common issues may be characterized as unity and intra-racial progress.

CHAPTER IV

THE BLACK EXPERIENCE IN ADVENTISM, 1840–1930

From the start of the Millerite Movement around 1840 to the time James K. Humphrey left the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1930, the African American experience in Seventh-day Adventism was a saga of paradox, ambiguity, and ambivalence. Born in the midst of the Second Awakening, the Adventist movement and later the Seventh-day Adventist denomination both demonstrated uncertainty, if not confusion, in dealing with the Blacks who filtered into their ranks in myriad ways. Adventists lacked a coherent, strategic plan to evangelize Blacks, hedged on declaring their position on the race issue shortly after their official organization at the height of the American Civil War, and only moved to intentionally minister to people of African descent in America after they were reprimanded by Adventist pioneer, Ellen Gould White, in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Their noble pronouncements to the contrary notwithstanding, Adventist resonance with the color issue during this period was one of pragmatism over principle, and expediency over legality.

Adventist treatment of Blacks has led supporters and detractors among members and non-members alike to question the organization's sincerity, sensitivity, and commitment to inaugurating an age of racial healing and reconciliation. Today, race, as in the broader society, continues to be the single most important challenge confronting the denomination, defining and contextualizing not a few of its policies,

practices, and priorities. In the United States, the Seventh day Adventist church is structured unambiguously along racial lines, a reality that eloquently tells that in the Seventh-day Adventist church at least, race matters.

Historically, Seventh-day Adventists have viewed human history and the events of the world from a distinct perspective. The distinctiveness of the denomination's cosmology began to emerge during the time the group existed as part of the Millerite Movement. It evolved more between the Great Disappointment of 1844 and the formal organization of the denomination in 1863. Yet Seventh-day Adventism did not evolve in a cultural and historical vacuum, uninfluenced by larger political and economic forces and factors. Consequently, while Adventists conceived of historical forces in ways that caused them to be branded a cult, they tended to view people of African descent in very much the same ways that the broader American society did. Moreover, the evidence suggests that the denomination did so unquestioningly, accepting the theological and sociological framework and underpinnings for society's diminution and depreciation of the African American's nature, culture, and ability.¹

James K. Humphrey joined the Seventh-day Adventist church shortly after the start of the twentieth century, when West Indians were beginning to stream into the urban centers of the North. Rising quickly through the denomination's leadership ranks, Humphrey, a proud Jamaican who was troubled by the racism he encountered in American society, early experienced severe pangs of conscience over the ways the Adventist church handled matters of race. Ultimately, Humphrey, unable to accept

¹ Alven Makapela, *The Problem With Africanity in the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1996), 1–2.

the marginalized status of African Americans in the Adventist church anymore, broke with the group.

In this chapter, I intend to explore the Black experience within the Seventh-day Adventist church, beginning with an examination of the moment and shape of the Black encounter with Adventism from the time Adventists began existing as Millerites who expected the return of Jesus Christ to earth in 1844. After the Great Disappointment of 1844, the Adventist tradition was kept alive by various Adventist groups, including the Sabbatarian Adventists, a fraction that accepted Saturday as the Bible Sabbath. It was this group that metamorphasized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which was formally organized in 1863. I shall investigate the infant church's attempts to attract Blacks in the North and in the South, as well as the writings and ministry of the two individuals who more than anybody else fostered Adventist contact with Blacks—Ellen G. White and her son, Edson White. Finally, I shall explore James K. Humphrey's life and ministry within the Seventh-day Adventist church.

The Millerite Movement

Between 1800 and 1850, the land mass of the United States increased by approximately fifty percent and the population jumped 400 percent from approximately 5,000,000 to over 20,000,000 people. The young nation became home to millions of immigrants, many of whom were from Ireland and Germany. This influx of people to America was the first genuine mass immigration the nation experienced. Yet if America welcomed new peoples to its shores, immigration also created tension and antagonism among its population. This was particularly true with

respect to religious orientation and allegiances, and, more importantly, the nascent spirit of nativism in the nation at the time. Americans viewed the growing Roman Catholic population with suspicion, labeling Catholics as anti-American for the premium they placed on promoting their own educational system. Early to mid-nineteenth century America saw religious uniformity come to an end, and, concomitantly, a rise in the number of sects and religious groups that operated outside the margins of American society. So pervasive was the increase and spread of religious groups and activity during the period that it has been referred to as the time of religious ferment.² Yet the rise of activity in the religious sector of the nation did not occur in a vacuum, but mirrored tendencies that were occurring in the political and social spheres of the nation as well.

The two individuals who represented the strains and changes that took place in the social and political lives of the nation were Charles Finney and Andrew Jackson. To be sure, Finney was not Jacksonian in his political ideology. Yet Finney was vintage Jackson in his presuppositions and world view, siding with the little and marginalized peoples of the American society whose discontent he exploited. The activity of both men resulted in the elevation of ambition and initiative over wealth and ancestry, and for the first time the American dream was considered within the reach of all. Optimism and egalitarianism were the watchwords in both the popular religion and popular democracy of the day.³

²Withrop S. Hudson, "A Time of Religious Ferment," in *The Rise of Adventism*, Edwin S. Gaustad, ed. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1974), 1-17.

³*Ibid.*, 4, 7.

It was in this context of hospitality to unconventionality in both politics and religion that Adventism was born and fostered. Its parent was millennialism, a Christian theology that includes the ultimate victory of Christ over the forces of evil and the deliverance and exoneration of his followers. Millennialism is best taught and understood in the context of the Second Coming of Christ, an event some Christians believe is synonymous with the end of human history. Millennialism in general, and apocalyptic millennialism in particular, invaded America from England in the first half of the nineteenth century, although William Miller, their chief American proponent, was not extensively versed in their British version.⁴

The Seventh-day Adventist Church had its origins in the Millerite Movement that swept the American northeast from the early 1800s to the mid-nineteenth century. Millerism was inaugurated by William Miller, a farmer from Low Hampton, New York who began to seriously study the prophetic portions of Scripture around 1818.⁵ A self-taught, self-styled Bible expositor and theologian, Miller concluded,

⁴According to Francis D. Nichol, a Seventh-day Adventist historian and former editor of the official organ of the church, *The Adventist Review*, Miller had read George S. Faber but no other British author on the subject.

⁵Trenchant treatment of William Miller may be found in *The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, Vol. 10* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976), 889–891. See also LeRoy E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1954); Robert Gale, *The Urgent Voice: The Story of William Miller* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1975); Everett Newfon Dick, *William Miller and the Advent Crisis, 1831–1844* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1994); David L. Rowe, “Thunder and Trumpets: The Millerite Movement and Apocalyptic Thought in Upstate New York, 1840–1845,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1974; Ruth Alden Doan, *The Miller Heresy, Millennialism, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987). For a Seventh-day Adventist perspective of the Great Disappointment, see Mervyn C. Maxwell, *Magnificent Disappointment* (Boise: Pacific Press Publishing Association, (continued...))

based on his personal exegesis of Daniel 8:14, that Jesus Christ would return in 1844 to purify the earth. Miller initially was loathe to divulge his findings to the public, opting instead to talk and preach with small groups of people wherever and whenever the opportunity arose. He would have continued to do so but for the involvement in the movement of Joshua V. Hines, a Boston publisher who on hearing Miller's views embraced them and decided to publicize them.

From 1840 onward, Joshua V. Hines functioned as the chief organizer and promoter of Miller's beliefs, giving the Advent Movement shape and size.⁶ Were it not for Hines, Miller may never have had a place in American history. Later, Hines' skills were augmented by those of Charles Fitch, whose unique interpretation of Revelation 18:4 provided the movement with one of its defining moments. Together these two men promulgated Miller's beliefs through the printed page and by organizing several general conferences in the northeastern United States to study the issue of the Second Coming.⁷ Their efforts were not without success. As many as 50,000 Adventists were spread across the northeastern United States by the mid-1840s, all eagerly expecting something of cataclysmic dimensions to occur. Nor were

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1994). For a look at the social and political context of the Millerite movement, see Reuben Elmore Ernest Harkness, "Social Origins of the Millerite Movement," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1927.

⁶Beginning on February 28, 1840, Hines published a periodical called *Signs of the Times* (Boston). Later, he added *The Midnight Cry* (New York City). Together, these two periodicals were the vehicle that disseminated information among Adventists and the medium that facilitated the exchange of their ideas. A valuable study of Joshua V. Hines is, David Tallmadge Arthur, "Joshua V. Hines and the Cause of Adventism, 1839-1845," Master's thesis, University of Chicago, 1961.

⁷The first general conference was held in October, 1840. General conferences brought believers together for edification and unification.

these people oddballs or fanatics woefully out of touch with mainstream America.⁸

Miller was modest in his ambitions and goals. For starters, he did not want to launch a new denomination or organization, believing that his convictions transcended sectarianism and division, and that Christian unity was both a prerequisite and prelude to the second coming of Christ. Moreover, Miller believed that because his message was Bible-based, it had the special blessing of God. Miller remained a Baptist until late 1844 when the Low Hampton congregation in which he had held membership expelled him. Thereafter, his teaching on church membership oscillated between espousing separation and remaining loyal to one's congregation. One factor that contributed to Miller's calls for separation was the persecution that Adventists, as those who embraced Miller's teaching that Christ would return to the earth in 1844 were then being called, were receiving in their respective churches.

People of African descent were involved in the Millerite Movement. Among the first Blacks to embrace Miller's beliefs were John W. Lewis of Providence, Rhode Island, and Charles (Father) Bowles of Boston.⁹ Before becoming a Millerite,

⁸Jonathan M. Butler, "Adventism and the American Experience" in *The Rise of Adventism*, Edwin Gausted, ed. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1974), 175.

⁹Charles E. Dudley, Sr., *Thou Who Hast Brought Us: The Story of the Growth and Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination as it Relates to African-Americans* (Brushton, N.Y.: Teach Services, Inc., 1997), 77; Louis B. Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow: The Story of American Seventh-day Adventists with an African Heritage* (Washington, D.C. and Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1984), 19. See also Walter L. Pearson, Jr., "Bound for Glory," *Adventist Review*, Vol. 171, No. 48, December 1994, 8-10, in which the author calls Blacks in the Millerite Movement "unsung heroes" who not only received hope from the movement but gave voice to the cry "the Bridegroom is coming!" Additionally, Pearson says that Blacks' acceptance of Miller's views and teaching was "the logical response to people seeking an end to injustice."

Bowles was a Freewill Baptist who had organized many White congregations. Yet among the Blacks of the Millerite Movement no one stands out as much as William Foy, a light-skinned Black from Maine who received visions earlier than Ellen Harmon White did. Until recently left out of or miscast in Adventist history books, Foy lived and preached at the peak of the Advent Awakening. He received a total of four visions, at least one of which occurred in a mixed congregation. It was originally believed that fearing prejudice and perhaps physical danger, Foy refused to publicize what had been revealed to him in vision. Yet his biographer has shown that after a three-month hiatus Foy resumed preaching, continuing to do so until close to his death on November 9, 1893. Although it is unclear how Foy felt about the Sabbath or whether he ever kept it, Foy was a genuine spokesperson for the Millerite cause, serving as a pre-Disappointment prophet who in no way competed or contradicted the post-Disappointment prophecies and ministry of Ellen Harmon White.¹⁰

Lewis, Bowles, and Foy were but three of the Blacks who figured prominently in the Millerite cause. To be sure, only a sprinkling of Blacks ever encountered the phenomenon, and there are no figures as to how many ever joined the movement. Still, these three individuals show that Blacks were involved in the cause.

Were Millerites abolitionists? Did they aggressively work to eliminate slavery? Did they stand in solidarity with the slaves? Ron Graybill believes that the foremost abolitionist leader of the day, William Lloyd Garrison, was ambivalent

¹⁰Delbert W. Baker, "William Foy: Messenger to the Advent Believers," *Adventist Review*, Vol. 165, No. 2, 8–10, January 14, 1988. For a full treatment of William Foy, see Delbert Baker, *The Unknown Prophet* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1987).

toward Miller and his cohorts, viewing them as deranged individuals victimized by outlandish theories which made them of no use to the abolitionist cause. Graybill says there is no record that Miller himself was actively involved in the anti-slavery cause, and that Millerite publications are almost completely bereft of any articles designed to promote the elimination of slavery. Millerism, to be sure, had something in common with the abolitionist cause, including a similar concern with biblical predictions about the millennium, a mutual opposition to organized religion, and a shared quest for personal piety, perfection, and purity. Yet Millerism was a movement with a single focus that adherents refused to be blurred by other tangential concerns. Concluding that Millerism did little to foster reform causes, Graybill alleges that it actually pulled many people away from active participation in the movement.¹¹

Some of the significant figures in the Millerite Movement did display signs of a social conscience. For example, Joshua V. Hines sponsored several reform causes before becoming Miller's chief promoter, and Charles Fitch wrote at least one article questioning slavery. Additionally, Joseph Bates organized an anti-slavery group during the 1830s and a temperance society in the 1820s. Yet Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart argue that Adventist pioneers were involved in these activities before they became Adventist or before the group became an organized entity, and that once they joined the group Adventist pioneers generally reflected the broader society's attitudes and practices with regard to the issue of race. The authors contend that Adventists early perceived the issues of slavery and racism in America as less matters that

¹¹Ronald D. Graybill, "The Abolitionist-Millerite Connection," in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 139–150.

required social reform than as issues that underscored American hypocrisy and identified and situated the nation in the scheme of Bible prophecy. Not only did attitudes of prejudice inform and dictate early Adventist approaches to race, with church leaders adopting the policy that good race relations between Blacks and Whites are best fostered and facilitated by the separate-but-equal doctrine, but the authors believe that Jim Crow segregation found a prototype in Adventism.¹²

Not surprisingly, after the Great Disappointment of 1844 Adventists experienced a decline in their numbers. In 1846 the remnant of the disappointed merged with a group who believed in the sanctity of the Bible Sabbath, which they held was the seventh day of the week, becoming known as Sabbatarian Adventists. By the end of that year Ellen White had started receiving visions and was generally viewed by the new group as heaven's special messenger to the remnant.¹³ From that time on to the organization of the denomination in 1863, Sabbatarian Adventists worked at concretizing and systematizing their doctrinal tenets and beliefs, ultimately hammering out a theology that included an attempt to address the race issue.

Sabbatarian Adventists held that slavery was antithetical to the Biblical ideal of love and brotherhood, and was a stain on the nation's moral fabric. They were particularly troubled by the Fugitive Act of 1850, viewing it as an intrusion by the

¹²Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1989), 194–195.

¹³Seventh-day Adventists believe that the gift of prophecy was resident in Ellen Gould Harmon White. A frail 17-year-old from Gorham, Maine when she began to receive visions, White became the guiding force in the Seventh-day Adventist church, bequeathing to the denomination a body of writing and verbal counsels that continue to shape and inform the church's theology, polity, and ministry.

federal government into the lives of citizens, whose freedom of choice Sabbatarian Adventists held was a biblical principle. Sabbatarian Adventists prized the notion of freedom of choice, rightly arguing that its denial or compromise in one sphere would spread to others, including themselves, a small, fledgling group operating outside the parameters of mainstream American religion. Yet, for all their lip service to the tenets of abolitionism, Sabbatarian Adventists stopped short of radical involvement in the abolitionist cause. Confronting the principalities and powers were not what they were about.

At best, Sabbatarian Adventists were moderate abolitionists whose preferred course of action was quiet diplomacy, not physical confrontation or even collective agitation. They believed that their target should be the moral and spiritual health of the American nation, not its political life. Sabbatarian Adventists were convinced that were the moral and spiritual fibers of the nation to be righted, an inevitable corollary would have been an upswing in its political life and institutions for the oppressed and marginalized. Among those who embraced and sought to advance the causes of both Sabbatarian Adventism and Abolitionism was Sojourner Truth, though she is more known and celebrated for her espousal of the feminist movement.¹⁴

Early Seventh-day Adventist Contact With Blacks

Organized as the United States was locked in a conflict centering around the destiny of Black people, the Seventh-day Adventist church was sluggish in mounting

¹⁴ According to Reynolds, Sojourner Truth was baptized by Adventist pioneer Uriah Smith in the Kalamazoo River in Battle Creek, Michigan. See Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow*, 22–27. One of the best works on Sojourner Truth is *Nell Painter's Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995).

an intentional, aggressive campaign to proselytize Blacks, who first heard the Adventist brand of the gospel in 1875 from a lay preacher named Silas Osborn.¹⁵ A native of Kentucky who had migrated to Iowa in 1851, Osborne had accepted Adventist teachings there before moving back to Kentucky in 1871. His brother pressed him to share his new found beliefs publicly, and after much cajoling, Osborne obliged.¹⁶ Among Osborne's first Black converts to Adventism in Kentucky was a preacher named Edmund Killen, whose wife was baptized by W. F. Killen in June, 1881, and who went on to preach to African American audiences, although not much is known about the degree of success he experienced in winning Blacks to his new denomination.¹⁷

When Adventist pioneers began preaching to Whites in some parts of the South, they found a sprinkling of Blacks worshiping with the Whites. For example, C. O. Taylor, the first Seventh-day Adventist minister to preach the Third Angel's¹⁸

¹⁵Bull and Lockhart argue that Adventists not only had no coherent strategy to evangelize Blacks, but that they may even have gone to great lengths to avoid contact with them. Whenever African Americans joined the Seventh-day Adventist church, the authors contend, they did do on their own initiative, often stumbling upon or simply showing up at Adventist meetings. Yet the authors most scathing commentary is that the Adventist church endorsed segregation, "first by expediency, and then by choice." See Bull and Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989), 194.

¹⁶*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 45, No. 14, April 1, 1875, 110; *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 50, No. 17, October 25, 1877, 135; *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 51, No. 2, January 10, 1878, 15.

¹⁷*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 58, No. 10, August 30, 1881, 155.

¹⁸Seventh-day Adventist pioneers believed that William Miller and his followers had delivered the messages of the two angels of Revelation 14:6–8, and
(continued...)

message in Georgia, reported that he saw some Blacks present with the Whites in the Baptist church he used, and D. M. Canright asserted that there were three African American Sabbath keepers among the White congregation to which he preached in Kentucky.¹⁹ It is far from surprising that Blacks were found worshipping with Whites at this time, since before the Civil War slaves had generally worshiped in the churches of their masters.

Yet Adventist pioneers to the South were not oblivious to the challenges inherent in witnessing to African Americans. For example, D. M. Canright, from Little Rock, Arkansas, related that they encountered no problems trying to preach to Blacks as long as they restricted their efforts to the Black community.²⁰ Years later J. M. Rees stated that in Tennessee Black and White membership in Adventist churches presented no problem, but that a minister who tried to preach to an integrated public audience would invariably see the Whites leave.²¹ Two Adventist preachers in Georgia saw both Blacks and Whites leave their meetings when the two groups realized they would have to sit together for the meetings. Yet some time afterwards African American evangelists reported successful attempts at preaching to White and

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that they were sounding the message of the angel of Revelation 14:9–11. The prophetic messages recorded in Revelation 14: 6–11 form the foundation of Seventh-day Adventist doctrine and theology. See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, Revised Edition* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976), 1483–1484.

¹⁹*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1192..

²⁰*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 47, No. 21, May 25, 1876, 166.

²¹*General Conference Daily Bulletin*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Oakland, California, November 14, 1887, 2.

Black congregations in the South.²²

The first Black Seventh-day Adventist church was established at Edgefield Junction, Tennessee, in 1886 by Harry Lowe, a former Baptist minister. It had been organized as a company in 1883.²³ In that year, J. O. Corliss reported that there were 267 White and twenty Black Adventists in the South. In 1890, R. M. Kilgore, a Northerner heading up the Adventist work in the South who would later urge the separation of Black and White churches,²⁴ organized the second Black Adventist congregation in Louisville, Kentucky. Kilgore built upon the labors of A. Barry, who had started having meetings in Louisville after accepting Adventism as the result of reading an issue of the denomination's official paper, the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*. The following year another Black congregation was organized in Kentucky, this time in Bowling Green, by Charles Kinney, a former slave from Richmond, Virginia, who had moved west after the Civil War.

Known as the "Father of Black Adventism," Charles Kinney joined the Adventist church in 1878 through the preaching of two distinguished Adventist pioneers—John N. Loughborough and Ellen G. White. On July 30, 1878, Kinney heard Ellen White preach to a crowd of 400 in Reno, Nevada. He was moved by the sermon which was based on the 1 John 3:1, "Behold, what manner of love the father

²²"Regional Affairs, Office of, and Regional Conferences," *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976), 1193.

²³Adventist polity calls for a group to be organized as a "company" first. On demonstrating numerical and financial strength, the "company" is then organized and recognized as a church.

²⁴Arthur W. Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists*, Vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1962), 188.

hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” By the end of September Kinney was keeping the Sabbath, and experiencing belonging and fellowship among the individuals who would become the nucleus of the Reno church. Recognizing Kinney’s competencies, church members elected him church clerk, and conference officials appointed him secretary of the Nevada Tract and Missionary Society. Kinney was ordained to the gospel ministry in 1889, in a ceremony which he never forgot and which changed the course of his service to the Adventist church. On the day of his ordination, church officials tried to segregate Kinney and his members at the camp meeting where the solemn service was to be held, only backing down when Kinney and his congregation threatened to bolt.

Admitting that his ideas were radical, and that his suggestions were ones he wished he neither had to make nor would ever be implemented, Kinney in 1889 began to call for separate services for Whites and Blacks in the Adventist church. He believed that inherent in the gospel was the power to break down all walls of prejudice resident in believers. Yet prejudice existed in society, creating barriers to the promulgation of the gospel. Kinney stated that the color question was an embarrassment to all Blacks, whose presence in meetings hindered Whites from joining the church. In an effort to ameliorate the situation, he offered twelve propositions, among them a call for a “frank understanding” between Blacks and Whites on all issues having to do with race. Kinney also advised that separation be pursued as a viable strategy wherever integration limited or negated church growth, and that Christian community be fostered so that separation may be viewed for what it is—a strategic way to reach all people and not a monument to prejudice and

alienation.²⁵

A couple of years before Kinney began counseling General Conference leaders on the race issue, Adventist leaders had started wrestling with it. Vigorous debate about the race question had dominated the 1887 General Conference Session, with the issue dividing the delegates. On the one hand were those who, citing the moral underpinnings and biblical principles attending the issue, found segregation offensive and unacceptable. These argued that Whites who refused to worship with Blacks were better left alone, their Christianity suspect anyway. On the other hand were the pragmatists who did not want to disturb the status quo or create controversy. These wanted the gospel to be preached without discrimination to whoever wanted to hear, but reasoned that elimination of prejudice in the hearts of Whites was a matter better left to the Spirit of God.²⁶ Still, a resolution recognizing no color line was introduced, with E. J. Waggoner amending it to say that Blacks who accepted the Third Angel's Message should be received into the Adventist church on an equality with White members, and that no distinctions whatsoever be made between the two races in church relations.²⁷

Between 1889 and 1895, Kinney, who had been ordained and commissioned with the expressed mandate to evangelize African Americans in the South, offered to the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists strategies for the successful

²⁵Charles M. Kinney, "Statement on the Concept of Regional Conferences," October 2, 1889, Seventh-day Adventist Church, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Md.

²⁶*General Conference Bulletin*, Vol. 1, No. 1, November 14, 1887, 2–3.

²⁷*Ibid.*

promulgation of his assignment. Stressing the egalitarianism inherent in Scripture, he appealed for White missionaries to penetrate the South with the gospel even as he admitted that structural racism would continue to frustrate those efforts. Kinney addressed the delegates at the General Conference session of 1891, speaking of the necessity of establishing a distinctly separate work for Blacks, especially in the South. Citing racial issues, he said that such a structure would lead to more effective soul winning efforts among Blacks. More than anything else, Kinney did not want to see the dignity and worth of his people trampled upon. At the same time he did not want to see Whites refuse to accept the gospel because of the presence of Blacks in their churches.²⁸

Seventh-day Adventist work among Blacks in North Carolina started in Greensboro in 1891, and in Texas at Catchings in 1893. Black congregations continued to be spawned in the South throughout the 1890s—in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1894; Birmingham, Alabama, in 1895; Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Charleston, South Carolina, in 1898; and in Orlando, Florida, Montgomery, Alabama, and Winston Salem, North Carolina, in 1899. The proliferation continued in the first decade of the twentieth century, with Black congregations beginning in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1900; St. Louis, Missouri, in 1901; Kansas City, Missouri, in 1903; and in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1906.²⁹

African Americans were not a drain or a financial burden on the Seventh-day

²⁸ *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald Extra, Daily Bulletin of the General Conference*, Vol. 4, No. 5, March 11, 1891, Battle Creek, Mich., 70.

²⁹ Calvin B. Rock, *Go On!* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994), 101–102. See also letter of Charles M. Kinney to John N. Loughborough, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Md.

Adventist church during this time. When Blacks first assembled for worship at Edgefield Junction in 1883, they contributed ten cents in offering. Ten years later they returned \$50 in tithe,³⁰ and \$5,000 at the turn of the century. In Mississippi, where in 1903 Black Seventh-day Adventists numbered nearly as many as White ones, financial records reveal that Blacks returned approximately half of all tithe the previous year.³¹ At the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, African Americans were returning \$25,000 annually in tithe.³²

Adventist efforts to educate Blacks during Reconstruction were as slow as those to expose them to the gospel. More than ten years after the end of the Civil War, a school for African Americans ranging in age from six to twenty-four who were “more obedient than the White pupils in the surrounding schools,” was finally operating in Ray County, Missouri. Not much is heard about the school after 1877.³³ From March through May of that year, however, reports were received at General Conference headquarters about a school for Blacks in Texas which had been started by a lay couple in a tent. Joseph Clarke and his wife were pleased when Blacks replaced the tent with a building they built themselves.³⁴ Yet Adventists launched their most ambitious project to educate Africans Americans in the mid-1890s when

³⁰A tithe is ten percent of one’s earnings and is used by the church to remunerate its clergy.

³¹*The General Conference Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 9 (Oakland, CA: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1903), 131.

³²Rock, 102.

³³*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 49, No. 8, February 22, 1877, 59.

³⁴*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 49, No. 21, May 24, 1877, 166.

the Oakwood Industrial School was established in Huntsville, Alabama. Named Oakwood because of the preponderance of oak trees in the vicinity, the school aimed to develop the moral, mental, and physical faculties of Blacks so as to prepare them for the “practical duties of life.” Students were expected to work as well as to study, and to conform to the religious and ethical ideals of the denomination and institution, with expulsion from school the penalty for the infraction of any of its rules. In 1904 Ellen White, whose counsel was key in the establishment of the institution, visited the campus, later dispatching an inspirational letter informing students that they were acquiring an education to better prepare themselves for service to God, and reminding them that God, as their great teacher, was ever willing to bestow wisdom upon them.³⁵

In 1903, General Conference president George I. Butler called for “greater and better facilities” to be provided at the Oakwood Industrial School. Noting that Oakwood was the only institution in the world established for training people to work among Blacks in the context of the Third Angel’s message, he admitted that the undertaking called for more resources than the Southern Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists could supply. Butler believed that only a collaboration between Southern and Northern forces could help Oakwood meet its objectives. Yet what stands out in his address to the delegates assembled for the Thirty-Fifth Session of the General Conference was his admonition that the Session not adjourn without voting policies that would place the educational institution at a level that would

³⁵One of the best history of Oakwood College is Mervyn Warren’s *Oakwood: A Splendid Vision: 1896–1996* (Huntsville, AL: Oakwood College, 1996).

match its needs and the demands of God at that time.³⁶

In 1901, with Oakwood's enrollment hovering around fifty and Black Adventist church membership approximating 300, and with church leaders still caught up in the throes of debating the race issue, the Seventh-day Adventist Mission Board dispatched Anna Knight to India, where she labored as a missionary for six years. A Mississippi native whose love of reading had exposed her to Seventh-day Adventist literature, Knight became convinced of the Bible Sabbath after an intense study of the issue and was baptized in Graysville, Tennessee. She later attended the Adventist College in Battle Creek, Michigan, graduating from the school's nursing program. In 1896, as the Oakwood Industrial School was opening its doors for the first time, Knight returned to Mississippi where she launched a mission school for impoverished Whites in her hometown of Gitano. When Blacks heard of her school, they requested that she start a Sunday School among them. Knight obliged, operating two Sunday School concurrently, one for Blacks and the other for Whites.³⁷

In New York City and Los Angeles, Seventh-day Adventist contact with African Americans followed divergent paths, with an ordained Adventist pastor and church leader establishing the Adventist presence in New York City and a layperson doing the same in Los Angeles.³⁸ Stephen N. Haskell pioneered the Adventist work

³⁶*The General Conference Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 9, Thirty-Fifth Session (Oakland, CA: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1903), 130.

³⁷For the most authoritative work on Knight, see Patricia Maxwell's *Journey to Freedom* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1987).

³⁸According to Solomon Ben David, O. O. Fransworth and E. E. Franke began Seventh-day Adventist work in New York City in the mid-1890s, with both of
(continued...)

among Blacks in New York City in 1902. Working out of a room on West 59th Street in the Borough of Manhattan, Haskell began canvassing Blacks in the neighborhood. Towards the end of that year the fledgling group he had started rented a hall for \$25. When the year ended, a church with a charter membership of eleven had been organized. H. W. Cottrell and E.E. Franke, who organized the congregation, left C. H. Carroll, a layperson, in charge. Carroll plunged into his work with such enthusiasm that by early 1903 the membership of the church had increased by 300 percent, and a night school providing instruction in reading, writing, Bible, history, grammar and other subjects was in operation. Among Carroll's first converts was James K. Humphrey. Yet no action was taken at the first annual session of the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, held October 7 to 12, 1902, in New York City, to target the African American population.³⁹

Four years after Adventist work among Blacks started in New York City, an African American then holding membership in the White Seventh-day Adventist congregation in Los Angeles started giving Bible studies to interested Blacks in the burgeoning population. As a result, two years later the first Black church in the West

38(...continued)

them pitching tents in Harlem. By 1901, Franke was claiming 225 followers in three churches, \$3,000 annually in tithe, and "liberal donations." In December of that year the Greater New York Conference was organized as an arm of the Atlantic Union Conference, becoming fully operational on January 1, 1902 with offices at 400 W. 57th Street. Solomon Ben David, *The History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in New York City* (Jerusalem, Israel: The Palestine Printing Press, 1995), 16–17, 30.

³⁹ *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 79, No. 23, June 10, 1902, 18; *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 79, No. 45, November 11, 1902, 18; *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 80, No. 8, February 24, 1903, 17.

was established.⁴⁰

What attracted African Americans to the Seventh-day Adventist church during this era? To be sure, Blacks did not flock to the church in significant numbers. Still, more than a handful saw in the unorthodoxy of the church's teaching a body of truth uniquely suited to bring them the mental, spiritual, and physical uplift they needed. Victimized by slavery and segregation, they found in the teaching of the imminent return of Christ the hope of rescue from oppression and injustice. The doctrine of the Sabbath offered a much-needed respite from the daily, unrelenting grind of labor in the fields of the South and urban centers of the North. And the denomination's still-evolving health emphasis held out an antidote for their physical needs. In sum, Adventism offered a system of Bible teaching and truth that powerfully appealed to the desire of African Americans for a better life in this world, not to mention the one to come.⁴¹

Ellen G. White and the Race Issue

A survey of the African American experience in Adventism would be incomplete, if not problematic, without an investigation of the thought and writings of Ellen G. White, whose work continues to be a formative and guiding influence in the Seventh-day Adventist church. Ellen White had much to say about slavery, people of African descent, and how Christians should have related to the newly emancipated

⁴⁰*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976), 1195.

⁴¹Delbert W. Baker, "In Search of Roots: Adventist African-Americans: Part Two: The Turning Point," *Adventist Review*, Vol. 170, No. 6, February 11, 1993, 9.

slaves.

Slavery was a volatile, divisive issue that fractured many denominations and polarized the membership of others. The Methodist church split over the issue in 1844, the year of the Great Disappointment for Millerites and Adventists, and the Baptists followed suit the following year. As the Civil War raged in 1861, three denominations with huge memberships split over the issue—the Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Old Side Presbyterians. Because Sabbatarian Adventists during the period from 1844 to 1861 drew heavily from the Baptists and Methodists, it is not surprising that Adventist theology and practice reflected the struggle of these two denominations to reconcile the issue.⁴² Of course, Adventist's unique interpretation of prophecy made for a radical connection between slavery and prophecy.⁴³

Among the myriad of thorny issues with which the infant Seventh-day Adventist church wrestled was church race relations. Still experiencing the pangs of birth, the denomination could not rationalize, on biblical grounds, the non-acceptance of the essential humanity and equality of people of African descent, though it relegated them to the fringes socially. One year after the church nearly splintered over

⁴²Roy Branson, "Ellen G. White—Racist or Champion of Equality?" *Review and Herald*, Vol. 147, No. 15, April 9, 1970, 2.

⁴³For an excellent analysis of the connecting linkages Adventists saw between slavery and prophecy, see Roy Branson's "Slavery and Prophecy," *Review and Herald*, April 16, 1970, in which the author argues that far from having little to do with their views on moral and social issues, Adventist theology was a reflection of national problems. Branson avers that Adventist pioneers like James and Ellen White, Uriah Smith, and John Nevins Andrews believed that a correct understanding of Scripture and doctrines was intimately and inextricably linked to "proper attitudes" regarding race relations, and that more than anything else, the oppression of Blacks in the United States unambiguously identified America and the role it would play in the span of Bible prophecy. In short, slavery was an indicator and barometer of the times.

the theological issue of righteousness by faith,⁴⁴ it was forced to confront the race issue in 1889 at its annual Fall Council meeting of world church leaders.⁴⁵ Ellen White, conciliatory and pragmatic, would then begin to issue a series of thoughts and admonitions on the race issue that speaks to its complexity, ubiquity, and irrepressibility. The first of White's messages, entitled "Our Duty to the Colored People," was delivered to world church leaders on March 21, 1891.⁴⁶

Ellen White asserted the intrinsic equality of Blacks, saying that in heaven's recordings the names of Whites are juxtaposed with those of Blacks, an axiomatic truth she believed shows that in God's reckoning no difference is found between Whites and Blacks. Arguing that God's love for his creation knows no division and shows no preference based on race, nationality, or gender, she said that the soul of the African is as precious in God's sight as that of any of his covenant people of ancient biblical Israel, and that those who speak ill or harshly of Blacks are guilty of misappropriating the blood of Jesus Christ which makes of all people one nation. White reminded Seventh-day Adventists that contrary to popular belief, there would

⁴⁴In 1888 Adventists convened a council in Minneapolis to debate the merits and utility of righteousness by faith, a theological notion championed by Martin Luther that is a hallmark of the Reformation, and its relationship to obedience. Up to 1888, Adventists had been known to emphasize obedience to God's Ten Commandment law, with several of them holding that obedience to the law was the way an individual procured salvation. The matter came to a head in 1888, when the church went on record as recognizing the primacy of righteousness by faith.

⁴⁵The *General Conference Bulletin* of October 24, 1889 neither documents nor reflects any resolution on the race issue, ostensibly because none was ever voted.

⁴⁶Ellen G. Whites's statements, articles, letters, and excerpts on the race issue were compiled by church leaders and published as *The Southern Work* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1966). To this day, *The Southern Work* remains Ellen White's most definitive and authoritative work on the issue.

be no segregated neighborhoods in heaven.⁴⁷

White bemoaned the 1889 General Conference resolutions on the color issue, claiming that they were not only unwarranted but precluded the miraculous intervention of God, and she cautioned church leaders against cementing prejudices that should have expired with Christ on the cross. She believed that sin was marring the church because it had made only lackluster efforts at winning Blacks to Christ, and warned that the church had received no permission from God to bar Blacks from their assemblies. Encouraging White church members to exploit every means possible to make amends for the injustices meted out to Blacks, Ellen White asserted that Blacks, like Whites, had souls to be saved, and were the property of Christ, too. Yet White's most telling admonition at this time was that Blacks hold membership in White churches.⁴⁸

Ellen White was all for the development of indigenous Black leadership, holding that many Blacks were intelligent, competent individuals whose abilities could be honed and sharpened should Blacks only be given the same opportunities as Whites. She believed that even though slavery had degraded and corrupted the Black race, many African Americans possessed "decided ability" and "more intelligence than do many of their more favored brethren among the White people."⁴⁹ She perceived Blacks as an "ignorant and downtrodden class" with emotions and customs

⁴⁷Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1966), 11, 14, 15, 55.

⁴⁸White, *The Southern Work*, 15.

⁴⁹Ellen G. White, "Lift up Your Eyes and Look on the Field," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 73, No. 4, January 28, 1896, 50.

so hardened by years of degradation that arresting and reversing them posed no small problem. Yet she claimed that a corresponding situation existed among Whites, and that success could still be realized if efforts were made to salvage African Americans. Even so, White did not condone the penchant among some Blacks of aspiring to preach to White audiences. Believing that such a move was a mistake, she encouraged Black preachers to focus on their own race, saying that such an emphasis would have as a corollary contact with White gatherings.⁵⁰

White continued admonishing the Adventist church on the race issue throughout the 1890s, her appeals being pointed and passionate. For example, she indicated that the church needed to “repent before God” because it had failed to perform missionary work in the “most abandoned part of God’s moral vineyard,” and stated that a concern for people of African descent should be central and foundational to the church’s missionary endeavors. Indeed, to continue to neglect African Americans in favor of others overseas betrayed a tragic misunderstanding of the priorities and purposes of God. Yet White’s most poignant statement during this period was that the darkness of the skin of African Americans was not a measure of their sinfulness or wretchedness, and that much of what African Americans were then experiencing was the direct result of how they had been treated by Whites.⁵¹ The church’s neglect of the African American had left it unprepared for the coming of the Lord, Ellen

⁵⁰White, *The Southern Work*, 15.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 35.

White stated.⁵²

The United States did not escape the indictment of White, who claimed that the entire system of slavery had been originated by Satan, a tyrant who fiendishly delights in pitting people against each other.⁵³ She informed the nation that it owed a “debt of love” to the African American, telling it that God had ordained that the nation make restitution for past wrongs, and that accountability rested as squarely upon the shoulders of those who had not enforced slavery as upon those who had.⁵⁴ To Ellen White, the Emancipation Proclamation freeing the slaves ranked in significance with the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. In both cases God had miraculously intervened to bring deliverance to an enslaved people. Yet God did not leave freed slaves to fend for themselves, placing upon the American people the responsibility of empowering African Americans. To the detractors who claimed that Blacks were hopelessly mired in a downward spiral of wickedness and depravity, Ellen White said that Whites were to be blamed for spoiling the morals of Black people.⁵⁵

Ellen White criticized her church for not moving quicker to bring relief to the plight of the freedman, saying that conditions in the South would have been markedly different if strategies had been initiated immediately after the proclamation of

⁵²Ellen G. White, “An Example in History,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 72, No. 51, December 17, 1895, 801.

⁵³*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 73, No. 4, January 28, 1896, 50.

⁵⁴*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 21, 1896, 33.

⁵⁵“The Southern Work,” *General Conference Bulletin*, Fifty-Fifth Session, Vol. 5, No. 13, Oakland, CA., April 14, 1903, 203.

freedom. Alleging that only about one percent of what could have been done there had been done, she said that angels in heaven were then stifling their music in displeasure. She argued that God had bestowed upon many people of African descent “rare and precious talents” that were only waiting to be tapped and unleashed, a reality aggravated by years of resistance to educating Blacks. Calling the South a “sin-darkened” field, she claimed the church had no excuse for not working it.⁵⁶

Ellen White’s counsels on the race issue during the 1890s were consistent with her earlier expressed views. She had opposed the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 which demanded the return of runaway slaves, encouraging church members to disobey it and suffer the consequences. As the nation was becoming embroiled in its Civil War, White received what may only be termed a watershed vision about slavery. She called slavery a horrible curse and “high crime,” asserting that through the Civil War God would punish the South for perpetuating slavery and the North for allowing it.⁵⁷

Delbert Baker deftly summarizes Ellen G. Whites comments on the race issue by saying that they revolve around seven principles: (1) the biblical, which calls for Christians to preach Christ worldwide; (2) the moral, which requires that Christians do what is right; (3) the humanitarian, which calls on people to be compassionate; (4) the empathetic, which challenges Christians to try to understand what others are experiencing; (5) the restitutionary, which calls for a restitution of things to the exploited; (6) the societal, which argues that reciprocity is what has made society

⁵⁶Ibid., 204.

⁵⁷Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 Volumes (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948) 1: 202, 264.

strong and vibrant; and (7) the eschatological, which asserts that judgment will be meted out to the oppressors of society, especially to those who have done nothing to correct wrongs done to the poor.⁵⁸

Notwithstanding her pointed statements condemning slavery and racism, Ellen White was a product of her times, whose social theories and practices conspired to produce in her a pragmatism that continues to confuse Blacks to this day, and that begs for explanation and understanding. To the uninformed Ellen White comes across as contradictory and confusing, and detractors have not relented in questioning and castigating her for comments she made which seem to compromise the biblical principles she espoused. For example, while encouraging Whites to work for the rights of Blacks, Ellen White still cautioned against “fanaticism,” specifically saying that interracial marriage should neither be taught nor practiced.⁵⁹ More specifically, White seemed to give tacit sanction to “separate but equal” facilities and operations for Blacks, her reasons ostensibly driven by both social realities and private concerns for the growth of the “Black work.”⁶⁰

Saying that efforts put forth on behalf of Blacks in the South should be done in such a way as not to trigger the prejudice of Whites, Ellen White cautioned workers there to pay close attention to what they said about Black-White relations. Workers were especially admonished not to criticize Whites about their treatment of

⁵⁸Delbert Baker, “In Search of Roots: Adventist African-Americans: Part Three: The Ministry Begins,” *Adventist Review*, Vol. 170, No. 7, February 18, 1993, 16–17.

⁵⁹Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work*, 15.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

Blacks. Still, White appealed for manpower and resources to be poured into the region, taking the time at one General Conference session to point out to the delegates that when previously she had talked about the “Southern work,” some had mistakenly assumed she meant the White work when in reality she had been using the terms “South” and “Black” synonymously.⁶¹ Her appeals for workers notwithstanding, White admitted that she had once counseled her son Edson, who pioneered Adventist work among Blacks in the South, to move on to another field of labor, though admittedly for health reasons.⁶²

In 1908, Ellen White stated that separate churches were one way of effectively promulgating the evangelization of Whites. Integrated churches, she believed, presented serious obstacles. Specifically, White stated that “in regard to white and colored people worshiping in the same building, this cannot be followed as a general custom with profit to either party.” She argued that “the best thing will be to provide the colored people who accept the truth, with places of worship of their own, in which they can carry on their services by themselves.” These places of worship were to be “neat, tasteful houses of worship.” Separation of the races was particularly necessary in the South, “in order that the work for the white people may be carried on without serious hindrance,” and the practice was to be continued “until the Lord shows us a better way.”⁶³ Even though a careful reading of her statements shows that they were conditional, that is, that Ellen White did not consider

⁶¹“The Southern Work,” *General Conference Bulletin*, Thirty-Fifth Session, Vol. 5, No. 113, Oakland, CA., April 14, 1903, 202.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 205.

⁶³Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:206–207.

segregation to be the ideal but a pragmatic way for the church to deal with a nettlesome issue, many believe that they are a reflection of the church's true position on the issue, and that White's statements helped determine Adventist policy throughout the twentieth century. Bull and Lockhart, for example, believe that the Adventist church is a White body with a mission to White America, and that, its liberal statements to the contrary notwithstanding, the church did not want this fundamental objective imperiled by forays into the African American community.⁶⁴

Yet Roy Branson vigorously defends Ellen White, arguing that in an era when "many fine Christians" defended slavery as an economic or political issue, Ellen White viewed it as a moral matter. Pointing out that Ellen White felt so strongly about the issue she even recommended that public defenders of slavery be removed from the fellowship of the church, he states that White anchored her beliefs of race on not only eschatological grounds, but on the doctrines of creation and redemption as well.⁶⁵ Branson admits that the doctrine of redemption, with its emphasis on Christ's atoning work which links all people together into one community of faith, appeals more to Christian believers, but says that even non-believers should see in the doctrine of creation more than hints of the commonality and equality of human nature.⁶⁶

Addressing Ellen White's statements which seem to promote segregation, Branson explains that it was not her theology that prompted them, but the "crisis of

⁶⁴Bull and Lockhart, 195–197.

⁶⁵Roy Branson, "Slavery and Prophecy," *Review and Herald*, Vol. 147, No. 16, April 16, 1970, 9.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

the nineties,” which Jim Crow legislations and severe economic conditions in the South had conspired to produce. He argues that White’s remarks were a concession to what she hoped to be a temporary situation, and that when White cautioned Blacks not to seek equality with Whites she was referring to some particular social arrangements and not to the fundamental nature of human beings. Moreover, her counsels reflected a concern for those Whites working in the South who throughout the 1890s had been the brunt of aggression provoked by their humanitarian work. Branson concludes that Ellen White was no “gradualist, no moderate,” but a “zealous reformer, vivid and full-blown.”⁶⁷

Branson finds an ally in Ron Graybill, the Seventh-day Adventist denomination’s first and foremost expert on Ellen White and church race relations. Stressing that Ellen White “held no latent doctrine of inherent inferiority for the Negro,”⁶⁸ Graybill says that she never supported the popular notion of a contented slave or the Southern White man as the best friend of Blacks, two widespread beliefs of her time. Furthermore, White firmly believed Blacks and Whites were inherently fully and totally equal people headed to and preparing for the same heaven. He concludes that Ellen White’s counsels regarding separate religious services and facilities were a “temporary expedient” based on “conditions in a country mired in the

⁶⁷Roy Branson, “The Crisis of the Nineties,” *Review and Herald*, Vol. 147, No. 17, April 23, 1970, 4–6.

⁶⁸Ellen White had once encouraged African Americans not to “urge that they be placed on an equality with white people.” See *Testimonies for the Church*, 9: 214.

depths of its deepest pit of racism.”⁶⁹ Furthermore, the expedience “was necessitated by the force of law and the threat of violence, loss of life among Negroes, and the abrogation of the opportunity to work among all classes of mankind.”⁷⁰

Edson White and the Mission to Black America

The individual credited with spearheading Seventh-day Adventist work among African Americans in the South is Edson White, the second son of Adventist pioneers and leaders James and Ellen White. Inspired to do so at the conclusion of a Bible training conference held at the denomination’s headquarters in Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1893, Edson White immediately began to strategize as to how he could bring spiritual and social enlightenment to rural poor Blacks in the South. His plans gained momentum when he stumbled upon the counsel his mother had given to the church’s leadership in 1891 that the organization should evangelize Southern Blacks. At a loss to explain church leaders’ neglect of his mother’s plain counsel, Edson forged ahead, preparing himself for his mission by attending a three-week seminar in Atlanta, Georgia in January, 1894.

Returning home from the Atlanta Conference, Edson settled upon an educational and vocational program as the best way to address the social, spiritual, and educational problems of Blacks in the South. This program would be modeled after that of famous Tuskegee Institute educator, Booker T. Washington. Yet the denomination pre-empted White when it established Oakwood College in Huntsville,

⁶⁹Ron Graybill, *Ellen G. White and Church Race Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1970), 117–118.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 118.

Alabama, in 1896. Edson did finally see his dream of evangelizing Blacks come true, helping to finance the project by printing and marketing a small instructional manual he called *The Gospel Primer*, and procuring and outfitting a boat he called *The Morning Star*⁷¹ for his expedition into the South.⁷²

Six months after launching, Edson White and his crew arrived in Vicksburg, Mississippi, in early January 1895, receiving hospitality from the Mount Zion Baptist church, a Black Baptist congregation in Vicksburg. A year before their arrival, a Black minister from Arkansas had come to town preaching a combination of fire and brimstone that provoked the ire of civic leaders. The preacher, Alonzo Parker, was martyred by an incensed mob, though not before predicting that the city would receive another opportunity to mend its wicked ways before receiving the judgments of God. When *The Morning Star* steamed into port, many of Vicksburg's Black population were convinced that the boat represented the fulfillment of Parker's prophecy.⁷³

White and his company promptly started to instruct interested Blacks in the rudiments of the three R's—Reading, 'Riting, and 'Rithmetic. Their progress was

⁷¹It was on *The Morning Star* that the first issue of *The Gospel Herald* was printed in 1898. Geared toward the African American community, this magazine would later become *Message Magazine*, which today continues to be the premiere Seventh-day Adventist magazine aimed at Blacks.

⁷²A full and detailed account of James Edson White's efforts to bring African Americans into the Seventh-day Adventist church is contained in Ronald D. Graybill's *Mission to Black America: The True Story of Edson White and the Riverboat Morning Star* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1971).

⁷³R. W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1979), 238.

slow and difficult, and was made more so when White learned that the denominational publishing house had decided to suspend publication of *The Gospel Primer*, a move that threatened to bankrupt their project and bring it to a halt. Yet White encountered his stiffest challenge from local authorities, who twice threatened to run him out of town. Once, White was denied permission to erect a church in Vickburg. On another occasion Edson was asked to cease teaching Blacks. Permission was ultimately given for the church, which was dedicated on August 10, 1895, with General Conference president O. A. Olsen preaching the dedicatory sermon.⁷⁴

Not only did Edson encounter passive and active resistance to his efforts from Southern Whites, but he did so from the Blacks as well. Southern Whites, still seething from their defeat and humiliation in the Civil War, viewed Northern Whites as outsiders intruding on their sovereignty and economic well-being, while the Blacks, experiencing a measure of freedom and self-determination for the first time in their existence in America, tended to look askance at White and his strange religion, which, among other oddities, proclaimed that Saturday was the Bible Sabbath and the day God wanted Christians to keep holy. Additionally, Edson encountered Blacks who seemed bent on preserving whatever vestiges of their ancestral past were still remaining among them.⁷⁵

⁷⁴Ibid., 236–239.

⁷⁵There has been an ongoing debate about the persistence of Africanisms in African American culture, especially in Black religion, for some time. Illustrative, if not representative, of the opposing factions are Franklin Frazier and Melville Herskovits. Frazier contends that the brutal Middle Passage and slavery conspired to all but completely erase whatever African culture there was in the slaves. See E.

(continued...)

The Morning Star toiled up and down the Mississippi from 1894 into the twentieth century, docking along its banks to bring enlightenment and empowerment to interested African Americans. Yet White was stung by charges that his project was being financed by the poor—the very people it was designed to liberate and empower. Meeting those charges head on, Edson informed a session of the General Conference that *The Morning Star* was his own property and had been financed with his own money, and that all operating expenses had been met by him. He asserted that at the start his personal income had been used to pay the salaries of the ten to eighteen individuals who had been deployed in various capacities upon the steamer, and that only when the operation had expanded had donations been used to help meet payroll. Yet Edson did not want *The Morning Star* to be looked upon as his personal endeavor, but as God’s plan and work. In responding to a query about where he had gotten the money to sustain his operation, Edson stated that the Lord had given it to him.⁷⁶

One year after docking in Vicksburg, Mississippi, *The Morning Star* began serving as the headquarters of the Southern Missionary Society, a semi-independent

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Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 1–6. Herskovits argues that even today there is much in the way of Africanisms, parallelisms, and retentions in African American culture. See Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964). A credible middle ground is Albert Raboteau’s *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South* and Eugene Genovese’s *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Built*, in which the authors contend that African American religion is a syncretism or blending of the African and European into a new and uniquely American religion.

⁷⁶James E. White, “Report of Southern Missionary Society,” *The General Conference Bulletin*, Thirty-Fifth Session, Vol. 5, No. 13, Oakland, CA, April 14, 1903, 200–201.

arm of the organization that Edson White had established to bring focus, contour, and direction to the work among Blacks in the South. The Southern Missionary Society would later become an arm of the Southern Union Conference, which was organized in 1901. Relocated to Nashville, Tennessee shortly before the establishment of the Southern Union Conference, the Southern Missionary Society functioned as the vehicle for the promulgation of the evangelistic, educational, and health programs of the church for Blacks. Its functions were assumed by the Negro Department of the General Conference, which was established in 1909.

The Morning Star is thus the first intentional attempt by the Seventh-day Adventist denomination to evangelize Blacks. Yet it was the brainchild of a creative maverick whose ideas and plans created friction along the way. White's program was successful only because of his dogged determination and the encouragement of his mother.

Six years after arriving in the South, Edson rejoiced to see a permanent church building erected in Vicksburg, Mississippi. The speaker for the dedicatory service was his mother, whose sermon was "Trust in God." Ellen White, whose visit to the South was made while she was very ill, was impressed with the building, in the basement of which was a school, and to which was annexed a two-story mission house and another four-room house. Yet what struck Ellen White was the congregation, which was made up almost entirely of Black people whom she characterized as "bright and sharp of intellect." White "never felt more pleased to

break the bread of life” than at that moment.⁷⁷

It was no accident that the Vicksburg congregation was almost all Black. Edson White disagreed with Adventists who believed that Blacks and Whites in the South should worship together no matter what dangers attended such an arrangement. For him segregated services was a matter of expedience, with experience showing that mixed congregations had adverse effects on both Black and White church attendance. Edson had scoured his mother’s writings for instruction that even remotely suggested it was “obligatory upon us to force the two elements together.” Coming up with nothing, he sought direct counsel from her, intoning, “If I am wrong in this, I want to be right.” As far as he was concerned, “no masterly effort” to dismantle Southern prejudice was required of him. Furthermore, any compulsion to bring Whites and Blacks together in the South would leave him without a viable strategy of motivation to work there. As far as Edson was concerned, only a miracle of God could change the situation in the South.⁷⁸

Painfully aware that working among Blacks posed barriers to working among Whites, Edson proposed a separate camp meeting for Blacks in Tennessee in 1900. He counseled that Black ministers should be brought to run the meeting, but that control of it should rest in the hands of Whites. Edson was particularly distressed by the forwardness of Chicago Blacks whom he claimed were “absolutely and aggressively persistent in pushing what they claim to be their rights in spite of all

⁷⁷“In the Regions Beyond,” *The General Conference Bulletin*, Thirty-Fourth Session, Vol. IV, No. 3, April 5, 1901, 85.

⁷⁸Letter to Ellen G. White, *Ellen G. White Estate, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland.*

reason.” He could not fathom why Chicago Blacks failed to see the damage they were doing to the advancement of Adventism by their presence and behavior in the church there. According to White, their behavior had been so “outrageously offensive” that many interested Whites had left vowing never to return.⁷⁹

Edson White’s position was in keeping with the denomination’s history of subordinating sensitive issues to the greater good of the church, and of prizing expediency more than disturbing the status quo. To church leaders, maintaining popularity was more critical than being pushed to the margins, or worse, being viewed as irrelevant. Ample evidence of this may be seen in the way one of White’s associates responded to an editorial in a Yazoo City, Mississippi, newspaper criticizing the mission activities of the White group. F. R. Rogers, the associate, responded to the editorial by saying that Seventh-day Adventists did not believe in, teach, or practice social equality. Accused of adopting two Black girls who dined at his table with the rest of his family, Rogers denied the charges, informing readers that he had had servants who had been treated as such, and that his group had exercised every care to follow the customs of the city and state because they were peaceful, law-abiding citizens. Yet Rogers left Yazoo City for Vicksburg soon after denying the charges, prompting the rapturous applause of both Yazoo City newspapers.⁸⁰

Edson and his associates did not view their duty in the South as that of contending with insolvable problems or irremediable difficulties. Instead, they were to preach “Present Truth,” leaving all social and political conundrums to God, who in

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰*The Gospel Herald*, Vol. II, No. 10, Battle Creek, Michigan, October 1900, 85–87.

his own time and way would resolve all wrongs and bring deliverance to the oppressed and exploited.⁸¹ White decried attempts by Northern Blacks, and Southern Blacks who had received educational training in the North, to bring about social changes in the South. It was impossible to reform the social customs of the South, Edson believed, saying that an individual might as well try to alter the course of the Mississippi River. He asked potential workers who did not have the simple objective of working for the salvation of souls in mind, and who were unable to accept conditions in the South as they found them, to stay away, intoning that his operation did not want “reformers” on social equality to enter the field.⁸² Edson’s thoughts and comments resonated with those of his mother, who cautioned Blacks not to press for social equality with Blacks, ostensibly because of unregenerate Whites who were the real cause of the race problem.⁸³

The seeming contradictions and ambivalence that Ellen G. White, Edson White, and other Seventh-day Adventists displayed on the issue of race were not unlike the feelings harbored by other nineteenth-century Christians. This was especially true of Christians in the South, where slavery had been the backbone of the economy. Even some abolitionists who vigorously fought for the termination of slavery were not free of racial prejudice, and many were conspicuously contemptuous in their treatment of Blacks, even refusing to associate with them. Some Whites in the abolitionist movement, while holding that people of African descent should be

⁸¹Ibid., 85.

⁸²*The General Conference Bulletin*, Thirty-Fifth Session, Vol. 5, No. 13, Oakland, Calif., April 14, 1903, 202.

⁸³Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:204–205.

represented and their causes championed, believed that Blacks were intellectually, socially, and morally inherently inferior to Whites.⁸⁴

The North American Division Negro Department

In 1890 Black membership in the Seventh-day Adventist church was approximately fifty, with not more than twenty Black Seventh-day Adventists living below the Mason-Dixon. As the twentieth century dawned, there were over 300 Black Seventh-day Adventists in seven organized churches in the South, and Oakwood's enrollment hovered around fifty. By 1908, Black church membership was over 1,000 and there were thirteen canvassers⁸⁵ spread out over the South promoting church literature uniquely geared to the African American community. Coordination to reach African Americans was provided by the Southern Missionary Society, and church leader Ellen G. White continued to agitate on behalf of the Black work. In 1909, Seventh-day Adventist church leaders recognized the need to create a centralized entity to direct the Black work with intentionality and purpose.⁸⁶

The creation in 1909 of the Negro Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists illustrates the move in America at that time to address issues of self-determination among Blacks in substantive, meaningful ways. In 1905 the Niagara Movement had committed itself to the abolition of all distinctions centered

⁸⁴Norman K. Miles, "Tension Between the Races," in *The World of Ellen G. White*, edited by Gary Land (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1987), 47-60.

⁸⁵A canvasser was an individual who went door to door selling church literature. No longer known as such, they are now called literature evangelists.

⁸⁶*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 86, No. 23, June 10, 1909, 13.

around race. A few years earlier a Black Adventist minister named Louis C. Sheafe had issued a call for Black representation in the leadership of the church, claiming that as he traveled around the country he was inundated with questions and concerns about the treatment of Blacks in the church. Sheafe believed the work among Blacks would be accelerated if spearheaded by Blacks themselves.⁸⁷

Yet a White person was appointed the first director of the Negro Department, with three more White individuals leading the department until 1918, when an African American was appointed director. William H. Green, a brilliant attorney who had argued cases before the highest courts of the land, led the department from 1918 until his death on October 31, 1928. Throughout the 1920s the General Conference continued to tinker with the structure it had set up to facilitate work among Blacks, finally voting at its Fall Council meeting in 1929 an action that even today is considered watershed—in Union Conferences with at least 500 members, a Black would be elected as Union Secretary.

The General Conference was on record as saying that the office of the director of the Negro Department would be at its headquarters. It was that way until 1918 when Green was elected head of the department. Prejudice precluded the continuation of that policy, so that Green's was a roving office away from the world headquarters of the denomination. In 1930, the year Humphrey and his congregation were officially severed from the Seventh-day Adventist church, the General Conference again reaffirmed its wish that the head of the Negro Department be situated at its world headquarters building in Washington, D.C. Even so, prejudice

⁸⁷ *The General Conference Bulletin*, Thirty-Fourth Session, Vol. IV, No. 17, April 22, 1901, 389.

again derailed the implementation of the action.⁸⁸

The evidence shows that the Negro Department did realize its major objectives of facilitating and fostering work among African Americans, and of helping to develop indigenous Black leadership. Among the Black Adventist ministers nurtured and developed during the early twentieth century was Sydney Scott, who in 1913 baptized over 100 people in Wilmington, North Carolina. Known and remembered for his masterly use of graphics that visibly illustrated the prophecies of the Bible books of Daniel and Revelation, Scott conducted several evangelistic campaigns during this period in North and South Carolina. Another successful Black Adventist minister was Matthew C. Strachan, who before assuming in 1924 the pastorate of Harlem Number Two in New York City, was a notable minister in Florida. J. S. Green, Floyd Stevens, and John Manns were three other successful ministers. Manns, who baptized about 150 in Savannah, Georgia, ultimately left the organized Seventh-day Adventist church over the race issue, taking much of the membership and church property with him. The remnant of the Savannah, Georgia, congregation was organized under the leadership of W. S. Willis, who in 1916 went to Washington, D.C. to stabilize the remainder of the Sheafe apostasy there.⁸⁹ Yet the standout among Black Seventh-day Adventist ministers in the early twentieth century was James K. Humphrey.

⁸⁸W. W. Fordham, *Righteous Rebel* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1990), 139.

⁸⁹H. D. Singleton, "Eighty Years of Adventism," in *Telling the Story: An Anthology on the Development of the Black SDA Work*, Delbert W. Baker, compiler (Loma Linda, Calif.: Loma Linda University Press, 1996), 4:82.

James K. Humphrey and the First Harlem Church

James Kemuel Humphrey was born in the parish of St. Elizabeth, Jamaica, on March 7, 1877. He attended elementary school in the parish, and graduated from Colbar College, where he distinguished himself as an exceptional student and eloquent speaker. On December 19, 1900, he married Viola (Roseanne) Anderson of Kingston, Jamaica, embarking shortly thereafter on a career as a Baptist minister. Always painfully aware of the plight of people of African descent in the world, Humphrey left Jamaica in 1901 to visit Africa. On his way to Africa he stopped off in New York City, where he was converted to Adventism by a Seventh-day Adventist layman named J. H. Carroll. A former Catholic, Carroll had been converted to Adventism by Stephen Haskell, an Adventist pioneer, and was facilitating meetings in his home in Brooklyn, New York, when Humphrey entered one day. The encounter altered Humphrey's plans and changed his life. Struck by the simplicity and logic of what he heard, Humphrey joined the Adventist church, walking away from the Baptist ministry, itself a significant step. He aborted his trip to Africa, deciding to remain in New York City, where his wife joined him the following year.⁹⁰

In 1903 Humphrey, not Carroll, was chosen to lead the small group of Adventists that had grown out of Carroll's labors, a testament to Humphrey's extraordinary organizational and leadership skills. A gifted musician and reputable scholar, Humphrey had innate charisma, a quality that contributed in no small way to the almost hypnotic effect his presence and words had on people. Humphrey stood over six feet and was lean all his life. Yet his lithe frame was not his distinguishing

⁹⁰Schwarz, 477–479.

feature, but the way he grew and styled his hair. Parted to the left and heaped up to the right, Humphrey's hair was snow white from his late forties onward. He also had a thick moustache that was hooked upwards on either side. Humphrey's hair and moustache captured and kept the attention of people, exerting somewhat of a mystical pull on some of them especially in his later years when his hair was completely white. He was an impeccable dresser, though he shunned the ostentatiousness and flamboyance of other notable Harlem ministers of the time. Humphrey's wardrobe was tasteful and conservative, as were his manners. Courteous almost to a fault, he would nod to people as he walked the streets of Harlem, gracefully acknowledging the presence and cultivating the society of those he encountered.⁹¹

When Humphrey assumed the leadership of Carroll's group in 1903, it consisted of ten people. The following year he began to function as a licensed missionary with the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,⁹² and was ordained as a Seventh-day Adventist minister in 1907. That year he was invited to serve on the executive committee of the Greater New York Conference, and on

⁹¹Bernice Samuel, interview by author, Jamaica, New York, April 17, 2000.

⁹²Seventh-day Adventists in a particular area are grouped together and governed by an entity called a conference. Ostensibly, a conference, sometimes referred to as a local conference, is a united body of churches, which are themselves united bodies of believers. The next level of the denomination's organizational structure is the union, which is a united body of conferences in a region. For example, during Humphrey's time the churches in the New York City area made up the Greater New York Conference, while those in upstate New York were a part of the New York Conference. Both conferences were a part of the Atlantic Union, headquartered then in Massachusetts. Local conferences supervise Adventist mission and ministry in the churches, whereas the union supervises the work in the local conferences. Both the local and union conference have executive committees, which assist their presidents in planning and executing their responsibilities.

the executive committee of the Atlantic Union some time later. When the North American Negro Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists was established in 1909, Humphrey was appointed as one of the members of its executive committee.⁹³ Humphrey generally approved of the establishment, though not necessarily the leadership, of the department, saying that the church should be as intentional in its efforts to win Blacks in the North as it had been to do so in the South.⁹⁴

The meteoric rise of Humphrey in the Adventist church continued through the 1910s. Humphrey was chosen as a delegate from the Atlantic Union to the General Conference in 1913. It was the first of many times he would serve in this capacity, and he found the experience enlightening and educational. Meeting and interacting with church leaders from around the world helped him to understand the global mission and impact of his church. Yet Humphrey could not lose sight of the challenges the issue of race presented the denomination. When a recommendation was introduced to drop the words “North American” from the name of the Negro Department, Humphrey spoke out against it, claiming that he was afraid the racial conditions then permeating North America would spread to the West Indies. Obviously, Humphrey, like some other West Indians, believed that the region from

⁹³*The General Conference Bulletin*, Vol. 6, No. 16, Thirty-Seventh Session (Washington, D.C.: The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1909), 243.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 286.

which he hailed had rid itself of racism and was basking in racial enlightenment.⁹⁵

As 1913 drew to a close, the Atlantic Union of Seventh-day Adventists boasted over 200 Black members, many of whom were members in the churches of the Greater New York Conference. Humphrey, a gifted evangelist, continued holding tent revivals in New York City, especially in the borough of Manhattan, and the result was that by 1920 the membership of the First Harlem church, which Humphrey was serving as pastor, was about 600. At the Greater New York Conference Session of 1920, Humphrey was appointed a member of the Conference's Credentials and Licenses Committee (he was reappointed to the conference's executive committee), and gave the report of the Colored Department of the Conference, which consisted of three churches—First Harlem, Brooklyn Number Two, and White Plains. At that session his wife was voted to the Medical Missions and Sabbath School Sub-Committees of the Conference, receiving a missionary license along the way. When a resolution calling for the training of suitable individuals for foreign missionary work was introduced, Humphrey gave it his wholehearted endorsement, saying that many unproven and ill-trained individuals had gone forth to labor, and that the resolution was long overdue. It was Humphrey who made the motion to adjourn the conference session.⁹⁶

Two years later, at the Seventeenth Session of the Greater New York Conference, Humphrey offered the opening prayer of the first meeting. No sooner

⁹⁵*The General Conference Bulletin*, Thirty-Eight Session, Vol. 7, No. 20 (Washington, D.C.: The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1913), 309.

⁹⁶Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Minutes of the Biennial Session of the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, February 24, 1920, Greater New York Conference Archives, Manhasset, New York.

had the first business meeting of the session started than James K. Humphrey took to the floor to explain why a group of Black Adventists meeting in New Rochelle should be accepted into the sisterhood of churches in the conference.⁹⁷ During the summer of 1921, Percy Brownie, a member of Humphrey's Harlem congregation, had collaborated with a few members from the White Plains, New York, church in an outreach initiative that resulted in five baptisms. Along with eleven members from White Plains and two transferees from Kingston, Jamaica, a church of eighteen had been started, and was by the time of the session returning appreciable tithes and contributing liberal offerings. Humphrey's motion that the delegates which the group had sent to the session be seated, and that the congregation be accepted into the sisterhood of churches, was overwhelmingly accepted.⁹⁸ Thus, there were four Black churches in the Greater New York Conference by the end of 1922, all of them under the supervision of Humphrey.

At the Seventeenth Session of the Greater New York Conference, Humphrey was appointed to the conference's Pastoral Committee, the Committee on Nominations, the Plans Committee, the Constitution and By-Laws Committee, and the Executive Committee. Black delegates to this session totaled fifty-nine, with the majority—forty-eight—coming from Humphrey's Harlem congregation, while six came from Brooklyn Number Two, three from New Rochelle, and two from White Plains. Harlem had the greatest number of delegates of any church in the conference.

⁹⁷ Adventist polity calls for churches to be voted into the conference at a duly called meeting of the conference.

⁹⁸ Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Minutes of the Seventeenth Session of the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, June 20–24, 1922, Greater New York Conference Archives, Manhasset, New York.

As the session was about to adjourn, Humphrey joined the conference and union presidents in thanking God and the assembled delegates for the harmonious way in which the conference had moved forward.⁹⁹ At the following session of the conference, Humphrey served in the key role of secretary of the session.¹⁰⁰

Part of the reason for Humphrey's success as a minister was that he was both available and approachable. Often, he opened up his home to his members, welcoming them there for fun, food, and fellowship with his family. These social engagements had the additional benefit of fostering the faith of the members, who generally were always on the look out for environments beyond the church's precincts that were conducive to the strengthening of their faith. With most of Humphrey's membership having migrated to New York City from the South and Caribbean, members were truly pilgrims in a strange land. Humphrey cultivated community and reciprocity among his members, encouraging them to band together and to be supportive of each other.¹⁰¹

First Harlem continued growing so well that, ostensibly, no building in Harlem was large enough to accommodate the burgeoning congregation. Consequently, in consultation with Atlantic Union and General Conference officials, the group's leaders made a decision to start a new congregation in Harlem. On

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Minutes of the Eighteenth Session of the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, March 12–14, 1924, Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Archives, Manhasset, New York.

¹⁰¹Donald L. Vanterpool, "A Study of Events Concerning the First Harlem Church," Unpublished Term Paper (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University School of Graduate Studies, 1979), 12.

January 1, 1924, Harlem Number Two was launched with 108 members. Matthew C. Strachan was called up from Florida to lead the new congregation, and he spoke glowingly of Humphrey's twenty-four years of labor and leadership in the New York City area. By the time Harlem Number Two was voted a part of the Greater New York Conference at its Eighteenth Session held from March 12 to 14 that year, the membership of the group was 125. Harlem Number Two fielded six delegates and three alternates to the session.¹⁰²

Yet Humphrey could not stop spawning new churches, which made for a widening of his influence. Three years after Harlem Number Two was organized, the First Jamaica Colored church was founded in Jamaica, New York. In 1925, a lay preacher named Sidney Armstrong had started to work the area. Organized in 1927 with a few additional members from Second Brooklyn joining those Armstrong had won, the church was making a significant contribution in tithes and offerings to the mission field and the Harvest Ingathering program¹⁰³ by 1928, when it was voted into the sisterhood of churches. Its membership at acceptance was twenty-five.

At the Twentieth Session of the Greater New York Conference, Humphrey was moved to propose that his groups be recognized, that their delegates be seated, and that the rest of the delegates be fully informed about the progress of Seventh-day

¹⁰²Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Minutes of the Eighteenth Session of the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, March 12–14, 1924, Greater New York Conference Archives, Manhasset, New York.

¹⁰³Until recently, the Harvest Ingathering campaign was conducted annually in Adventist churches around the world. A humanitarian venture aimed at alleviating pain and suffering worldwide, it called for church members to canvas their neighbors and friends for financial contributions to help in the worthy cause.

Adventist efforts in the African American community. He superintended the work in his community with vigilance and diligence, leaving no stone unturned. Yet Humphrey's influence transcended the African American community. Humphrey opened sessions of the Greater New York Conference with prayer, moved to adjourn meetings, spoke to critical resolutions, served on several important committees, and influenced many actions of the church.¹⁰⁴

As early as 1924, Humphrey appeared to be giving in to a certain kind of megalomania. As he tendered his report of Adventist ministry in the African American community to the delegates at the Eighteenth Session of the Greater New York Conference that year, he lamented his physical condition, which he claimed had curtailed his evangelistic activities in Harlem the previous year. He explained that his burden then was not to raise money, but to see his membership grow, and that membership growth was his lifelong ambition. Yet Humphrey held up the giving totals—\$22,224 in tithes and \$18,388 in foreign missions—of the previous year for analysis. He argued that given their limited economic resources Blacks were giving more proportionally than other groups. In his report, Humphrey hoped for the time when he would be asked to evangelize not only in New York City but Philadelphia and Chicago as well.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Minutes of the Twentieth Session of the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, March 20–24, 1928, Greater New York Conference Archives, Manhasset, New York.

¹⁰⁵Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Minutes of the Eighteenth Session of the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, March 12–14, 1924, Greater New York Conference Archives, Manhasset, New York.

It appears that Humphrey wanted to leave New York City, twice petitioning church leaders to be relocated. On both occasions he was turned down, ostensibly because the church in New York City was thriving under his leadership. Humphrey never offered reasons for wanting to leave New York City, though they are evident with a reading between the lines. Humphrey's association with, and tenure within, the Seventh-day Adventist church was marked by emotional stress over the race issue in general and the way he perceived people of color being treated in the church in particular. In 1905, one year after he began working as a licensed missionary, he was accosted by an individual twenty years his senior who was about to cut ties with the church over the race issue and asked to do the same.¹⁰⁶ Obviously, Humphrey was disenchanted with his church and his displeasure was known. Yet Humphrey "flatly refused" to disassociate himself from the denomination at that time, saying that he had never come across a precedent in God's word for anyone rejecting "God's organized plan of work" and succeeding.¹⁰⁷

Humphrey chose the General Conference Session of 1922 to share this information, the occasion a high point in his ministry. Asked to preach at the session, Humphrey chose suffering and "The Divine Program" as the theme and title of his sermon. Basing his sermon on 1 Peter 5:10, Humphrey lifted up and expanded on the

¹⁰⁶No one is sure who the individual referred to is, though speculation centers on Louis C. Schaefer and not John Manns who also visited with Humphrey. Formerly pastor of the Northwest Washington, D.C. Church at 10th and V Streets, Schaefer and his congregation defected from the denomination in 1907, returning to the fold some years later. Subsequently, Schaefer left again, never to return. See Jacob Justiss, *Angels in Ebony* (Toledo: Jet Printing Services, 1975), 45.

¹⁰⁷*General Conference Bulletin*, Fortieth Session, Vol. 9, No. 11, Mountain View California, May 25, 1922, 253, 254.

theme of suffering, asserting that it was God's wonderful program for Christians, who must all suffer in this world for some time.¹⁰⁸ Suffering being the will of a sovereign God, Christians have no control over it, and must accept it as submissive children of a God who knows what is in their best interest and for their most good. Suffering puts people on an equal footing, uniting them in a community of shared sympathy, and leading them to a state of perfection. In fact, suffering is one of the means through which perfection is realized. For Humphrey, suffering liberates and sanctifies, grounding Christians in the truth. Yet suffering is a fleeting reality caused by the temporal nature of the universe. This being the case, Humphrey, like most Christians, was eager for the return of Jesus Christ, and urged his fellow pilgrims to hold on.¹⁰⁹

Humphrey's General Conference sermon on the evening of May 23, 1922, did not occur in a vacuum. More personal testimony than the exposition of a particular biblical passage, the sermon reveals a man with a heavy heart, and a person struggling to come to grips with unresolved issues.¹¹⁰ After asserting that, like the Apostle Paul, he would allow nothing to drive a wedge between his love for God and himself,

¹⁰⁸ Although Humphrey used Peter as the springboard for his sermon, he appealed to the apostle Paul for warrant and backing for his main thesis. Quoting profusely from Paul's letter to the Romans and Corinthians, Humphrey claimed that suffering is the inevitable experience of people who became Christians. More topical than expository, the sermon demonstrates that Humphrey was at least a biblical preacher, if not a theologian, at this point in his ministry.

¹⁰⁹ *General Conference Bulletin*, Fortieth Session, 253, 254.

¹¹⁰ Humphrey's exposition lacks theological depth and does not reflect the historic African American perspective on pain and suffering. Two excellent studies of the African American theology of pain and suffering are, James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1975) and Anthony B. Pinn, *Why, Lord? Suffering and Evil in Black Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

Humphrey, at that time supervising four congregations in the metropolitan New York City area, related the incident about the brother who years before had encouraged him to leave the Seventh-day Adventist church. Humphrey claimed that independent churches, like the one the brother wanted to start, only appealed to recalcitrants and individuals who had grown lukewarm in their commitment to the church. He stated that those who love truth as it is found in Jesus Christ do not lower the bar of truth.¹¹¹

Yet Humphrey informed his listeners that he was often asked about his plans for the future, revealing that there was a measure of interest, if not uncertainty, about his tenure in the Seventh-day Adventist church. His intention was to remain in the word, he said, elaborating that “the cause of Jesus Christ is greater than men, greater than plans, greater than organization.” Of supreme importance to him were the salvation of his own soul, the glorification of God, and the salvation of all whom God had entrusted to his care.¹¹²

Humphrey continued ministering in Harlem throughout the 1920s, baptizing over 300 persons between 1920 and 1927. By 1925, Harlem, with a population approximating 250,000, presented Humphrey with some unique challenges, made more daunting by the fact that there were only two Black Seventh-day Adventist pastors and no Bible worker laboring in Harlem.¹¹³ Humphrey and his colleague,

¹¹¹ *General Conference Bulletin*, Fortieth Session, 253–254.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ A Bible Worker or Bible Instructor is a licensed missionary who assists a minister in his work. Usually women, Bible Workers function full or part time, and
(continued...)

M. C. Strachan, had been unable to engage in tent evangelism because of the difficulty of procuring a vacant lot between 125th and 145th Streets. Yet First Harlem had grown, becoming the largest church in the Greater New York Conference during that time. It remained so even after dropping the missing members. In 1925, Humphrey was asked to provide pastoral leadership for the Brooklyn Number Two congregation, established that year as the result of a tent effort that netted nine baptisms.¹¹⁴ He continued being a leader of uncommon abilities until the Utopia Park affair brought his service to the Seventh-day Adventist church to a halt.

Summary

The Black experience in the Seventh-day Adventist church began when a few Blacks joined Millerites in expecting the advent of Christ in 1844. Blacks who embraced Millerism, associated with Sabbatarian Adventists, and joined the Seventh-day Adventist church did so on their own, the three groups lacking a coherent, intentional plan of attracting African Americans, whose status as slaves and then as freedmen posed problems for these Christians. Church pioneers were involved in some anti-slavery causes, to be sure, though the reasons for their involvement are debatable. One reason why issue continues to be made over whether Adventists endorsed segregation in the nineteenth century is the absence of any official record of

113(...continued)
are remunerated for their services.

¹¹⁴Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Minutes of the Nineteenth Biennial Session of the Greater New York Conference, March 24–26, 1926*, Greater New York Conference Archives, Manhasset, New York.

the denomination's position of the issue.

Not until 1887 does the issue of segregation appear in official church records. At an official meeting of church leaders that year, delegates passionately exchanged views on a resolution calling on the church to erase all lines of distinction between Whites and Blacks. A three-member committee was empaneled and empowered to study how the resolution may be implemented, reporting one week later that it did not sense a need for the church to enact laws or guidelines on so delicate an issue. As with other sensitive issues, the denomination left the matter up to the dictates of individual consciences.¹¹⁵

Seventh-day Adventists began their focused and intentional attempts at attracting Blacks in the South after the Civil War, when the region was undergoing reconstruction. Yet not all Southern Blacks resonated with the politics of Reconstruction, tainted as it was with Jim Crow legislation and de jure segregation that made a mockery of the Thirteenth Amendment. Neither did all Southern Blacks flock wholesale to the Northern Whites then canvassing the South, the altruistic pronouncements of these Whites notwithstanding. Viewing Northern Whites with deep-seated feelings of suspicion, and in their attempts to redefine themselves spiritually and socially, most Southern Blacks opted to remain with their churches, "The Invisible Institution," which had functioned as a balm for them during the Antebellum period.¹¹⁶ Yet some Blacks did exploit the educational and vocational

¹¹⁵D. W. Baker, "In Search of Roots: Adventist African-Americans, Part Two: The Turning Point," *Adventist Review*, Vol. 170, No. 6, February 11, 1993, 10.

¹¹⁶One of the best analyses of Black religion during slavery is Albert Raboteau's *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*
(continued...)

opportunities offered to them by Northern Whites.

Adventist ministry to and among Blacks in the South received a boost when Ellen G. White's son chanced upon counsel she had given to church leaders years earlier. Pointed and passionate, Ellen White had called upon the church to not neglect the freedmen in the South, claiming that Whites and Blacks were equal in the sight of God. Edson sailed into Mississippi in January 1885, plying the Mississippi River for almost a decade thereafter evangelizing the African American community. Yet both Edson's and his mother's writings on matters of segregation call for sober, in-depth, and reasoned analysis because of their seeming contradictions.

As the twentieth century dawned, James K. Humphrey, passing through New York City on his way to Africa, accepted the teachings of Adventism from a layman. A former Baptist minister, Humphrey embarked upon a career of service to the Seventh-day Adventist church that was marked with distinction.¹¹⁷ In time, he pastored the largest Black Seventh-day Adventist church in North America, ending

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(Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). For a credible view of the ways in which the Black church has historically functioned in the African American community, see E. Franklin Frazier's *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964).

¹¹⁷Though allusion is made to Humphrey's leadership role in the Greater New York Conference and Adventist church, he is conspicuously absent when Black leaders are surveyed by some indigenous African American writers. For example, in *A Star Gives Light: Seventh-day Adventist African American Heritage*, Humphrey is named as one of three Blacks who were disenchanted with the church's proposal that the Black work be organized on a mission basis because such an arrangement would not facilitate Black representation on all levels of church organization. Humphrey is also mentioned as one of the evangelists responsible for the growth of the Black membership to 3,500 by 1918. Yet Humphrey is not mentioned in the book's history of the Black Seventh-day Adventist ministry. See Norwida A. Marshall, ed., *A Star Gives Light: Seventh-day Adventist African American Heritage*, (Decatur, Ga.: Southern Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1989), 43–44.

his service only when his congregation and he were expelled.

Delbert Baker sees five themes running through the Black experience in Adventism. First, he believes that the development of the Black work was in keeping with, and an integral part of, God's plan for Seventh-day Adventists to evangelize the entire world. Second, he posits that God designed that the Seventh-day Adventist church be multicultural and all-inclusive. Third, he identifies Ellen G. White as the single most important Adventist leader for championing Adventist ministry to Blacks. Fourth, he submits that the relationship between the Seventh-day Adventist church and Blacks was a mutually beneficial one, in that African Americans helped the church to "mature in its outlook on multiculturalism." In this regard, he cites Ellen White, who pointed out the incongruity of the church sending missionaries overseas while a mission field in the South lay right before it. Finally, Baker calls for a celebration of the strides made in winning Blacks as a result of the collaborative efforts of the entire church.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸Delbert Baker, "In Search of Roots: Exploring the History of Adventist African-Americans in the United States," *Adventist Review*, Vol. 170, No. 5, February 4, 1993, 13–14.

CHAPTER V

THE UTOPIA PARK AFFAIR

Throughout the 1920s, James K. Humphrey served the Seventh-day Adventist denomination with distinction and vision, leading the First Harlem Seventh-day Adventist congregation to a position of primacy and prominence within the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. In 1927, First Harlem was the largest Seventh-day Adventist church in New York City, and the third largest in the United States.¹ Yet, for all of his success, Humphrey was uncomfortable with the way the Adventist denomination treated people of color. More important, Humphrey began to believe that the denomination, its lofty pronouncements of support and solidarity notwithstanding, was not anxious to bring about substantive changes in the conditions faced by African Americans. Humphrey had waited patiently for the denomination to match its words with corresponding actions, but as the 1920s drew to a close his patience wore thin. A series of events ultimately led to the expulsion of the First Harlem SDA Church from the sisterhood of churches of the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and the revocation of Humphrey's ministerial credentials. Together, these events are known as the Utopia Park Affair.

What was Utopia Park all about? What led up to it, and could it have been avoided? What, if anything, does it say about race relations in the Seventh-day

¹Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Comparative Reports for the Years 1920–1927, Twentieth Session, March 20–24, 1928*. See Appendices A–G.

Adventist church during this time period, and what clues does it provide for the engagement of the race issue today? Was Utopia Park nothing more than self-promotion on Humphrey's part as some detractors have alleged? Does it provide eloquent witness that Humphrey during the 1920s succumbed to a type of megalomania, using his body as a symbol with evangelical and public relations dimensions? These are some of the issues that will be addressed in this chapter.

The African American Drive for Self-Determination

The United States Supreme Court's much heralded maxim that separate is equal was not matched in the nation's cities, towns, and villages. On the contrary, segregation and inequality seemed synonymous, an almost axiomatic truth that was exacerbated by discrimination and oppression. On every hand, and by every measure, segregation militated against the attempts of Black people to get a fair crack at the "American Dream," leading to frustration and anger on their part. Yet Christians in general, and the members of Humphrey's congregation in particular, were more confused and distressed by the tacit endorsement and acceptance of segregation that they saw the Christian community in the United States giving to it. For almost his entire tenure as a Seventh-day Adventist minister, Humphrey kept the race issue before the denomination's leadership, agitating for change that would result in greater self-determination for African Americans.

Yet James K. Humphrey was not the first African American pastor with whom the Seventh-day Adventist church experienced difficulty over the treatment of Blacks in the church. That distinction belonged to Louis Sheafe, who from 1903 pastored the First Church of Seventh-day Adventists located at 324 Spruce Street,

Washington, D.C., and later the People's Seventh-day Adventist Church located at the corner of 10th and V Streets in the nation's capital. In 1907 disagreements between the denomination and Sheafe made The People's SDA Church vote unanimously to sever its association with the denomination. Not surprisingly, denominational leadership cited other reasons for its rift with Sheafe and his congregation. The organization alleged that its problems with Sheafe were fueled and compounded by Sheafe's sympathy with the pantheistic beliefs of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, the Battle Creek Adventist doctor and businessman who revolutionized the breakfast habits of Americans with the introduction of the breakfast cereal.²

The departure of the People's church from the Seventh-day Adventist sisterhood of churches may have contributed to the establishment of the North American Negro Department of the General Conference, the administrative arm of the denomination created in 1909 to foster and promote the spread of the gospel among African Americans. At the time of the creation of the Negro Department, the organization had already instituted ethnic entities to facilitate the grafting of European immigrant groups into the American and Adventist culture. Yet the North American Negro Department differed from the departments that catered to the needs of German-Americans, Danish-Americans, and others in fundamentally different ways. Foremost among the ways was the fact that the Negro Department did not have the integration of Blacks into the life and mission of the church as one of its paramount objectives.³

²Makapela, 210–218.

³*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 86, No. 23, June 10, 1909, 13.

Was the establishment of the North American Negro Department tantamount to the institutionalization of racism within the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Or was the denomination simply reflecting the tone of Black-White relations in the broader American society, legitimized and standardized in the United States by the Supreme Court's *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling that separate and equal was an ethical and viable notion? Credible answers to these questions are made difficult by the fact that the North American Negro Department was not run by Blacks for the first ten years of its existence. Indeed, Blacks were in a minority in the department, serving mostly on its Advisory Committee and leaving most of the formulation and execution of the department's plans and activities to Whites. Still, if nothing else, the department is proof that "separate but equal" had made its way into the Seventh-day Adventist church.⁴

There were less than 1,000 people of African descent in the Seventh-day Adventist Church when the North American Negro Department was established, leading some observers to question the move. Officially, the department was to promulgate Adventist efforts in the Black community. General Conference President A. G. Daniells, noting the unprecedented number of "colored ministers" participating at the 1909 General Conference Session, said the creation of the Negro Department was "a step in the right direction" that would help the denomination "have one solid, systematized, concerted effort to push this important branch of the work." Included in those efforts were the publication and marketing of Christian literature uniquely

⁴Ibid.

geared to meet the special needs of the African American community.⁵ Additionally, the department was “a movement for the betterment and uplifting of a people.”⁶

Yet the creation of the department did not completely satisfy or quiet the misgivings of some in the African American constituency. Sydney Scott, for example, objected to the department being called the “North American Negro Department,” arguing that the term was misleading, and that “Afro-American” should be used instead. Scott also stated that while the idea of such a department was sound, he could only endorse the concept if “just and fair representation” in the department “from the local mission clear to the head” was a reality. W. A. Westworth, of the Southeastern Union, interpreted the launch of the department as the creation of a foreign mission station. M. C. Strachan, who later pastored Harlem Number Two and the Ephesus SDA Church congregation that grew out of First Harlem, saw the department as a necessary expediency, and James K. Humphrey stated at its creation that the department would be in his prayers.⁷ Humphrey had been asked by General Conference leadership if he were “thoroughly convinced” about the term the denomination anticipated calling the department, answering, “I am convinced so. The term ‘colored’ is not definite in fact. . . . But we are the negro race. I am not ashamed at all to acknowledge that.”⁸

Accepting neither the way the Negro Department was constituted nor the way

⁵Ibid.

⁶*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 86, No. 24, June 17, 1909, 8.

⁷Ibid, 7.

⁸*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 86, No. 23, June 10, 1909, 13.

it was operated, African Americans continued to agitate for change, arguing among other things that only one of their own could run the department with the sensitivity to their unique needs for which conditions in society called. As long as Whites continued to control the department, they believed, their cause would be hurt. In 1918 their lobbying efforts paid off with the appointment of W. H. Green as the first African American director of the department. Yet the appointment of Green did little to acquit the denomination of the charges of racism leveled against it. On the contrary, it provided evidence to sustain the charge, because in spite of the fact that his three White predecessors had maintained and worked out of offices at the denomination's world headquarters in Washington, D. C., Green was not allowed to do so. Four years after he assumed the leadership of the North American Negro Department, the official yearbook of the denomination listed the director as having two addresses—one at its world headquarters and the other in Detroit, Michigan, where Green resided.⁹

The Call for Regional Conferences

In 1920, as James K. Humphrey was expanding his efforts in Harlem, a Black Seventh-day Adventist minister in Savannah, Georgia ran afoul of denominational policies. J. W. Manns, like Humphrey a leader of uncommon homiletical ability who possessed an extensive knowledge of Seventh-day Adventist doctrine and policies, had pioneered in the establishment of several Adventist congregations in the South. Included in the network of churches he had established was the Savannah

⁹*Yearbook of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1922), 263.

congregation, where it was rumored he had baptized approximately 160 people.¹⁰ In violation of denominational policy, Manns had led his Savannah congregation to retain the deed to its property.¹¹ He refused to reverse himself on the decision when pressed to do so by church leadership, arguing that the church's demands were racist and discriminatory. As a result, the Savannah congregation was dismissed in late 1920.

Fortuitously, a collection of Ellen White's counsels on the race issue was published around the same time that Manns and his congregation opted to go their separate ways.¹² The release of White's book could not have occurred at a less convenient time. In it she advises against the erection and perpetuation of barriers between American Adventists and their newly arrived European cousins, asserting that the unity of a Christian body provided convincing proof that the Godhead is one, and reminding her readers that the principle of heaven is oneness.¹³ Yet Ellen White admonished African Americans to refrain from agitating for change for fear of stirring up ill-will among Whites, to labor for and among their own race, and to seek separate church facilities since it was not in the best interests of Whites and Blacks to worship

¹⁰Makapela, 223.

¹¹According to Seventh-day Adventist policy, all deeds/titles to real property must be held by the local conference, ostensibly to safeguard the property from the whims and fancies of the local congregation.

¹²Although Ellen White died in 1915, she left boxes of manuscripts that first her family and later the Ellen G. White Estate, a department/subsidiary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, have published as books, pamphlets, and magazine articles. Publication of previously unpublished material continues to this day.

¹³Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 9:195–198.

together.¹⁴

More perplexing to Blacks was Ellen White's counsel that African Americans accept their second class citizenship and submit to hardship for Christ's sake. Moreover, they should not press for an equal footing with Whites, and should not forget the biblical injunction that sometimes expediency is a higher value than legality. Yet White's most confusing statement was her implicit endorsement of a higher morality among Whites, albeit one that had come about because "Northern people have lived in a clearer, purer moral atmosphere than have the colored people of the South."¹⁵

African Americans received Whites's counsel with a mixture of reservation and bewilderment. Given their subordinate status in the American society, they had hoped to find spiritual and social salvation in the Seventh-day Adventist church, which wore its uniqueness as God's special end-time people as a badge of honor. At a loss to comprehend White's statements, many Black Adventists rejected them outright, while others used them to argue against her authenticity as a contemporary prophetess.

Issue may have been made about White's counsel but hardly with the everyday treatment of Blacks within the Adventist church. In 1919, J. E. Jarvis applied to Union College, one of the twelve union colleges owned and operated by the Adventist church, for admission to pursue a degree in theology. Jarvis wanted to become a Seventh-day Adventist minister, and, not unlike some Blacks of his era,

¹⁴Ibid., 206.

¹⁵Ibid., 214–215, 223.

desired to attend an integrated school instead of the all-Black Oakwood college in Huntsville, Alabama. To his surprise and chagrin, Jervis was not accepted at Union, receiving a letter signed by the school's president, Harvey A. Morrison, that informed him it was not the institution's policy to accept Blacks from outside its territory,¹⁶ and that under normal circumstances and conditions the institution did not have Black students.¹⁷ Ten years later, as the First Harlem church was becoming embroiled in the Utopia Park Affair, Jervis was serving the congregation as its associate pastor.

The denomination's attitude and policies toward educating Blacks in its educational institutions did not change much between 1919 and 1929, the year a member of First Harlem applied for admission to the nursing program of the denomination's only institution for medical training in the United States. Mrs. Beryl Holness received word from the College of Medical Evangelists in California, now Loma Linda University, declining her request for admission on the ground of her "nationality." That Holness, from a well-known Black family, was turned down in the midst of Humphrey's struggles with the Greater New York Conference, fueled the controversy all the more.¹⁸

Yet the Seventh-day Adventist Church was not blind to the plight of Blacks.

¹⁶The twelve Seventh-day Adventist colleges in North America are strategically located across the country to primarily serve the constituency where they are located. Ideally, they do not market themselves or recruit students beyond their territory. Exempted from this guideline are Loma Linda University, the denomination's premiere medical institution, located in Loma Linda, California; and Andrews University, the organization's flagship educational institution and primary graduate school, located in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

¹⁷Letter, Union College, August 22, 1919, as it appears in "?" (n.p.: The Russwurm Publishing Company, Inc., n.d.), 19.

¹⁸Ibid.

At the 1929 Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee, held in Columbus, Ohio, from September 24 to October 2, much time was devoted to studying the needs of the “good and growing work” executed by Blacks in North America. The previous year, W. H. Green, who had led the Negro Department for almost ten years, had died, creating a vacuum in the Black work.¹⁹ Prior to the Autumn Council, a commission appointed at the Spring meeting of world church leaders had met and, through the Plans Committee, had tendered a slate of recommendations concerning work among Blacks. Among the recommendations was one calling for serious study to be given to the feasibility of establishing a school for Blacks in the North. Also, that Blacks be encouraged to enter the colporteur field so as to win souls and secure scholarships to Christian schools; and that Adventist sanitariums, where possible, accept Blacks into their nursing programs (no mention was made about training Blacks to become doctors). Yet the actions that may have struck Humphrey the hardest were the ones calling for the office of the secretary of the Negro Department to be located at the church’s world headquarters in Washington, D. C., and that George E. Peters be appointed secretary of the North American Negro Department.²⁰ A gifted speaker with a commanding presence and impressive bearing, Peters, like Humphrey, was a West Indian. Antiguan by birth, he

¹⁹One of the three individuals who authored the obituary of W. H. Green, who died on October 31, 1928, was J. K. Humphrey. Humphrey was at Green’s funeral services, which were held in Detroit, Michigan, and presided over by General Conference president, W. A. Spicer, who delivered the eulogy. *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 27, 1928, Vol. 105, No. 52, 22.

²⁰“Report of the Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee,” *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 106, No. 46, November 14, 1929, 7, 8.

spoke with an unmistakable accent.

Earlier that year, at the Spring meeting of the world church held in Washington, D.C., the Black Caucus had passed a resolution calling for the creation of regional conferences to replace the nebulous, ineffective Negro Department.²¹ Stressing that regional conferences would relate to the General Conference in much the same way as other conferences, the resolution nonetheless stated that with regional conferences African Americans would control and administer their own funds, hire and terminate their own workers, negotiate for the acquisition and disposal of real property, and cast and pursue the vision for the Black work. In sum, the regional conference idea was an attempt on the part of Blacks in the Seventh-day Adventist church for self-determination. The request of Black church leaders, as they saw it, would bring concretization and legitimization to the “separate but equal” condition that existed in the Seventh-day Adventist church.²²

Humphrey was at the forefront of the call for separate regional conferences for African Americans. His argument was based on the plight of Blacks within the Seventh-day Adventist church. As he and fellow Black leaders saw it, the denomination’s attitude and policies toward Blacks left them feeling powerless and unappreciated. The North American Negro Department, its high objectives notwithstanding, had done little to assuage the situation of Blacks in the church, in part because even when it was finally led by an African American the department had

²¹The concept of regional conferences had been mentioned as early as 1898 by Charles Kinney. Seventh-day Adventist Archives, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Springs, Maryland.

²²“7,” 7.

no clout. Humphrey and other Black leaders knew that African Americans in the Adventist church lacked credible, tenable constituent representation at the higher levels of the organization, a situation they found unacceptable given their financial contributions and the number of baptisms they amassed.²³

The General Conference leaders responded to the request for regional conferences by empaneling a committee to study the issue. The committee consisted of eighteen individuals, eleven of whom were White. Not surprisingly, Humphrey was among the six Blacks asked to serve on the committee. Outnumbered three to one, the Blacks on the committee were powerless to stop the body from “emphatically and absolutely” voting down the idea of regional conferences. Yet what particularly distressed them was the committee’s statement that “Black Conferences are out of the question. Don’t ever ask for a Black Conference again.”²⁴

The Utopia Park Health Benevolent Association

Sometime after the Spring meeting of Adventist world church leaders, Humphrey began to promote the idea of an all-Black commune among his members. The project was called Utopia Park, and Humphrey had grand goals and objectives for it. To be owned, operated and occupied by people of color, Utopia Park was to be completely non-sectarian. It would provide Blacks with an environment conducive to their physical, social, and psychological well-being, as well as provide them with employment opportunities. Initially, Utopia Park was to be located in Wappingers

²³Makapela, 229–231.

²⁴Ibid., 231; Fordham, *Righteous Rebel*, 79.

Falls, New York, a small town about seven miles from Poughkeepsie, but problems with that property caused Humphrey and his group to settle for an estate in Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey. Humphrey thought that it was divine providence that had led them to the spot.

Touted and billed as the “Fortune Spot of America for Colored People,” Utopia Park was said to consist of rolling hills, sixteen acres of gardens and lawns, plants and flowers too numerous to list, a main lake three acres wide that could accommodate 5,000 swimmers, three smaller lakes uniquely suited for ice skating in the winter, and a high point from which the boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn could be seen on a clear day. Accessible from New York City by boat, rail, or automobile, the property was fanned by ocean breezes that supposedly helped the physically and emotionally ill to regain their health, and was dominated by a 28-room mansion that sat amidst floral gardens. Plans called for the mansion to be converted into a community center, and recreational activities running the gamut from tennis to canoeing were planned for the old and young alike.

The property’s main building had a seating capacity of 1,000 and housed one of the park’s main attractions—a \$20,000 custom-built organ that came with an organist. A Black master musician, William E. Batson, was said to be able to thrill his brothers and sisters, a respite they would need after working in the farming and dairy industries, as well as in the polytechnic school, that were planned for Utopia Park. It was alleged that already there had been inquiries from Black entrepreneurs about the prospects of establishing manufacturing plants and other businesses there.

Utopia Park was said to be the brainchild of Pastor James K. Humphrey, who, allegedly, had conceived of it after several years of introspection and reflection.

Dubbed an “intelligent, earnest and indefatigable worker,” Humphrey was compared favorably to a modern-day Alladin. A Promotion Committee of twenty-two men and a Ladies Committee of twenty-five that included two teenagers and a young girl served as overseers of the project. Lots measuring twenty-five feet by 100 feet were offered only to Blacks of good, moral standing, with resident lots going for \$600, corner lots going for \$650, and business lots going for \$750. A mere ten percent down procured a residence lot, with \$3.50 the weekly installment. All communications about Utopia Park were to be addressed to Utopia Park, Inc., located at 141 West 131st Street, the exact address of the First Harlem Seventh-day Adventist church, and the promotional materials listed Pastor James K. Humphrey as Director General of Utopia Park.²⁵

To market Utopia Park, a song, replete with shades of Ethiopianism and to be sung to the tune of “My Maryland,” was written. The words of the song were:

Utopia, Utopia
 Sweet land of Ethiopia
 I look away across the sea,
 A mansion there now waits for me.

CHORUS

View that golden, sunny shore,
 My dream, my home, that I adore.
 Utopia, Utopia;
 Sweet land of Ethiopia.

II

Utopia, Utopia;
 Sweet land of Ethiopia;
 I'm waiting for thy great command
 To go to the promised land.

CHORUS

View that golden, sunny shore
 My dream, my home, that I adore;

²⁵*The Utopia Park Health Benevolent Association, (n.p.: n.d.).*

**Utopia, Utopia;
Sweet land of Ethiopia.²⁶**

Members of the First Harlem congregation embarked on an aggressive fund raising campaign to acquire the funds for the project. They took to the streets of Harlem, soliciting money in cans like those used in the denomination's Harvest Ingathering annual drive. They also sponsored a dinner that netted several thousand dollars. Allegedly, these funds were deposited in a Harlem bank in Humphrey's name.²⁷

Humphrey's dream of establishing a commune where Blacks could achieve and experience a measure of self reliance and independence in their social, economic and political lives through a program of education, training and practical experience approximated the utopian communities of pre-Civil War North America. In those societies leadership was derived from within and was almost always Black. Governing bodies were self-contained, and rules and regulations, which were strict, covered all facets of life in the community. The utopian communities were communitarian in structure, philosophy, and mission, providing a context of permanence for those who desired it. In short, these communities were all about equipping Blacks for life in a hostile society, while providing them with succor in the process. As training and support devices, their utility and purpose cannot be overstated.²⁸

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Joe Mesar and Tom Dybdahl, "The Utopia Park Affair and the Rise of Northern Black Adventists," *Adventist Heritage*, Vol. I, No. 1, 37.

²⁸William H. Pease and Jane H. Pease, *Black Utopia: Negro Communal Experiments in America* (Madison, Wis.: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, (continued...))

Its promotional and fund raising activities for Utopia Park at full steam, Harlem Number One was envisaging a successful campaign, even though it was operating outside of denominational policies. Yet the church's chances of success changed when the president of the Greater New York Conference began receiving information of what Humphrey was doing at First Harlem. Earlier that year the curiosity of the president had been piqued by the visit to his office of five of First Harlem's leaders to explain the appreciable drop in the church's tithe and offerings remittances. Louis K. Dickson decided it was not in his best interests to delay asking for clarification about the news of Utopia Park that had reached his desk. On August 13, 1929, he dispatched a letter to Humphrey, asserting that he had received word Humphrey and his members were about to establish a "colored colony, sanitarium, and old people's home," a project of which he was "totally in the dark regarding the facts." Dickson requested of Humphrey information that would set him "straight on the matter."²⁹

To his credit, Humphrey did not keep Dickson waiting long for a reply, responding one week later that the news of the Utopia Park project that had reached the president was substantially true, but informing him that the project was not a denominational initiative. Humphrey thanked Dickson for his "expression of kindly interest" in the project and his "desire to cooperate in this good work," but informed

28(...continued)
1963).

²⁹Letter, Louis K. Dickson to Elder J. K. Humphrey, August 13, 1929, in *Statement Regarding the Present Standing of Elder J. K. Humphrey*, ed. James Lamar McElhany (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, (1930), 6.

him that Utopia Park was “absolutely a problem for the colored people.”³⁰ Dickson found it difficult to understand and accept Humphrey’s response. His follow-up letter, dated August 26, 1929, called upon Humphrey to remember his obligations as a conference employee, which included counseling and conferring with conference leadership on ventures like Utopia Park. Characterizing Humphrey’s refusal to share details of his project “entirely unsatisfactory and disappointing,” Dickson dispatched the follow-up letter to the pastor, again requesting vital information.³¹

Yet Humphrey would not be forthcoming, forcing Dickson to place the matter on the agenda of the September 5, 1929, meeting of the Executive Committee of the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, of which Humphrey was a member. Given the opportunity to explain the project so that he could benefit from the “counsel of his associates in the ministry,” Humphrey made a few perfunctory remarks, leaving the Committee “as much in the dark as to the real status of the situation” as it had been before. Frustrated by Humphrey’s uncooperative, if not recalcitrant, attitude, Dickson felt constrained to refer the matter to the next level of the administrative structure of the organization, the Atlantic Union Conference, whose president, E. K. Slade, was present at the September 5 conclave of the Greater New York Conference Executive Committee. Dickson believed that Humphrey, also

³⁰J. K. Humphrey to Elder Louis K. Dickson, August 20, 1929, in James Lamar McElhany, ed., *Statement Regarding the Present Standing of Elder J. K. Humphrey* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, (1930), 7.

³¹Louis K. Dickson to Elder J. K. Humphrey, August 26, 1929, in James Lamar McElhany, ed., *Statement Regarding the Present Standing of Elder J. K. Humphrey* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, (1930), 7, 8.

a member of the Executive Committee of the Atlantic Union Conference, might be more forthcoming with details of Utopia Park before that body.³²

Events were occurring at a rapid pace. Acutely and painfully aware of the implications of delay, church leaders were wasting no time in tackling the issues surrounding Humphrey and Utopia Park, as challenging and thorny as they were. As such, Humphrey and Utopia Park were placed on the agenda of the October 27, 1929, meeting of the Executive Committee of the Atlantic Union Conference. Before that meeting was convened, however, a development occurred which had a profoundly negative impact on the situation. As it had done the previous two years, the Greater New York Conference sent a representative down to the Commissioner of Public Welfare that Fall to apply for a permit to solicit on the streets of New York City during the Christmas holidays. Asked by the Commissioner if he knew a “Rev. J. K. Humphrey,”³³ who was promoting a project up in Wappingers Falls, New York, and shown a stack of material advertising the project with Humphrey’s picture conspicuously displayed on it, the Greater New York Conference employee demurred, opting instead to let conference leadership handle what he thought was an extremely sensitive matter.

The very next day Louis Dickson met with the Commissioner, who laid before the surprised president twenty-seven pages of material produced as the result

³²Ibid., 8.

³³Seventh-day Adventist clergy do not use the title “Reverend,” but “Pastor.” The use of the latter term helps to distinguish Seventh-day Adventist clergy from “First day” ministers. Additionally, the contradistinction is replete with theological significance. For a Seventh-day Adventist clergy person to use the term “Reverend” is to show that he or she is disassociating himself or herself from the denomination.

of a hearing his department had conducted on the Utopia Park Health Benevolent Association. Dickson could tell that the Commissioner was nonplused by the fact that the denomination knew nothing about Humphrey's initiative. Embarrassed and feeling compromised before the public official, the president could think of no other recourse than to share the new development with the Executive Committee of the Atlantic Union Conference at its October 27 meeting.³⁴

Humphrey did not attend the October 27 meeting, during which "careful and sympathetic study" that took "all angles into consideration" was given to Humphrey and the Utopia Park project. The result was a unanimous vote recommending to the Greater New York Conference Executive Committee that Humphrey's ministerial credentials be revoked "until such time as he shall straighten out this situation in a way that will remove the reproach" that his actions occasioned. The Union Committee based its recommendation on the fact that Humphrey was engaged in a "sideline" contrary to the established polices of the Seventh-day Adventist church,³⁵ that he had consistently refused to appraise church leaders of his activities at their request, that he had absented himself from meetings where the matter was up for discussion and advisement, and that his enterprise exposed the organization to litigation of a "serious nature." For these and other reasons, the Union Committee

³⁴McElhany, *Statement Regarding the Present Standing of Elder J. K. Humphrey* 8, 9.

³⁵All Seventh-day Adventist clergy are subject to the same standards and guidelines regarding other work.

placed upon Utopia Park its “unqualified disapproval.”³⁶

Yet the Greater New York Conference gave Humphrey another chance to enter into dialogue. On October 31, its Executive Committee, with Humphrey in attendance, convened. Present also were two individuals (one of whom was Atlantic Union Conference president, E. K. Slade) whom the Union Committee had suggested meet with the Greater New York Conference. The purpose of the meeting was to “help Elder Humphrey to see his mistake and to let him know that . . . his brethren would do all . . . to help him if he would but turn from the course he has taken.” The strong pleas of the group failed to move Humphrey. The Committee then informed Humphrey that his credentials would be revoked. So that Humphrey fully understood what that meant, the Committee explained to him that he could no longer serve as the pastor of First Harlem or represent the denomination, and that he was no more a member of either the local conference or union executive committees.³⁷

November 2, 1929, was a historic day for James K. Humphrey and the members of the First Harlem Seventh-day Adventist church. That Sabbath, Humphrey preached his last sermon as pastor of that congregation. The title of his sermon, based on the first of the Ten Commandments recorded in Exodus 20, was “Thou Shalt Have No Other Gods.” For reasons that he never divulged, Humphrey cried throughout the sermon. It is unclear whether church leaders were present for the worship service at First Harlem that morning, but it is certain that they were in attendance at the business meeting of the church that convened that evening. Among

³⁶Ibid., 9.

³⁷Ibid., 10.

those present were the president and secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, W. A. Spicer and C. K. Meyers; the president of the Atlantic Union, E. K. Slade; and the president of the Greater New York Conference, Louis K. Dickson.

Alleging that the meeting had been requested by Humphrey, Greater New York Conference president Louis K. Dickson, reading from a prepared statement, stated that church leaders were there to “talk over”³⁸ with the congregation “as brethren” a matter of great importance to the church, the denomination, and the “cause of God.” He regretted the “much-to-be-deplored crisis” to which they had been brought by the actions and attitude of Humphrey, but went to great lengths to assure the church that church leaders had an abiding interest in their welfare and the future of Adventist efforts in the African American community in Harlem. Dickson characterized Humphrey as an individual of “large ability” whose work God had signally blessed with success. Yet Humphrey’s speculative dealing in a real estate “promotion and colonization enterprise” was proof positive of his “disregard for the well-established policies and regulations of the denomination.” Dickson then elaborated on the unity that he claimed was both a legacy and hallmark of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, saying that unity was “one of our most sacred legacies and our most potent weapon against the assaults of the enemy of all truth.”

³⁸To “talk over” a matter connotes an open dialogue. Yet less than five minutes into his presentation Dickson stated that Humphrey’s attitude and actions had caused the organization to take “decided action” which church leaders had come “to *announce* to you as a church” (italics mine). Later, toward the end of his presentation, he said that the meeting had been requested so that “we might inform you as a church of our decision.” Whether church leaders were there to announce or inform the church of their decision, it seems certain that they were not there to “talk over” the matter.

Moreover, the success and prosperity of the church were directly tied to the loyalty of its members to the organization, and the disregard of the fundamental principles of church organization was tantamount to offering hospitality to Satan.³⁹

Dickson then painstakingly delineated the evolution of events. He read in their entirety his letter of August 13 to Humphrey, in which he appealed for information about the venture, Humphrey's August 20 response, in which Humphrey claimed the project was "absolutely a problem for the colored people," and his follow-up letter to Humphrey, in which he expressed dissatisfaction with Humphrey's response. He informed the congregation that Humphrey's uncooperative attitude had left him with no other alternative than that of taking the matter to the Executive Committee of the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, which, with Humphrey present, had voted to accept the recommendation of the Executive Committee of the Atlantic Union Conference that Humphrey's ministerial credentials be revoked. Still, opportunity had been provided for Humphrey to acknowledge the error of his ways and to seek counsel from church officials. Not surprisingly, Humphrey had rebuffed all such overtures.⁴⁰

Dickson informed First Harlem that their pastor, contrary to his claims that the denomination had failed to demonstrate care and concern for African Americans in general and himself in particular, had spurned its offers to resolve some Black-White issues in a collaborative way. Specifically, Humphrey, who had been appointed to a special committee impaneled at the 1929 Spring Council of world church leaders

³⁹McElhany, *Statement Regarding the Present Standing of Elder J. K. Humphrey*, 5–6.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 6–10.

to study the feasibility of Black conferences, had failed to attend any of the meetings called by the group, on one occasion saying he was too sick to attend. Even though the church was already fractured, Dickson stressed the incongruity of members of an organization dividing and working independently of each other, and appealed again for Humphrey to reconsider his position. The conference president also appealed to church members to “take their stand as loyal supporters of order and organization in the church of Christ,” reminding them that their allegiance was “to God and to His church, and not to any individual.”⁴¹

The November 2, 1929, meeting lasted five stormy hours, during which the First Harlem congregation, standing in almost unanimous solidarity with its pastor,⁴² demanded the deed to its property.⁴³ Later, in a report he prepared for the regular biennial session of the conference held in January, 1930, Dickson characterized the actions of First Harlem on the night of November 2, 1929 as “open rebellion” in support of Humphrey, whom, the president claimed, had reportedly cast himself as a present day Moses intent on leading his people out of the slavery of disenfranchisement and White oppression into the promised land of liberation and empowerment. The president claimed that “the wild confusion and uproar” of that fateful evening testified to the “disrespect of the presence, counsel and advice of the

⁴¹Ibid., 11.

⁴²Ostensibly, the membership that night voted 695 to 5 to sever its relationship with the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and to support James K. Humphrey.

⁴³*The Black Dispatch* claimed that about 1,000 people were present at the meeting, that a riot would have erupted but for the quick intervention of Humphrey, and that denominational leaders were ushered out to safety only after agreeing to return the title of its property to First Harlem.

leaders of the denomination.”⁴⁴ On the night of November 2 he had claimed that the denomination did not want to argue the “merits or demerits of any real estate enterprise,” but to the delegates of the biennial session he said Utopia Park was a “speculative real estate scheme” and the “ill-conceived independent personal plan of Humphrey.”⁴⁵ Additionally, he openly speculated then that Humphrey had had ambitions of replacing W. A. Green as secretary of the Negro Department, and that when it had become clear that Humphrey would not, Humphrey began to poison the minds of his members toward the denomination.⁴⁶

News of First Harlem’s and Humphrey’s difficulties with the Seventh-day Adventist organization were not restricted to the Adventist community. New York City’s Black weekly, *The New York Amsterdam News*, in a front page story of the November 2 meeting that appeared in its November 6, 1929 issue, said that the church’s break with the organization was triggered by the racial discrimination Black Seventh-day Adventists faced in the denomination’s schools, hospitals, and missions, and that the governing bodies of the church were all composed of White men. The newspaper placed the number of people who attended the historic meeting at 900, claiming they all protested the attempted ousting of Humphrey, who had faithfully

⁴⁴McElhany, *Statement Regarding the Present Standing of Elder J. K. Humphrey*, 20.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 11, 13.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 12.

served the congregation for twenty seven years.⁴⁷ One week later, the newspaper again carried a front page story about the matter, saying that the irate members of First Harlem were calmed by Humphrey, whose intervention had returned the meeting of November 2 to order. Humphrey informed *The Amsterdam News* that the denomination was trying to discredit him by having the District Attorney of New York City and the Welfare Department investigate Utopia Park, that in the previous ten years his congregation had contributed over \$300,000 in tithes and offerings to the organization only to receive nothing in return, and that his congregation's request that the deed to its property be turned over to it had been made to bring an end to White domination.⁴⁸

The New York Age was more accusatory in its coverage of the story, asking in its front page issue of November 16, 1929, whether Humphrey was a second Marcus Garvey who was ambitious to accomplish something grand for his people, but who allowed ambition to get the better of sound business judgment. It wondered if Humphrey had been victimized by two White real estate developers, named John L. Le Berthen and George D. Spalding, who had introduced the idea of Utopia Park to him. Allegedly, Berthen and Spalding had taken Humphrey to Wappingers Falls, where they showed him 313 acres of land with a lake which they failed to tell Humphrey was part of the Wappingers Falls water system. Later, when residents saw

⁴⁷“Seventh-day Adventists Break with White Governing Body Over Minister: Harlem Church Severs Ties With Conference on Grounds that Parent Group Practices Racial Discrimination,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Wednesday, November 6, 1929, Vol. XX, No. 49, 1.

⁴⁸“Adventist Pastor Slams Broadides at Fraud Charges,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Wednesday, November 13, 1929, Vol. XX, No. 50, 1, 3.

busloads of Blacks whom Humphrey had started to take to the location on weekends swimming in the lake, they rose up in protest, causing the project to be jettisoned. The scheme was then relocated to New Jersey. The newspaper also claimed that Humphrey had deposited money for the project in a bank in his name.⁴⁹

The local press continued to cover Humphrey's break with the Seventh-day Adventist church, informing readers a couple of weeks later that the District Attorney of New York City had concluded that Humphrey had violated no state law in his promotion of Utopia Park. Even the solicitation of funds on the streets of New York City did not violate any city ordinance. The Commissioner of the Department of Welfare also issued an emphatic denial that the department had ever intended to or had prosecuted Humphrey, a statement the embattled pastor claimed was both exoneration and vindication for him.⁵⁰

Yet the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists was not finished with Humphrey and the First Harlem church. At a meeting of its executive committee held on January 14, 1930, two resolutions concerning First Harlem were adopted on the basis that the church had acted inconsistently with the teachings of the Adventist denomination, and had failed to live up to its obligations to the Conference. The first resolution called for First Harlem to be dropped from the sisterhood of churches of the Greater New York Conference, and the second called for an

⁴⁹“Rev. J. K. Humphrey loses 25-year Pastorate in 7th Day Adventist Church in New York,” *The New York Age*, Vol. 43, No. 10, Saturday, November 16, 1929, 1.

⁵⁰“Minister Cleared in Resort Project: Kelly Denies His Office Persecuted Sponsor of Venture,” *The New York Amsterdam News*, Wednesday, December 4, 1929, Vol. XXI, No. 1, 2.

arrangement to be made for the reorganization of the few members still loyal to the denomination into a new church. Another resolution was adopted inviting First Harlem to send delegates to the upcoming biennial session of the Conference for the purpose of presenting facts in its defense. First Harlem did not send any delegates to the Session, which voted unanimously to disfellowship the church.⁵¹

When the secretary of the Conference informed the delegates at the Twenty First Session of the Greater New York Conference that First Harlem had failed to field delegates to the Session, a group from the audience told him that there were indeed people from First Harlem present who desired to continue with the Adventist organization. The vice-president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, J. L. McElhany, present at the Session, moved that since there were people from First Harlem who “in heart and in spirit” wished to remain loyal to the Conference, that the president of the loyal conference, the de facto pastor of all the churches in the conference, meet with the group for the purpose of organizing them and bringing a recommendation to the entire body concerning their plans and intentions. Subsequently, three people from First Harlem were seated as delegates-at-large.⁵²

⁵¹McElhany, *Statement Regarding the Present Standing of Elder J. K. Humphrey*, 21–22.

⁵²Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Minutes of the Twenty-First Biennial Session of the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, January 27–29, 1930, Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Archives, Manhasset, New York. The group later became the nucleus of the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church. Interestingly, Louis Dickson made no mention of Humphrey to the delegates, vis-a-vis the changes in the working force of the Conference.

An Assessment

The expulsion of First Harlem from the Greater New York Conference and the revocation of the ministerial credentials of James K. Humphrey were unfortunate occurrences that were bemoaned by all who were involved in the events that led up to them. Certainly, Humphrey and his loyalists would have preferred to remain a part of the Seventh-day Adventist organization in spite of its pitfalls and shortcomings. The tears that seasoned his sermon on November 2, 1929, officially his last day as pastor of First Harlem, indicate that at the very least Humphrey was troubled with the way events were unfolding. Yet how much church leadership empathized with and understood the members of First Harlem and their pastor is an issue that calls for analysis.

There is no evidence that officials of the Greater New York Conference responded in any coherent, meaningful way to the five members from First Harlem who visited their offices in the Summer of 1929 to explain the reasons for the noticeable drop in the church's financial remittances to the Conference. Additionally, it appears that Humphrey's broad and deep support at the church, as starkly evident by the vote of November 2, had little, if any, impact on Conference leadership, leading one to conclude that Adventist leadership belittled the church's membership. The only time denominational leadership visited First Harlem was on the evening of November 2 to inform church members that their beloved pastor of over twenty years had been defrocked for promoting a project that, as far as church members were concerned, would benefit them. It is not certain that denominational leaders were at First Harlem for the worship service of November 2, though it appears that they were

not. One wonders how events would have played out that night had the members of First Harlem seen church leaders worshiping in their midst that day. Possibly, had the two groups interacted in the context of worship, their encounter that evening may have been stripped of the suspicion, anger, and hurt that characterized the historic event.

Given the assemblage of personnel from the General Conference, the Atlantic Union, and the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the absence of George E. Peters, the newly appointed secretary of the Negro Department of the General Conference, from the meetings that considered and deliberated on Humphrey and Utopia Park is noteworthy. It is unknown whether Peters' counsel or recommendations were sought, or whether he was even aware of the controversy swirling around in New York City. Still, given the size and strategic position and significance of the First Harlem church, and the official purpose for the existence of the Negro Department, the absence of Peters at these meetings, especially the historic meeting of November 2, is inexplicable. As the highest ranking Black in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, Peters' presence almost certainly would have had a powerful impact on the proceedings, if not the outcome.

Yet the absence of Peters may have been part of the strategic plan of church leaders. When First Harlem was reorganized as the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist church, George E. Peters was assigned as its first pastor. A gifted speaker with a commanding presence and impressive bearing, Peters, a West Indian from Antigua, spoke with an accent familiar to Harlemites. Undoubtedly, his assignment was a strategic move by church leaders to appeal to the large West Indian constituency among Seventh-day Adventists in New York City. Additionally, Peters' assignment

was meant to convey the message that church leaders considered the removal of Humphrey from First Harlem so important a matter that it was willing to reassign its highest ranking Black employee to assume the responsibilities of pastoral leadership in the area.

Church leaders informed the members of First Harlem on November 2 that they were there at the invitation of the church to “talk over with you as brethren” a matter of great importance. Yet they quickly revealed the reason for their being at First Harlem that night. Humphrey’s recalcitrant attitude toward “supremely important and vital principles” of church organization and leadership had driven them to take “decided action” which they were there “to announce” to the church. Thus, church leadership was not at First Harlem on November 2 to dialogue or listen, but to announce a decision that had been made without the input of church members.⁵³

One reason the Utopia Park affair ultimately resulted in the revocation of Humphrey’s ministerial credentials and the expulsion of First Harlem from the Adventist organization was the Anglo leadership’s woeful ignorance of the fundamentally significant role African American religious leaders play in the Black community.⁵⁴ It is far from surprising that on the night of November 2 Humphrey won near unanimous endorsement for his course of action and attitude. The support he received from his parishioners was not due to a gullible childlikeness that could easily be exploited by shrewd manipulators masquerading as religious leaders, but to

⁵³McElhany, *Statement Regarding the Present of Pastor J. K. Humphrey*, 5–6.

⁵⁴Maurice Roy Jordine, *Reflections on J. K. Humphrey and the First Harlem Church*, Unpublished Term Paper, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Mich., Spring, 1978, 12.

the profound love and admiration Black congregants have for their pastors.⁵⁵

Adventist leaders also misread the social and political dynamics at play in the African American community during the 1920s. The era was fraught with vestiges of Pan-Africanism and Ethiopianism, two elements of Black nationalism that had dominated African American life from 1850 to 1925.⁵⁶ With Harlem receiving thousands of the Blacks from the South and the West Indies who were flooding the urban communities of the North during that time, the area was ripe for Humphrey's emphasis on Black uplift as a weapon to ward off the discrimination and marginalization Blacks encountered when they arrived in the "Land of Promise." A few years earlier, Humphrey's fellow Jamaican expatriate, Marcus Garvey, had succeeded in generating the first mass Black movement in the United States of America with a similar call for Black economic and political empowerment.

It is reasonable to conclude that Humphrey's drive for self-determination for Blacks was not based on a Messiah complex or Moses syndrome, but anchored in the broader African American community's quest for increased autonomy and power during the 1920s. While it is uncertain whether Humphrey ever personally met Garvey, it is sure that he exhibited many of Garvey's Black nationalist tendencies. Like Garvey, Humphrey wanted people of color to rise up and fulfill their true destinies, and to throw off the yoke of oppression that slowed their drive to self-

⁵⁵For an enlightening account of the historic role of African Americans clergy persons in the Black community, see Charles V. Hamilton, *The Black Preacher in America* (New York: William Morrow and Co. Inc., 1972).

⁵⁶Trenchant treatment of the subject may be found in Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

determination. Moreover, Humphrey envisioned his church's struggle with the Greater New York Conference as part of a larger crusade, namely the Black struggle against White oppression.⁵⁷ So sure of this was Humphrey that in the promotional material for his Utopia Park project he quoted from another Jamaican expatriate—Harlem Renaissance figure, Claude McKay:

So I would life in rich imperial growth,
Touching the surface and the depth of things,
Instinctively responsive unto both,
Tasting the sweets of being and the stings,
Sensing the subtle spell of changing forms
Like a strong tree against a thousand storms.⁵⁸

In spite of the fact that Adventist leadership misread crucial phenomena permeating the African American community during the 1920s, and may have displayed an insensitivity toward First Harlem's perspectives on its pastor and his activities, church leaders did try to resolve their differences with Humphrey in a collaborative fashion. To be sure, meetings were convened in quick succession, calling into question the critical matter of due process. Yet the conflict management measures church leaders utilized indicate attempts on their part to enter into dialogue with Humphrey.

Did friction or rivalry between James K. Humphrey and Louis K. Dickson, president of the Greater New York Conference, contribute to the controversy? Dickson was Humphrey's junior in many respects, including length of service in the Greater New York Conference. Humphrey had almost twenty years of service to his credit when Dickson joined the Conference in 1923, and when Dickson was elected

⁵⁷Mesar and Dybdahl, 22–35.

⁵⁸Claude McKay, "Like a Strong Tree," in "?, " 22.

president of the Conference in 1927, Dickson had been an ordained Seventh-day Adventist minister for only ten years. That Dickson shot past him to the presidency in such a short time may have troubled Humphrey, who was always acutely and painfully aware of the dearth of leadership opportunities available to people of color in the organization. Yet there is no hard evidence that a rivalry between Dickson and Humphrey contributed in substantive ways to the dramatic events of 1929 and 1930.

Humphrey did have his rivals and detractors, among whom was J. L. Moran, the principal of Harlem Academy in the late 1920s. Moran, who was appointed president of Oakwood College in 1932 after a student-led strike protesting discriminatory practices and conditions at the all-Black school, did not appreciate that Humphrey wielded so much influence and power among African Americans. Humphrey's popularity disturbed him immensely. Whether out of envy or because he favored organization over people, Moran regularly kept the General Conference apprised of Humphrey's activities. The principal, an indigenous African American, banned the reading of Humphrey's periodical by his students. Whenever he could, he seized copies of the paper and forwarded them to the General Conference.⁵⁹

To what extent did Humphrey fail to provide his congregation with information and counsel that would have prevented it from being voted out of the organizational structure in January, 1930? Did Humphrey put self before people? Did he allow resentment and anger to fester within him until they fomented a rebellion? How did Humphrey get to the point in 1929 where he could consciously facilitate and promulgate a break with the established church when less than a year earlier he had

⁵⁹Makapela, 248, 261.

declared in a sermon that nothing could drive a wedge between him and the Adventist church? Was Humphrey a person who played to the masses? Did he lack moral underpinnings on which to base his decisions and actions?

The answers to these and other attendant questions are not easily forthcoming. Yet, one thing is certain, and that is that Humphrey was not without fault in the controversy that led to the revocation of his ministerial credentials and the expulsion of First Harlem. While it may be impossible to do a scientific psychological profile on Humphrey now, a reasonable inference may be made that the pastor was under much stress throughout his tenure as a minister in the Seventh-day Adventist church. Humphrey comes across as a complex individual struggling to reconcile his resonance with the denomination's biblical and theological positions with its beliefs about and treatment of people of color.

Humphrey's culpability in the controversy included his refusal to attend some of the meetings called by the organization to deliberate on the matter, his disregard for clearly outlined denominational policies and procedures, and his refusal to communicate substantively with denominational leadership when requested to do so. These acts left him open to charges of recalcitrance and the exploitation of his power and influence.

Official Seventh-day Adventist Explanation

Shortly after the revocation of Humphrey's ministerial credentials and the expulsion of First Harlem from the sisterhood of churches of the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, the denomination published a lengthy and

detailed account of the activities that led up to the unfortunate events.⁶⁰

Undoubtedly, the publication of the document shows the gravity of the actions taken by the denomination, and their implications and ramifications both within and without the organization. Humphrey wielded an influence that extended well beyond the precincts of his local parish. His ministerial career within the denomination up to the events of 1929 had been unblemished and illustrious, and his prominence precluded anyone from dismissing his ideas as irrelevant. In an ironic twist, the president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in 1945, and the person who was most instrumental in swinging denominational support behind the idea of regional conferences, was James L. McElhany, the author of the organization's official explanation.⁶¹

One of the themes McElhany painstakingly emphasized in his *Statement* was the notion of unity, the maintenance of which church leaders considered a matter of supreme importance. Again and again, church unity is mentioned as a critical need of the church, with loyalty to the denomination its identical twin. No comment is made by McElhany of Humphrey's allegations of racism and discrimination within the church.

Yet the denomination did not treat Humphrey's charges of racism and discrimination with benign neglect. In an attempt to rebut them, A. R. Ogden, president of the Antillian Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, published an

⁶⁰McElhany, *Statement Regarding the Present Standing of Elder J. K. Humphrey*.

⁶¹McElhany was vice president of the General Conference when he authored the explanation of events.

article in the *Jamaica Visitor*,⁶² at the time the denominational newsletter on the island, where, quite understandably, Humphrey had quite a following. Ogden professed that Seventh-day Adventists had manifestly showed its commitment to and love of all people by sending forth missionaries with the gospel to a languishing humanity. He claimed that the General Conference had allocated over \$300,000 in aid to Africa in one year, and another \$240,000 to the Inter-America region. “Outside of the small fees of the students,” West Indies Training College, located in Mandeville, Jamaica, was being fully subsidized by the General Conference. Ogden asserted that “everyone who breaks rank today will soon see their mistake, and with sadness and shame because of their mistake, either seek re-admission to the remnant body, or give up in despair.” For these and other reasons, Ogden appealed to Jamaicans not to fall prey to Humphrey charges and characterizations.⁶³

African Americans did not roll over and readily accept the official analysis and interpretation of the Utopia Park affair put out by the church. In a combative rebuttal to the *Statement Regarding the Present Standing of Elder J. K. Humphrey*, they laid the blame for what had happened squarely in the lap of the church, which they claimed believed that Black people were incapable of leadership. Saying it was high time for the Black ministers of the denomination to “stand up like men with backbone and fight for their people,” they dismissed the church’s penchant for crying apostasy to such acts as nothing more than attempts to intimidate Blacks into complacency and acceptance of their second-class position in the church. They asserted that they were

⁶²Ogden’s article was reprinted in its entirety in McElhany, *Statement Regarding the Present Standing of Elder J. K. Humphrey*, 22–25.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 24.

dealt with only because of their ability to contribute to the coffers of the church, not because their White counterparts viewed or accepted them as true equals.⁶⁴

The Black membership bewailed their treatment at the hands of Whites. They claimed that many of their congregations lacked buildings of their own, paying exorbitant rents for the use of halls and other facilities that often barely met minimum building code standards. Moreover, some of these congregations lacked pastoral leadership, utilizing the services of lay personnel to keep their churches operating. Of particular distress to them was the contempt with which a small congregation called “Sharon” had been treated.⁶⁵ Having no ordained pastor, the group had petitioned that its elder, who was also a lay leader, be compensated for his services out of tithe funds.⁶⁶ The Conference had responded quickly, condemning the idea that the elder could be paid out of tithe funds, and, professedly, indicating that should the congregation do so, it would be summarily dissolved.⁶⁷

The authors of the rebuttal viewed the comments about Humphrey that had been made by the president of the Greater New York Conference as an attempt to discredit the veteran pastor. They dismissed the charge that Humphrey was to be blamed for the decrease in the financial remittances to the Conference, explaining that

⁶⁴“?” 3–4.

⁶⁵ Allegedly, the small, fledgling group had remitted \$12,000 over a five year period to the Conference, with nothing to show for it. *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁶ Seventh-day Adventists believe that the tithe, which is ten percent of income, is holy, belongs to God, and is to be used solely for the support of the gospel ministry, that is, for the remuneration of clergy persons.

⁶⁷“?” 8.

the drop was due to a heightened awareness on the part of Blacks to their treatment in the church, and to their decision to no longer support institutions that systematically discriminated against them. To the extent that Humphrey had taught them not to turn the proverbial other cheek any longer, but to resist and to fight for their rights, he had done no wrong, and when he had refused to attend the meetings of the Negro Commission to study the feasibility of the denomination establishing regional conferences, it was because of the tactics of church leadership. Finally, the dismissal of Humphrey provided telling evidence of an unacceptable fact—the absence of any discernible and measurable benefits for their financial contributions to the organization.⁶⁸

Summary

The revocation of Humphrey's ministerial credentials and the expulsion of First Harlem from the Greater New York Conference did not slow or quiet Humphrey's call for more autonomy for Blacks within the Adventist church. Indeed, Humphrey's experience galvanized Seventh-day Adventist African Americans, providing them with a tangible issue around which they were able to focus their energies in their struggle for greater self-determination in the organization.⁶⁹ One year after Humphrey's expulsion, students at all-Black Oakwood College rose up in protest against policies and practices at the institution. A campus-wide student strike brought the educational institution to a standstill, and resulted in the installation of

⁶⁸Ibid., 8.

⁶⁹Mesa and Dybdahl, 53.

the college's first Black president—F. L. Moran. One of the student leaders of the strike, W. W. Fordham, was well aware of the events that had taken place in New York City the year before, and believed that Humphrey's break with the denomination was the spark that ignited and fueled calls for regional conferences.⁷⁰

The momentum gained, regional conferences were finally established fifteen years later after a couple of tragic incidents that underscored that the Seventh-day Adventist church was still mired in a quagmire of confusion and ambiguity over the race issue.⁷¹ Adopted first as a pragmatic way of dealing with what appeared as an interminably nettlesome issue, separate Black and White conferences in the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists are today a matter of policy.⁷² All-Black and all-White Adventist congregations are a hallmark of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, though few contemporary Adventists know little about the history of the development of the phenomenon.⁷³

⁷⁰Fordham, *Righteous Rebel*, 158.

⁷¹In one of the incidents, Lucy Baird, a Seventh-day Adventist light skinned Black woman, was turned away from the denomination's hospital in Washington, D.C. because of her skin color. Taken across town to a Black hospital, Baird died on the way there.

⁷²*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1190–1196.

⁷³Not all people of African descent in North America worship in congregations exclusively geared to meet their unique needs. For any number of reasons, some hold membership in White congregations. Additionally, today not all Black churches in North America belong to regional conferences. Again, for any number of reasons, some Black congregations opt not to be a part of the regional conference covering their territory, but to the local state conference. The situation on the West Coast is even more distinctive. There regional conferences do not even exist. When the phenomenon was implemented in 1945, Black churches on the West Coast voted not to adopt the regional conference format, and several subsequent
(continued...)

Utopia Park provides eloquent evidence of the tenuousness of race relations in the Seventh-day Adventist church, and the fact that the race issue was not confined to the South. Previously, the denomination had focused its mission to Black America in the South, naively believing that the North was immune to the kinds of challenges it faced in attempting to reach African Americans with the gospel. Even the departure of the People's Temple of Washington, D. C., had failed to alter denominational thinking on the issue. It took Utopia Park to do so. No longer could the Seventh-day Adventist church deny that African Americans faced no difficulties in their drive for self-determination either in the Northern United States, or for that matter within the Adventist church.

**73(...continued)
attempts at forming regional conferences on the West Coast have failed.**

CHAPTER VI

THE CHURCH HISTORY OF THE SABBATH-DAY ADVENTISTS

If the 1920s was a period of vigor and optimism in Harlem, New York, the 1930s was a decade of uncertainty and tension. With the Stock Market crash of 1929, not only Harlem but the entire United States was shoved into an economic crisis that tested the American people. On that fateful October day in 1929 the “Roaring Twenties” gave way to “Hard Times.” Truly, the 1930s were turbulent years for America, with the Great Depression at home contributing to the economic and political instability around the world.¹ It was in this crucible of economic and political uncertainty that the Sabbath-Day Adventist organization was born. Coincidentally, the historic meeting between Seventh-day Adventist world church leaders and the members of First Harlem that led to their parting took place at the end of the week of the Stock Market crash.

In this chapter, I explore the history of the Sabbath-Day Adventists, seeking to ascertain whether the organization’s early history markedly differs from its recent history. I examine Sabbath-Day Adventist doctrine and church polity, comparing

¹Some useful studies of the time period are Michael Parrish, *Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression in America, 1929–1941* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984); T. H. Watkins, *The Great Depression: America in the 1930s* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1993); Richard Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); and John B. Kirby, *Black Americans in the Roosevelt Era: Liberalism and Race* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980).

them to Seventh-day Adventist doctrine and polity. A critical issue I investigate is how the Sabbath-Day Adventist denomination reflected the crucial political and social events of the twentieth century. For example, how did it respond to World War II, the Korean War, the Viet Nam War, and the Civil Rights struggle? What kind of approach did Sabbath-Day Adventists have to twentieth century social problems like AIDS? Humphrey's writings and sermons are examined for clues to his theology. Yet, with a view to learning how Sabbath-Day Adventists related to Humphrey, how he is remembered today, and what functions were served by membership in the organization, the chapter begins with an oral history retrospective of James Kemuel Humphrey.²

An Oral History Retrospective of James K. Humphrey

What was Humphrey like as a pastor and leader? Was he autocratic or democratic, and how was his preaching affected by the split with the Seventh-day Adventists? What were the worship services and ministries of the Sabbath-Day Adventists like under him? How did members feel about him and about being a part of the religious organization he founded? Were their emotional responses primarily centered around Black pride? And what functions were served by their being Sabbath-Day Adventists?

Shortly after his break with the organized Seventh-day Adventist church and

²In utilizing oral history as a methodology, I am indebted to the following: Eva M. McMahon, ed., *Interactive Oral History Listening*, (Hillsdale, N. J.: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1994); Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998); and Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970).

the launching of his independent organization, James K. Humphrey assumed the title of Bishop.³ Why did Humphrey opt for this designation? According to Ucilla La Condre, whose maiden name was Shillingord, Humphrey assumed the title because he felt he had labored long enough and had started enough congregations to be elevated to the position. La Condre, who was born in New York City and raised in Harlem by a father from Dominica and a mother from the South, was married in 1943 by the bishop, who blessed both her children. A current Bronx, New York, resident who subsequently returned to the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist church during the 1960s, she says that since nobody would lift him up, Humphrey did so himself, his action receiving ratification from his congregation. In her view, Humphrey's appropriation and usage of the title had less to do with biblical or theological assumptions than with issues of power and utility.⁴

Irene Jarvis remembers that when Humphrey assumed the title of Bishop, the youth of the church began calling him "The Great I Am." Unsure of whether they did so because they thought Humphrey believed he was Moses or God himself,⁵ the youth did think that he was succumbing to a type of megalomania. This theory of the youth was not based on the number of people who swelled the small sanctuary to

³ A bishop is "a rank in the ordained Christian ministry. The bishop oversees the affairs of the church in a particular area, and only bishops can ordain others to the ministry." Albert J. Raboteau, *African-American Religion* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 133.

⁴ Ucilla La Condre, interview by author, tape recording, Bronx, New York, June 11, 2000.

⁵ According to the Old Testament, God told Moses that when Pharaoh asked who had sent him to demand the release of the Children of Israel, Moses was to inform the Egyptian leader that "I Am" had sent him. See Exodus 3:14.

hear Humphrey preach, or because he lived in palatial quarters or tooled around Harlem in expensive cars, but on his bearing. Like most of the other youth, Irene, the last of six children whose mother had been a member of First Harlem SDA Church from 1918, was struck by Humphrey's "dignified bearing." Born in 1924, the current Brooklyn resident was baptized by Humphrey in 1939, and is a member of the United New York congregation to this day.⁶

In establishing the United Sabbath-Day Adventist organization and in assuming the title of "Bishop" Humphrey followed in the tradition of a long line of Black religious leaders who challenged the status quo.⁷ Almost without exception, Black religious leaders who founded their own organizations assumed the title of "Bishop." Not all these groups were unambiguously religious. Some, like Garvey's UNIA, were quasi or para-religious. Neither did all these leaders conceive of themselves as messiahs or Moses-type deliverers of their people. Finally, not all of them called upon their followers to reject the White Christ for a Black one, as did George Alexander McGuire, the former Episcopalian priest from Antigua who worked for Garvey's UNIA before establishing the African Orthodox Church.⁸

Humphrey was not perceived as one who utilized an autocratic or dictatorial

⁶Irene Jarvis, interview by author, tape recording, Brooklyn, New York, August 15, 2000.

⁷An insightful and valuable contribution on some of these individuals, including some who are not as well known, is Randall K. Burkett and Richard Newman's *Black Apostles: Afro-American Clergy Confront the Twentieth Century* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1978).

⁸Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer, *African-American Religion in the Twentieth Century: Varieties of Protest and Accommodation* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 124, 125.

style of leadership. Shunning heavy-handed rule, he was a democratic leader who encouraged discussion, moderated debate, drew ideas from members, and respected differences. When a group of members left to form a splinter group, Humphrey was unhappy and disappointed, but not bitter. Yet the bishop was not loathe to maximize his power on occasions, often informing members that a course of action or a policy he sought to implement had been revealed to him directly by the Holy Spirit. Such a revelation almost always quelled discussion and eliminated opposing viewpoints. Still, in claiming divine revelation and inspiration, Humphrey was operating less in the tradition of cult leaders than reaffirming his divine call and commission.

While he did not rule with an iron hand, Humphrey did manage his church closely. The bishop authored all the materials used for study in the Sabbath School, and beginning in 1934 served as editor of *The United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*. A gifted musician, he was a key player in both church choirs, as well as director of New York United's orchestra. Bernice Samuel (nee Simmons) says that New York United was known for its outstanding music, boasting a senior and youth choir that both performed to rave reviews. Additionally, the choirs recruited and drew people to the young congregation. Samuel states that Humphrey, who married her sister in 1939, was often present for rehearsals and occasionally directed the senior choir. Samuel, who was born in New York City in 1920 to an Antiguan mother and a Barbadian father, was a member of New York United until 1963, leaving over disparaging remarks that William Samuels, the pastor then, made about the youth. Currently living in the St. Albans section of the borough of Queens, she is

a member of the Linden Seventh-day Adventist Church in Laurelton, New York.⁹

Yet what amply demonstrates Humphrey's management style was the role he played in the church's treasury department. Ucilla La Condre states that Humphrey taught the staff how to "keep the books," even showing them how to wrap coins.¹⁰ That Humphrey was a demanding manager and workaholic who seldom took vacations is a reasonable inference. Most of his traveling was to visit branches or to establish congregations. Return trips to his native Jamaica were rare, and it was during one of those rare trips to the land of his birth that an opposing faction broke away, taking "the cream of the crop" along.

Unlike the majority of African American pastors in Harlem at the time, Humphrey never donned a pastoral or preaching robe when he mounted the pulpit. He preferred to preach in a plain black suit, believing that robes, even black-on-black ones, called attention away from the message to the messenger. Yet in opting for the plain suit Humphrey may have been exposing West Indian cultural tendencies. More importantly, he may have been showing vestiges of Seventh-day Adventist culture.¹¹ Olga La Beet, a member of New York United until her death in March, 2001, remembered that as a public speaker Humphrey seemed a combination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Reverend Jesse Jackson. A former teacher, guidance counselor and high school principal, La Beet said that Humphrey exhibited the

⁹Bernice Samuel, interview by author, tape recording, St. Albans, New York, April 17, 2000.

¹⁰La Condre, interview.

¹¹Because of their more conservative orientation, initially West Indian pastors in the United States seldom preached in robes. Today, more of them do.

cadence and rhythm of Jesse Jackson and the deep thought and insights of Dr. King, adding that members were unable to detect an accent in him by the 1930s. She concluded that that may have accounted for Humphrey's broad appeal in the African American community.¹²

Humphrey was an ardent student of the Holy Bible, which he carried aloft, and particularly enjoyed studying and preaching its prophecies. Both as a credentialed Seventh-day Adventist and as an independent minister, he used the Sunday evening service to pound home Bible prophecy, especially those found in Daniel and Revelation. The Sunday night service was evangelistic in nature, and, almost always, drew a standing-room-only crowd. Both Ucilla La Condre and Dorothy Simmonds remember Humphrey encouraging members at New York United to stay home on Sunday nights so visitors could get a seat. They say that to make the prophecies as clear as possible, Humphrey used charts, graphs, and other visual aids, and a rule to point out items and to maintain the interest and attention of his ever eager listeners. They remember him as erudite and scholarly, adding that Humphrey relished the role of teacher more than that of preacher, and that he had the gift of making the complex

¹²Olga La Beet, interview by author, tape recording, New York, New York, June 12, 2000. The New York United Sabbath-Day Adventist Church was made up mostly of West Indians, and many of its indigenous African American members had West Indian roots. The two cultural groups got along reasonably well, although incidents did occur that revealed an underlying tension. For example, Irene Jarvis says that once a West Indian member uttered some disparaging remarks about indigenous African Americans, claiming that West Indian parents were better at raising children. The statement created much confusion at the church, almost splitting it. Jarvis, interview.

and difficult simple and understandable.¹³

Dorothy Simmonds has an association with James K. Humphrey that predates the founding of the United Sabbath-Day Adventists. Born at Harlem Hospital on December 19, 1914, she was taken at six months of age to Barbados by her parents, returning to the United States in 1926. The family became members of First Harlem, and young Dorothy remembers sitting in the balcony as a teenager and hearing Humphrey calling for volunteers to help out at Second Harlem. Her recollection of the stormy meeting of November 2, 1929, is faint, though she states that the Seventh-day Adventist church leaders present that night were run out by members loyal to Humphrey. Baptized as a United Sabbath-Day Adventist by Humphrey in 1933, she was married in 1942 by the bishop, who also blessed her children. A year earlier he had eulogized her mother. Still a loyal member of New York United, Dorothy, whose husband was secretary of the church until his death, is fierce though objective in her defense of Humphrey, saying that the bishop was a great minister but not a good business person. She claims that Utopia Park failed and caused the bishop to lose money because he lacked business acumen, not because he was not well meaning.¹⁴

Two other individuals, Ernie Chandler and Mirian Flatts, remember Humphrey as an outstanding evangelist. Flatts, who was born in 1894 on the island of Barbados and had been baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist church there, arrived in New York City in 1922. She became a member of First Harlem, serving the congregation as a kindergarten Sabbath School teacher. Flatts says Humphrey was a

¹³Dorothy Simmonds, interview by author, tape recording, Mt. Vernon, New York, June 11, 2000; La Condre, interview.

¹⁴Simmonds, interview.

good leader, “a vibrant evangelist,” and “a fiery preacher.”¹⁵

What Ermie Chandler remembers most about Humphrey was his ability to answer any question posed to him. Expressing her admiration, Chandler, who was baptized by Humphrey in the Hudson River, adds that Humphrey once offered a \$1,000 check to anyone able to disprove that Saturday was the Bible Sabbath. On another occasion, the bishop was stumped by a question. He paused, bowed his head in prayer, and opened the Bible exactly at the spot where the answer to the question was. Chandler says that really impressed her and convinced her that Humphrey was anointed by God. Born in 1907 in Barbados, Chandler was married in 1925 by Humphrey, who also blessed her children. Currently residing in Manhattan, Chandler and her family returned to the Ephesus SDA Church in 1939 because they wanted to be a part of the larger, established organization. Today she says that Humphrey did not have enough patience “to wait on the Lord.”¹⁶

Throughout the 1930s James K. Humphrey maintained the evangelistic flavor of his preaching, believing that preaching that was not evangelistic was inherently unbiblical. Almost always, he ended his sermons by lifting up Jesus and with an appeal for those who had not yet accepted Christ as their personal Savior to do so. Passionate and persuasive, these appeals struck a responsive chord in not a few of his listeners. The result was that regular baptisms were conducted in Pelham Bay and the Harlem River, as well as in the baptistry at the church. Jarvis and Simmonds recall that before being baptized, people interested in joining the church were required to

¹⁵Miriam Flatts, interview with the author, tape recording, Huntington, New York, June 10, 2000.

¹⁶Ermie Chandler, telephone conversation with the author, March 26, 2001.

spend at least six months in a baptismal class, where they received thorough instruction in the fundamental tenets of Christianity. Only after individuals showed convincing proof that they understood the teachings of the church were they baptized. Sabbath-Day Adventist baptismal services were not the spectacularly staged events that drew a horde of curiosity seekers like the baptismal services of some of the other religious groups of the era. On the contrary, they were low-key events that powerfully impacted the lives of the faithful.¹⁷

Humphrey did not restrict his teaching and preaching to the prophecies and doctrines found in the Bible. Asserting that the bishop was knowledgeable almost to a fault, La Beet says that he went on a search for the Black presence in the Bible, and that the quest resulted in him preaching frequently on the subject. She opines that the bishop saw as a critical aspect of his ministry the raising of the consciousness level of his congregants with respect to their history both within and without the Christian church. Race consciousness was a readily identifiable element in his persona and world view, though he was not consumed by it. Dubbed “The Man of the Hour,” Humphrey particularly liked to zero in on current events, especially those taking place in Harlem. He believed that his finger was on the pulse of world events, and, consequently, he was in a position to alert his hearers to what they could expect to see transpire in their lifetime.¹⁸

According to La Condre, Humphrey was a community-minded leader who

¹⁷Simmonds, interview; Jarvis, interview.

¹⁸One member alleges that Humphrey’s vast knowledge and depth was the main reason she later earned an A in one of her Literature courses in college. Olga La Beet, interview with the author, tape recording, New York City, June 12, 2000.

believed in tearing down the walls of separation between religious groups and building bridges to other groups and people instead. Humphrey kept abreast of issues and developments within the World Council of Churches. In this regard, the bishop demonstrated a marked contrast to Seventh-day Adventists, who, at least up to the time, distanced themselves from the World Council of Churches, holding that involvement in the organization smacked of ecumenism. Humphrey reached across denominational lines to collaborate with other Black religious leaders on initiatives to improve the conditions of Black people and was not averse to inviting Black pastors of other religious persuasions to preach at his church or to lecture on social and political issues. Like other African American pastors, Humphrey wanted his group to be a seven-day-a-week provider of ministries and programs that benefitted the community spiritually, economically, politically, and socially. He encouraged members to vote, and admonished his youth to stay in school and to pursue careers in medicine, law, and other professions historically off limits to Blacks.¹⁹

Irene Jarvis states that each week Humphrey visited the Children's Division of the Sabbath School, where he reveled in listening to the children recite Bible verses. Often, he would assign Bible verses to the children, returning the following week to hear them recite the verses. He affirmed the children, and they in turn loved him. Humphrey would gather the youth in the front of the sanctuary, where he spoke to them about issues with which they were wrestling. He counseled them about courtship and dating, encouraging them to marry within the church family, and of the

¹⁹La Condre, interview. One 1930s religious leader whom Humphrey shunned was Father Divine, the Harlem cult leader who wielded a powerful influence on thousands of Blacks at the time. La Condre, interview.

importance of personal grooming, the value of an education, and the need to set goals in life. The bishop frowned upon mediocrity, dismissing it as a curse to the Black race. More than anything, he wanted his youth to know that their potential was limitless, and that in their hands were the keys to success.²⁰

United Sabbath-Day Adventists in general and Humphrey in particular gave more than lip service to their youth, providing them with opportunities to participate in all the services of the church and to function in various officer personnel capacities. These opportunities went beyond those in youth groups, such as the youth choir and the weekly youth meeting. La Condre says that at New York United, youth served as ushers, as choristers for the Sunday night evangelistic meeting, and as counters in the treasury department. The message Humphrey and his leadership team wanted to convey was that their church did not view youth as irrelevant members to be banished to the fringes of the church, but as leaders in training.²¹

On Saturday nights the youth of New York United went roller skating and bowling, and to the beach and Coney Island on some Sunday afternoons and holidays. Humphrey often packed his car with young people for the trip to Jones Beach on Long Island. One such youth was Aileen Hunter (nee Samuels), whose father succeeded Humphrey as Bishop of the United Sabbath-Day Adventists, and who was a close friend of Ruth Humphrey, the bishop's only daughter and child. Fondly does Hunter remember being taken as a child to the beach by the pastor and of being knocked down by a wave. Hunter, whose parents were from Antigua, was

²⁰Irene Jarvis, interview.

²¹La Condre, interview.

born in New York City in 1924, baptized by Humphrey in 1936, and married by him in 1946, the year before her father assumed leadership of the organization. She is a retired high school assistant principal who also did tutoring at Mercy College in Dobbs Ferry, New York. Now living in Nanuet, New York, she commutes to New York United faithfully every Sabbath.²²

Bernice Samuels opines that boat rides up the Hudson offered a respite from the pell-mell pace of life in Harlem. So too did the lyceums and other cultural programs which were conducted for the youth on some Sunday afternoons, and the occasional trip to Carnegie Hall for a special presentation. According to her, these social and cultural activities engendered a sense of belonging among not just the youth but all church members, and caused several youth to marry within the church family.²³

In spite of the premium early Sabbath-Day Adventists placed on mentoring youth, few things about the current membership of the New York congregation stands out as starkly as the absence of youth. Currently, New York United is composed of approximately sixty members, almost all of whom are adults. Indeed, members who date their association with the congregation from the Humphrey era constitute an appreciable percentage of the current membership, making New York United a veritable coterie of senior citizens. Feisty and resilient, the group cherishes the church's history and guards Humphrey's legacy with uncommon loyalty.

Agatha Phillips, who was ordained as a female elder on January 6, 2001,

²²Aileen Hunter, telephone conversation with the author, March 4, 2001.

²³Samuels, interview.

states that notwithstanding his sensitivity to social and community issues, Humphrey nonetheless counseled his members that above all else they should stand in the Christian faith and never forget their Lord Jesus Christ and what he had done for them.²⁴ This stance of Humphrey's shows he was not a radical doctrinally. In many ways Humphrey was a conservative in doctrine and church polity. For example, Humphrey denounced life insurance as an evil to be shunned by his members. He exhorted members not to spend their hard-earned dollars to procure a commodity that only fattened the coffers and pockets of grafters and extortioners, and he believed that life insurance betrayed a lack of faith in God and a preoccupation with life on earth, both of which were at variance with the principles of God's everlasting kingdom. Bernice Samuels remembers that when two members who did not have life insurance died, the New York United Sabbath-Day Adventist congregation was thrown into a disarray that resulted in a split between those who embraced life insurance as a necessary and intelligent way of planning for the inevitable contingencies of life, and those who resolutely maintained that it was an evil.²⁵

For La Condre, La Beet, Jarvis, Samuel, Hunter, Simmonds and others, New York United was, as La Condre aptly puts it, "a place of refuge."²⁶ More a family than even a community of faith, members shared what they had with each other, and knew that temporal as well as spiritual help could be procured at the church.

²⁴Agatha Phillips, interview by author, New York, New York, January 6, 2001.

²⁵Samuels, interview. Samuels belonged to the first group, having purchased a policy for her entire family.

²⁶La Condre, interview.

Simmonds says they were a “happy group of Sabbath keepers,” and that she was proud to be a member of the group.²⁷ In a similar vein, Jarvis, who remembers that as a youth it was not an option if you were going to church, states that it was “fun being in church.” One reason it was fun being in church was because the friends she had there were different from those she had at home and school.²⁸ The joy and satisfaction that these individuals derived from being associated with New York United is noteworthy, given that as Sabbath keepers they could not participate in activities other youth did.

E. Forrest Harris, Jr., contends that the independent Black church movement and the Black cults and sects of the North were “unique expressions of Black people’s quest for collective self-consciousness through religious commitments.” These religious bodies functioned as a “source of power and self-definition alternative to the dehumanizing anti-self images” in the broader society, providing members with “hope, assurance, and a sense of group identification.”²⁹ Thus, for United Sabbath-Day Adventists, church was a place where relationships were formed and nurtured, life partners were procured, children were socialized, youth were trained to assume positions of responsibility in society, and, most important, a religious organization

²⁷ Simmonds, interview.

²⁸ Jarvis, interview.

²⁹ E. Forrest Harris, Jr., *Ministry for Social Crisis: Theology and Praxis in the Black Church Tradition* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 24–25.

was built through which they expressed their dreams and aspirations.³⁰ Humphrey is remembered positively by these individuals. He was the religious leader who studied the Bible with them as a prerequisite to their baptism. He married most of them, blessed their children, and presided over the burials of their parents, spouses and, in some instances, children. Willing to admit he was a human being with flaws, they nonetheless hold him in high esteem to this day.

Establishment of United Sabbath-Day Congregations

Sabbath-Day Adventists came into existence as a result of the treatment people of African descent had received in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination almost from the time they started attending the meetings of this unique religious group. From the start, Black Seventh-day Adventists had attempted to “secure adequate returns and proper recognition” from the organization. Yet their efforts had met with frustration, if not failure. Attempts by African Americans to matriculate at the denomination’s educational institutions had met with sparse success, and the racism the few who were admitted encountered often caused them to withdraw prematurely. The situation was not much different from that of those who tried to enter Seventh-day Adventist medical facilities, either for treatment or training. Opportunities in the organization were restricted to teaching, preaching, and selling church literature, with little consideration given to the educational achievements or vocational competencies of African Americans. Frustrated that the denomination had

³⁰See Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), xi.

failed over the years to give them “due consideration” in spite of their faithfulness and loyalty, and, more importantly, had failed to “show a better example of Christ-likeness in Righteousness, Justice and Equity,” James Kemuel Humphrey and his loyalists believed they had ample reason to disassociate themselves from the Seventh-day Adventist denomination and form their own.³¹

The group adopted the name United Sabbath-Day Adventists in January 1930 after a committee of twenty-three individuals had given extended study to the matter. The committee, which voted twenty-one to two in favor of the name, believed that it could not continue using the name Seventh-day Adventist because it stood for “unfair treatment of colored people through discrimination and ‘Jim-Crowism.’” United was chosen because of the premium the Bible placed on unity, and because unity is a hallmark of true Christianity. Additionally, the new religious body would try to effect unity between individuals and groups, including racial and ethnic groups. This unity would authenticate and motivate the group’s endeavors to preach the gospel worldwide. Still believing in the sanctity of the Sabbath, the group used the term Sabbath-Day in its name, going a step further to assert that people who keep the Sabbath day holy must of necessity be holy themselves. Finally, because members were convinced that Jesus would be returning to the earth soon to end the reign of sin and usher in an age of peace and holiness, they kept the word Adventists.³²

United Sabbath-Day Adventists were buoyant and optimistic at the start of their organization. They believed that American society, especially in the South, was

³¹*United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, Vol. II, No. 11, November, 1931, 5.

³²*Ibid.*, 4.

ripe for proselytizing. The group decried the sluggishness with which Seventh-day Adventists had tried to reach African Americans, and was particularly chagrined that after almost sixty years of contact Black Seventh-day Adventist church membership was only approximately 9,000. While Sabbath-Day Adventist outlook was going to be global, the new religious body would give specialized focus and attention to their marginalized brothers and sisters in the United States, whom they characterized as “susceptible to the religion of Jesus Christ, and are so willing to hear any one speak of the Savior who died for them.”³³

A year and a half after their inauguration, United Sabbath-Day Adventists were being ridiculed and vilified by Seventh-day Adventists as a scattered, inefficient, and ineffective organization. Reminding its detractors that at eighteen months it was still an infant and should not be compared to organizations sixty and more years its senior, the group pointed out that it had been born of love—as Christ had been—and was in need of love, affirmation, and empathy. It requested that instead of the disparaging barbs it be offered substantive and substantial gifts in the form of financial contributions to its domestic and foreign initiatives, and offerings of time and labor. United Sabbath-Day Adventists dismissed the criticisms as untrue, claiming that their strides in evangelism and church growth outdistanced those of the denomination from which they had extricated themselves. In addition, they claimed that their progress mirrored that of African Americans in the general population, who, shaking loose from the shackles of slavery, also had faced seemingly

³³Ibid., 6.

insurmountable barriers in their drive for self determination.³⁴

The evidence appears to substantiate the claims of the Sabbath-Day Adventists. In quick succession, they spawned branches in the United States and overseas. Not surprisingly, the largest United Sabbath-Day Adventist congregation was in New York City, where Humphrey lived and was well known. Mother of every other Sabbath-Day Adventist church, this congregation, which by mid-1931 numbered 530, was committed to fostering evangelistic efforts worldwide. Its Sabbath School was touted to be the best organized among Adventists in the world, and the church boasted a youth membership well in excess of 200. By late 1931 other United Sabbath-Day Adventist congregations had been spawned in Chicago, Boston, St. Louis, Omaha, Milwaukee, Newark, and Kingston, Jamaica. How United Sabbath-Day Adventists established these churches is unclear, though it appears that people sympathetic to Humphrey and his cause contacted him with a request that he organize them as a church.³⁵

These small congregations were saddled with pressing needs, which, given their Depression-era context, is understandable. Forty-four individuals constituted the church in Omaha, which had M. M. Boodle as its pastor. This group worshiped in a large two-story frame house it was attempting to purchase as 1931 drew to a close. Still, members were encouraged by the prospects for growth, evidenced by three persons who had recently “taken their stand for baptism.” The Milwaukee congregation, led by Moses M. Payne, a local elder, was a vibrant group that had

³⁴Ibid., 12.

³⁵Ibid., 9.

forty-five people attending Sabbath School. In addition, its young people's meetings were "very interesting and enjoy a good attendance," with a "number of visitors attending and participating in the services and meetings of the congregation."³⁶

The first United Sabbath-Day Adventist church in New Jersey was established in July, 1930, in Newark with a charter membership of twenty-four, almost all of whom had been former members of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. By the end of 1931 the group had grown by twenty-five percent and was functioning as a full-fledged church. Its Sabbath School was "wide awake," and its Missionary Department was "working for the conversion of souls." The Newark congregation did not have a building of its own. Yet that did not stop the group from trying to meet the material needs of its constituents and community, an objective that was anchored in its belief that the mission of a church is more than that of ministering to the spiritual needs of people. Sabbath-Day Adventists held that feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and sheltering the homeless constituted the mission of the church, too. Church leaders informed readers of the *Messenger* that the pastor of the Newark congregation, who during 1931 was a guest columnist for the *Newark Herald*, had seized the opportunity to explain in a series of articles the reasons behind Humphrey's split with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. "Convinced that under the circumstances Elder J. K. Humphrey was right in the stand he took," readers were "grateful for the information."³⁷

In the fall of 1930, a small congregation was organized in Ashbury Park, New

³⁶Ibid., 1, 15.

³⁷Ibid., 8.

Jersey. Committing itself to justice and equity between the sexes and among races, the group, constituted mostly of former Seventh-day Adventists, found it difficult to achieve its goals and objectives because of financial constraints. Like other Sabbath-Day Adventists congregations, this group also appealed for funds to carry on its work.³⁸

On May 30, 1931, James K. Humphrey, acting in his capacity as founder and president of the United Sabbath-Day Adventist General Conference, organized a branch in Boston with a charter membership of thirty-three. Like other congregations, this one operated without a local minister for a time. Yet that did not derail its outreach activity, so that five months after its organization its membership had grown to forty. Attendance at Sabbath School was double the church membership, and all departments of the church were functioning optimally.³⁹

By the end of 1931 United Sabbath-Day Adventists had established a presence on the island of Jamaica with churches in Kingston; Higgins Town, St. Anns; Waltham Park, St. Andrews; and Ewarton, St. Andrews. The Kingston congregation, which supported the group at Waltham Park, was permeated by a “good spirit” and a “strong determination to stand together for the furtherance and establishment of the despised cause,” and a baptismal class of seven proffered evidence of the group’s evangelistic zeal. Established amidst severe conflict, the Higgins Town congregation had quickly secured a lot of land on which, with the help of the Kingston congregation, it had constructed a church building. Though still

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., 9.

unfinished, a condition which was an inaudible but eloquent appeal for financial assistance, the facility doubled as a school building, providing space for at least forty school children. Ewarton was a relatively recent church plant that had come about as the result of the visionary labor of a focused local leader, but was suffering because of the lack of a permanent, stable place of worship.⁴⁰

Humphrey alleged that a torrent of calls for the organization of Sabbath-Day Adventist congregations had been received from Jamaica and from Central and Latin America. The calls had prompted Humphrey to appeal for human and financial resources, and only the lack of help had thwarted a more aggressive response from the new religious body. A dearth of financial resources had prevented Humphrey from visiting Panama, though not two Sabbath-Day Adventist congregations from organizing themselves there during 1931.⁴¹

By August 1932, United Sabbath-Day Adventists were lauding their rise and progress, accomplished “under the courageous and energetic leadership of Elder James K. Humphrey.” In spite of severe opposition from detractors, the organization had moved “forward steadily,” proving wrong predictions of an early demise, and standing tall as a “challenge to the bigotry and selfishness of those who once exploited them.”⁴² The organization claimed a world wide membership of 1200 people worshipping in fifteen congregations and missions in places as far away as Jamaica, West Indies. Humphrey, saying that a “good report maketh the bones fat,”

⁴⁰Ibid., 13.

⁴¹Ibid., 14.

⁴²*United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, Vol. III, No. 8, August 1932, 3.

informed members that the New York congregation, the flagship church of the denomination and home to the General Conference of Sabbath-Day Adventists, had a membership of approximately 600. Once more, he alleged that Seventh-day Adventists were only interested in the financial contributions of Blacks, specifically of “getting the most out of them that is possible, rather than doing the most for them that is possible.” He told his followers that the New York Supreme Court, ruling in their favor, had directed the Greater New York Conference to return the deed of the group’s property to it, saying that this was an answer to prayer for which the church was happy and grateful. Humphrey believed that in “every respect” the new body was much better off than “when she was connected with the Seventh-day Adventists.”⁴³

The Brooklyn and Newark congregations, both pastored by R. Leo Soaries, vice-president of the General Conference, were raising funds to procure adequate worship facilities. Organized in May, 1930, with a charter membership of fifteen, the Brooklyn membership in August, 1932, stood at twenty-nine. Soaries asserted that members were “conscientious Christians” who were standing “squarely for the Bible and the Bible only, and Jesus Christ as their Savior.” Rejoicing in a “present salvation and a deep knowledge of Christ,” the group was “praising God for the organization of a Negro Sabbath-keeping body where promising young people can hold positions of trust and responsibility in service for God and humanity.” A gifted writer, Soaries had recently produced a play entitled “Deliverance” which the youth of the church, whom he characterized as “refined, cultured, and energetic,” had dramatized to rave reviews. The pastor said that everybody who had seen the play commended “these

⁴³Ibid., 7.

talented young people for the able manner in which they played their parts.” Soaries was convinced that Blacks were at a point in their existence that called for them to find their niche, and, not unlike his leader, was sure that Blacks more than any other racial group were suited to “conscientiously preach the gospel of Christ to the world.” This was the case because a requirement for preaching the gospel effectively was a life devoid of hypocrisy and untarnished by feelings of superiority. With their “superiority complex and racial antagonisms,” Whites, Soaries thought, were incapable of convincing people “that they are the representatives of an impartial God.”⁴⁴

In the Midwest, the Chicago church, which had survived the onslaughts of an “unfaithful few” who had been associated with the church, was moving forward under the competent and loyal leadership of a lay couple, Joseph Lumley and his wife. The Milwaukee congregation, “one of the strongest and most faithful companies” in the conference, was also operating under lay leadership. The Depression was having an adverse impact on the ability of members to support the church financially in Milwaukee. Still, the church was well organized, according to Alice E. Nogest, Missionary leader, and believing that civilization was in its eleventh hour, it was “trying to improve the time.” As such, the congregation had targeted its youth for service, organizing a “Girl’s Douglas Club to help in the way of providing wholesome recreation,” and a “Surprise Package Club.” Remembering that the “Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,” the youth had been busy “cleaning rooms for sick people, going errands, and doing things in general to bring

⁴⁴Ibid., 10–11.

bliss to others.” The St. Louis church, which had survived “great tribulation because of unfaithful ministers,” had recently received the services of some lay preachers, and in Omaha, where Morrell Boodle and his wife had not been “without troubles and trials,” the church was repairing and decorating its auditorium.⁴⁵

Back East, there were United Sabbath-Day Adventist Sabbath Schools operating in Baltimore and in Jamaica, New York, and the membership of the Boston congregation, thirty-three when the group started in 1931, stood at forty-three. Attendance at the Sunday evening evangelistic meeting in Boston was high, as was the case with Sabbath School, where sixty-seven people were usually in attendance. A branch Sabbath School had been started in Newburyport, and the Boston congregation boasted a baptismal class of several. Over the previous thirteen months the church had collected \$565.98 in offerings. Boston was aspiring to lead the Conference in activities, and was purchasing more *Messengers* per capita than any other Sabbath-Day Adventist congregation. The success of this congregation was all the more significant because its pastor had recently been transferred to the Southwestern region.⁴⁶

In Humphrey’s country of birth, the work of the Sabbath-Day Adventists was also moving forward. On August 3, 1932, the cornerstone of a new church building in Kingston was laid. The Reverend G. Hargis of the Seventh-day Baptists was the keynote speaker for the occasion, returning a favor Humphrey had performed for him when the United Sabbath-Day Adventist leader preached the dedicatory sermon for a

⁴⁵Ibid., 11–12.

⁴⁶Ibid., 8, 10.

Seventh-day Baptist building in 1930. Calling Hargis a “brother minister,” Humphrey thanked him for his services.⁴⁷ At Higgins Town enrollment at the Sabbath-Day Adventist church school topped thirty, with plans calling for it to increase to fifty by the opening of school the following month. Sickness and lack of a worship center had conspired against members at Ewarton.⁴⁸ Humphrey ended his report of the church planting and church growth activities of his still infant organization claiming that calls for organization of Sabbath-Day Adventist congregations were pouring in from “all parts of the world and especially from the United States.” He stated that as soon as funds allowed, the calls were going to be answered.⁴⁹

The establishment of Sabbath-Day Adventist congregations in the United States and the West Indies continued throughout the 1930s. For example, in the summer of 1938, a group was organized in Indianapolis by Humphrey, who placed at its helm a former Baptist minister who had joined the Seventh-day Adventist church a year and a half before. J. J. Freeman quickly became disenchanted over the experience of African Americans in the Seventh-day Adventist church. On learning about the United Sabbath-Day Adventists through one of their publications, Freeman requested to meet with Humphrey, who gladly facilitated his wishes to be a part of the United Sabbath-Day Adventists. By then, Humphrey had also traveled to Bermuda, establishing a “splendid group of believers there.” As the Ninth Annual Session of the General Conference of the United Sabbath-Day Adventists convened

⁴⁷The extent of the relationship between the Seventh-day Baptists and the United Sabbath-Day Adventists is unclear.

⁴⁸Ibid., 15.

⁴⁹Ibid., 9.

in New York City in 1939, calls requesting organization were coming in from Detroit, Cleveland, and Cincinnati in the United States, and from Antigua, Barbados, British Guiana (now Guyana), and Trinidad in the West Indies.⁵⁰

The establishment of United Sabbath-Day Adventist congregations in the West Indies is noteworthy. Like some West Indians of his era, Humphrey believed that race relations in the West Indies were starkly different to those that existed in the United States. To be sure, slavery had been as oppressive in the West Indies as it had been in the United States, and the situation was the same with racism. Yet some West Indians, including Humphrey, held to the ungrounded belief that conditions in the West Indies had changed. For example, when in 1913 a move had been made to drop the words North American from the North American Negro Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Humphrey spoke out against the recommendation, arguing that he did not want conditions in the United States to spread to the West Indies, where they were not in existence.⁵¹

Who were the people that joined the Sabbath-Day Adventists? Did the group attract only urban slum dwellers, immigrants from the South and the West Indies searching for stability and meaning in an unfriendly, alien environment? Based on the photos and articles in the denomination's official organ, the *United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, a reasonable conclusion is that the group attracted educated, middle class, well-to-do individuals, as well as those mired in poverty. Almost without exception, pictures of church leaders and members show well-dressed,

⁵⁰*United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, Vol. 10, No. 2, June 1939, 3.

⁵¹*General Conference Bulletin*, Vol. 7, No. 20 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1913), 309.

immaculately coiffured people. Children are adequately and tastefully clothed. Even snapshots of the Kingston and Higgins Town, Jamaica congregations tell a story of Blacks being able to clothe themselves well in the midst of a worldwide depression. In addition, one is able to detect a sense of pride in the people, a feeling that in spite of the odds they were going to triumph, and that they had nothing for which they should be ashamed.

The artwork on the cover of the November 1931 and August 1932 issues of the *Messenger* was the creative expression of a United Sabbath-Day Adventist young adult. In the picture, Claudius Frederick attempted to capture “the universality of the gospel commission” by depicting an angel flying in the sky while blowing a trumpet to make people aware of “the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ.” The airplane, ship, train, and automobile convey the thought that “by land, sea, and air the message of Jesus’ soon coming must be disseminated.” Tasteful and attractive, the cover of the periodical tells that at New York United youth were provided with avenues to develop and display their talents and competencies. Indeed, the November 31, 1931 issue of the magazine, in calling attention to its cover, stated: “We are glad that this young artist, as well as other young people of our group, can now be given an opportunity to use their talents in the service of Christ who died for them.”⁵²

True to its claim, the *Messenger* was a medium for the growth and expansion of the skills of Sabbath-Day Adventists, especially the young. J. R. Williams, a medical doctor with a degree from McGill University, contributed health articles monthly, and S. H. Craig, a dentist and World War I veteran who had graduated from

⁵²*United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, November 1931, 3.

Harvard University with “the highest ranking in the class of 1929,” wrote a regular column on oral health.⁵³ Poetry and other expressions of creative genius dotted the pages of the periodical, which always carried an assortment of portraits of members and pictures of congregations. The assistant editor of the periodical was C. J. Lewis, a “promising” young man, and the editor, P. J. Bailey, not much older. In addition to editing the journal, Bailey ran the departments of the Conference, suggesting he had organizational, managerial, and administrative skills. A serious, scholarly-looking gentleman, Bailey gives evidence of an appreciable grasp of theological themes. Whether he was trained in theology is unclear, but his articles, especially one entitled “The Scope of the Gospel,” demonstrates that he was steeped in Scripture and resonated with theological nuances. In this article, Bailey provides a panoramic sweep of the plan of salvation, his soteriology consonant with traditional Adventist and evangelical Christianity’s understanding of the issue.⁵⁴

In the August, 1932, issue of the *Messenger*, three pictures speak to the sense of pride that Sabbath-Day Adventist leaders had in the accomplishments of their youth. On page four was a picture of C. J. Lewis, the handsome assistant editor of the paper who had just received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education from New York University. On page fifteen was the picture and story of Dr. Kathleen H. Jones–King, “an unassuming young woman of refinement and ambition,” who had recently finished a medical internship at Freedman’s Hospital in the nation’s capital. A member of Howard University School of Medicine’s class of 1931, Jones–King,

⁵³Ibid., 5.

⁵⁴*United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, August 1932, 4–5.

who was practicing in Philadelphia, was one of the first women doctors of Howard University to pass the National Board Examination, and had been licensed to practice in forty-six states. She had been baptized by Humphrey in 1926, and credited her success to prayer, hard work and the financial help of a younger sister, who, together with the rest of the family, was a member of the Brooklyn Sabbath-Day Adventist congregation.⁵⁵

Yet it was a picture on page twelve of that issue that tells eloquently of the premium Sabbath-Day Adventists placed on ambition and success, especially as it related to their youth. Ten-year-old Elaine Moore is shown clad in a plaid coat. Her hair pulled back to show her beautiful face, her penetrating eyes reveal, according to the periodical, a “forceful personality” and tell a tale “of innate intelligence and ability.” The journal claimed that when the qualities young Elaine exhibited are harnessed and used for and by God, “great good is accomplished.” Endowed with a good mind, Elaine had been able to commit to memory and repeat without help several passages of Scripture, and was lifted up as a prototype of the kind of children being nurtured in the church.⁵⁶

Yet human-interest stories accompanied by pictures were not restricted to the young. Occasionally, the autobiographies of seniors were run, especially those who had experienced slavery firsthand. For example, in 1932 readers were treated to the odyssey of Mrs. Bell Crowder, a member of the St. Louis church. Born in Louisville in 1852, she and her three siblings were taken to Tennessee when her mother was

⁵⁵Ibid., 4, 15.

⁵⁶Ibid., 12.

sold to a slave trader. There her two brothers were separated from the rest of the family. Taken to church where she heard White preachers speak every Sunday on the theme, “Servants, obey your masters,” Crowden believed for a while that that was the only verse in the Bible. After the Civil War her family moved a couple of times, finally locating her two long-lost brothers. Eleven months shy of her eightieth birthday, Bell Crowder looks many years younger in the picture, taken on the front steps of her home clutching what appears to be a well-used Bible.⁵⁷

Notwithstanding what seems like the proliferation of United Sabbath-Day Adventist congregations during the 1930s, the fact is the organization never experienced great success attracting the unchurched and nonbelievers to itself, and only limited success in proselytizing former Seventh-day Adventists. Humphrey may have been one of Adventism’s premier evangelists before he was defrocked by the denomination, but once he became the titular head of the Sabbath-Day Adventists he ceased to engage in evangelism on the scale he had done previously. More importantly, from their inception United Sabbath-Day Adventists had one major goal—survival. Struggles with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination and internal conflicts only made their major goal more acute. Yet United Sabbath-Day Adventists during this time period may not be characterized as an insular, self-conscious bunch preoccupied with self-preservation and self-perpetuation. The group did articulate a theology of mission that transcended its precincts, and did reach out to its community in tangible ways.

⁵⁷Ibid., 13.

Tenets and Constitution of the Sabbath-Day Adventists

In his seminal work, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches*, Peter J. Paris argues that the major objective of the independent Black church movement was “the institutionalization of the Christian faith in a nonracist form” and that the founders of independent Black churches never intended that their churches differ from those of their White counterparts in policy and doctrine.⁵⁸ Attempting to remain loyal to the principles of the nation and their race, these Black churches differed from White ones in purposes more than in doctrine and polity. According to Paris, two factors accounted for this reality. The first is that Black churches were dependent on the cooperation of Whites for both their emergence and development, often needing their help to procure loans to acquire property. Additionally, because Blacks resolutely believed in the ideal society they saw Black churches as a necessary, and perhaps temporary, evil prompted by the contingencies of race.⁵⁹

Were the United Sabbath-Day Adventists a Black duplication of the Seventh-day Adventist church? Were their tenets or fundamental beliefs reflective of those of the Seventh-day Adventists?⁶⁰

The closest thing to a fundamental set of doctrines that Sabbath-Day Adventists adopted was authored by R. Leo Soaries, vice-president of the

⁵⁸Peter J. Paris, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 129.

⁵⁹Paris, 46, 133.

⁶⁰Seventh-day Adventists do not have a creed but a “fundamental” set of beliefs. See *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Silver Spring, Md.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988).

organization. Published in 1935, it shows that, in the main, United Sabbath-Day Adventists tenets mirrored those of mainstream Christianity in general, and the Seventh-day Adventists in particular (Appendix H).

Fundamental Beliefs of Sabbath-Day Adventists

Sabbath-Day Adventists believed:

1. In the infallibility of Scripture, which is the word of God and amply supplies the “wisdom, knowledge and understanding” needed for salvation. The holy corpus was the product of neither the initiative nor intelligence of people, but of a sovereign God, who, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, inspired holy men and women to write Scripture. 2 Tim. 3:15, 16; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21.

2. That Jesus Christ, who was used by God to create all things, was both human and divine while on earth, and had to be the God-man in order to accomplish the work of redeeming humanity. John 1:1–5; Col. 1:13–16; Heb. 1:1, 2; Phil. 2:8; Matt. 1:21, 23; Heb. 2:14–18.

3. That Jesus Christ is able to save the most wretched from eternal death, which is the consequence of a life of sin. Christ offers eternal life as a free gift. Matt. 1:21; Acts 16:31; Rom. 5:1; John 3:16; Matt. 9:13; Rom. 6:23; Rom. 5:12–19.

4. That people are mortal beings, having been created into a situation where death was a distinct possibility. Human beings are unified creatures of body, soul and spirit who expire at death, remaining unconscious until Jesus returns. Gen. 2: 7, 16–17; Gen. 3:22; Eze. 18: 4; Rom. 16:3; Job 14: 7–15; Job 17: 13.

5. That those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their savior will be rewarded at his second coming, and that those who have rejected him will reap the

consequences of their actions, “complete annihilation,” after the millennium. Isa. 40:10; Isa. 62:11; Rev. 22: 12; Rev. 20: 7–9; Mal. 4:1; Psalms 37:10, 20, 38; Psalms 34:21; Prov. 2:22.

6. That the judgment takes place after the second advent of Jesus Christ. Psalms 96:13; Psalms 50:3; 2 Tim. 4:1; Matt. 25:31–40.

7. That the testimony of Jesus Christ is the spirit of prophecy, Christ having been the one who prompted and actuated the prophets. Christ was “the directing intelligence behind every statement made.” Indeed, “it was Christ who testified through the prophets.” As such, “the testimony of Christ is the spirit of prophecy, and not the gift of prophecy.” Throughout the Dark Ages, Christians suffered and were martyred for the testimony of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:10, 11; Rev. 1:9; Rev. 19:10; Rev. 20:4.

8. That the Holy Spirit, who sealed Christ at his baptism, seals the believer. Given to lead and guide the believer into truth and to glorify Christ, the Holy Spirit is the divine Comforter who abides with Christians for ever. Eph. 4:30; Eph. 1:13–14; 2 Cor. 1:22; John 16:13–14; John 14:16–17.

9. That conversion is a requirement for entrance into the kingdom of God through baptism, and that the “born again” person lives a temperate, holy life. John 3:5; Matt. 18:3; Titus 2:12, 14; 2 Pet. 3:11–14; 2 Thess. 4:14–18.

10. That God’s Ten Commandments law, as a “transcript of His character,” is eternal and immutable. Psalms 111:7–8; Psalms 89:34.

11. That Saturday, the seventh day of the week, and not Sunday, the first day of the week, is the Bible Sabbath, and should be “observed as the day of worship by all Christians.” Gen. 2:1–3; Exod. 16:23, 28; Exod. 20:8–11.

12. That the “proper means for the support of the church” was the “Bible plan of tithing and the giving of offerings.” Mal. 3:8–11; Matt. 23:23.

13. That civilization had reached its penultimate hour, and that Blacks had been conscripted to proclaim the gospel to the world since both Jews and Gentiles had missed their opportunity to do so. Matt. 20; 6; Matt. 16:21–24.

14. That Gentiles were the Japethites, or “the white race,” and that the terms Ethiopian, Egyptian, Hamite, and Cushite all applied to people of African descent. Gen. 10:5; Mark 10:33; Rom. 11:11, 25; Isa. 19:23–25; Isa. 11:11.⁶¹

It is uncertain if this list represents the complete set of cardinal doctrines of the Sabbath-Day Adventists. Some pivotal Christian beliefs and teachings are missing. For example, nothing is said about the resurrection of Christ, or about his co-eternity with God, the Father. To be sure, that Christ possesses all the attributes of deity is implied in the document, and perhaps no mention of Christ’s resurrection is simply that and nothing more. Items 13 and 14 show that Sabbath-Day Adventists were no mere duplication of their White counterparts, the Seventh-day Adventists, but a group acutely conscious of its Black heritage. Whether this slate of beliefs was ever officially voted or adopted by Sabbath-Day Adventists is unsure. It is also uncertain if members or those interested in joining the group had to vow allegiance to the doctrines before they could be accepted into membership.

Constitution and By-Laws of the Sabbath-Day Adventists

The Constitution and By-Laws of the United Sabbath-Day Adventists

⁶¹*United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, August 1932, 9–10.

identifies the New York congregation as the body to which the document applies, leaving one to speculate as to whether the Constitution and By-Laws also applied to all branches. A reasonable inference is that other than for Article One, which identifies the church by name, it did. The Constitution is specific yet comprehensive, painting in broad strokes yet supplying detail, too.

Acknowledging Jesus Christ as the head of the United Sabbath-Day Adventists and recognizing the Bible as the enduring guide of rightful living for all Christians, it states that the fundamental mission of the group was to facilitate Christianity in keeping with “Sabbath-Day Adventist doctrine.” Church membership was open to all who believed in the second coming of Jesus Christ, the seventh day of the week as the Bible Sabbath, baptism by complete immersion, the unconscious state of the dead, dress and health reform, and those who committed themselves to paying a tenth of all their income as a tithe to the church. It was the responsibility of the Board of Trustees to levy and assess tithes and other financial contributions.

Precise as to the officer personnel of the church, their responsibilities and the formula for their election to and removal from office, the document does not state their terms of office.⁶² The exception was the elder, whose tenure was indefinite. The president had broad powers, including authorization to sign all contracts and agreements, and “all checks for the withdrawal of funds.” Yet the treasurer was expected to pay all the bills of the church and the financial secretary to keep accurate records of all receipts and expenditures, showing that the organization sought to

⁶²Given Humphrey’s love of young people, and his ministry to and mentorship of them, it is surprising that the document does not mention an entity or department specifically aimed at the youth.

decentralize its financial operation, undoubtedly with a view to minimizing the probability of wrongdoing. Showing that it prized good music, the group placed matters relating to the choir in the document, going so far as to state that rehearsals were to open and close with prayer “so that God might be well pleased.” Only sickness and uncontrollable contingencies, in which case a written excuse was called for, were recognized as legitimate excuses for non-attendance at rehearsals.

United Sabbath-Day Adventists considered church membership a sacred matter and the dismissal of a member an action to be taken only after all attempts at restoring the individual had failed. Citing Matthew 18:15–19 which outlines a procedure for dealing with the errant in the community of faith and differences among Christians, the Constitution and By-Laws states that dismissal of members could take place only after the detailed procedure had been exhausted. Still, members were expected to deport themselves in ways that would be “a credit to the church and to God,” and were expected to “bear their share of their responsibility for the upkeep of the church.”⁶³

General Conference Sessions

Almost from the start, United Sabbath-Day Adventists convened General Conference Sessions annually. The objectives of these sessions included the receiving of reports from the satellite groups around the country and in the West Indies, and the dissemination of information from headquarters to the constituent churches. Committees on Nominations, Constitution and By-Laws, Entertainment, Plans and

⁶³ *Constitution and By-Laws of the New York United Sabbath Day Adventist Church*, n.p., n.d., Appendix I.

Recommendations, and Credentials and Licenses were impaneled, usually completing their tasks before the sessions adjourned. Humphrey was never averse to injecting devotional elements into these business sessions of the organization. As such, each session started with much singing, and whenever there was not much business to attend to or there were lapses in the agenda, delegates took to the floor to testify of God's blessings and the joys of being associated with the organization. Seldom were doctrinal or theological issues taken up at these sessions, although ministerial credentials, ministerial licenses, and missionary licenses were granted and withdrawn. A General Conference session more often addressed house keeping matters, serving as a rallying point for the faithful and a motivational device for the feeble of faith.⁶⁴

At the Ninth Annual Session of the General Conference of United Sabbath-Day Adventists, convened in New York City in the denomination's newly purchased property located at 36–38 West 135th Street from May 19–26, 1939, delegates were seated from Bermuda (2); Boston (1); Indianapolis (1); Milwaukee (1); Newburyport, Massachusetts (1); Omaha, (1); Philadelphia, (1); and New York City (32 regular delegates and 11 alternates). Additionally, there were eight delegates-at-large, led by James K. Humphrey, and including Humphrey's wife, Violet R. Humphrey, and his brother, Benjamin Humphrey. No mention is made as to the criteria utilized for the selection of delegates. At this Session, as was the case with all others, James K. Humphrey presided.⁶⁵

The General Conference of Sabbath-Day Adventists had officer personnel and

⁶⁴Ibid., 8.

⁶⁵Ibid.

directors for the Sabbath School and Youth departments. It is certain that all these positions, with the exception of the presidency, were up for re-election at a General Conference Session. For example, at the Ninth Session the Nominating Committee recommended individuals for the positions of Secretary-Treasurer, Alvin Simmons; Secretary of the Sabbath School department, Viola R. Humphrey; and Secretary of the Young People Department, Elsie Stulz. The Committee also recommended a five-member Executive Committee consisting of five men to assist the president in the execution of his duties and responsibilities. Conspicuously absent from the Nominating Committee's report was a recommendation for the position of president of the organization. Obviously, that Humphrey would continue on as leader of the group was a matter not up for discussion, debate, or a vote. The United Sabbath-Day Adventist denomination was his brainchild, and he would be at its helm, at least for the foreseeable future. Indeed, that Humphrey was the indisputable leader of the organization is evidenced by the way he conducted the business of these sessions. It was Humphrey who opened and closed each session—always with a prayer.⁶⁶

Unarguably, men dominated the leadership roles of the United Sabbath-Day Adventists. Humphrey was not threatened by male leadership. On the contrary, he prized having men of uncommon ability around him, and took the matter of legacy seriously. Humphrey believed that one of his primary responsibilities as a leader was the cultivation and development of men to carry on the work of the organization. As such, he continuously assembled about him a group of competent men whom he groomed to become deacons, elders, and trustees. To them he also offered

⁶⁶Ibid., 10.

instruction regarding the management of a secular business, and about being a leader in one's household. Most of the men he drew to him remained loyal, although two did level charges against him which led to the establishment of two splinter groups.⁶⁷

Yet the two departmental directors voted at the Ninth Session were women. In fact, women delegates at that Session outnumbered men, and of the eighty-four people named as financial contributors to the Session seventy-one were women. Still, all six persons receiving ministerial credentials then were men, as were those who received ministerial licenses. Only three men out of a total of thirty obtained missionary licenses in New York.⁶⁸ These facts demonstrate that in spite of the fact that women provided much of the financial support for the Sabbath-Day Adventists, the organization's leadership was almost exclusively male.

Humphrey's report to the delegates at the Ninth Session shows that the organization was experiencing acute growing pains at the time. He bemoaned the lack of attendance at and an interest in the Sabbath School of the church. Pleading for at least ninety-five percent of members to attend, he cited numerical and financial growth of the church as the by-products of an increase in Sabbath School attendance. He called upon parents to encourage their children to attend, reminding parents that their children's attendance will "protect and preserve" them from the vices characteristic of large metropolitan areas and out of the nation's jails and prisons. Referring to his experience as a Seventh-day Adventist minister, Humphrey stated

⁶⁷Humphrey fought an array of charges throughout his ministry, including allegations of marital infidelity and financial mismanagement. None of the charges have ever been proven true.

⁶⁸Ibid., 11. Traditionally, these licenses have been reserved for women functioning as Bible Instructors.

that Sabbath School attendees made the strongest church members. His slogan was “Every member of the church, a member of the Sabbath School; and every member of the Sabbath School, a member of the church.”⁶⁹

Not surprisingly, the lack of support for the Sabbath School had a negative impact on overall church attendance, a matter which was also dealt with at the Session. Believing that even if they relocated interested members should inform the church of their whereabouts, delegates unanimously voted to conduct a membership inventory of all churches with a view to removing from membership lists anyone who had not been heard from in six months. Sabbath School attendance was also affirmed, with the delegates again voting unanimously to encourage members to support the Sabbath School with their attendance and involvement. Yet it was in the matter of financial responsibility that the Session spoke out most sternly, recommending that a special offering be donated for Humphrey to travel the country and West Indies to organize interested groups, and that a sacrificial offering be collected quarterly to help promulgate the organization’s outreach efforts.⁷⁰

Financial challenges had an adverse effect on the group in more ways than one. They led to a reduction in the number of times the denomination’s only paper, *The Messenger*, was to be published. Initially published every month, *The Messenger* began to be published quarterly in the late 1930s. Even so, continued lack of support for the paper from members caused the General Conference to go into debt with each publication, a situation Humphrey found totally unacceptable. Humphrey called on

⁶⁹Ibid., 4, 5.

⁷⁰Ibid., 8, 9.

members to commit themselves to \$1 a year to keep the periodical afloat. Yet financial challenges did not have a negative impact on the publication of the *Sabbath School Tutor*, the teaching journal of the organization that was published quarterly. A series of lessons centering around one theme that was intended to lead members to a deeper understanding of Scripture, the *Sabbath School Tutor* was must reading for all members. Recognizing the importance of studying the word, members rallied to Humphrey's cry to save the *Sabbath School Tutor*, with only one congregation refusing to pay its fair share of the cost of publishing the journal.

A major factor in Humphrey's break with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination had been the denomination's policy regarding church property. Humphrey could not accept that the title of properties owned by a local congregation had to be held by the local conference, the immediate governing entity of the organization. Yet at the Ninth Session of Sabbath-Day Adventists, the Constitution and By-Laws were amended to reflect the policy of the Seventh-day Adventists. Humphrey asked for and received a vote that the endorsement of the General Conference be procured before an organized United Sabbath-Day Adventist congregation could acquire or dispose of property. Moreover, such property would be part of the property of the General Conference. Much discussion attended these suggestions before they were voted, and the recommendation that the property of a defecting congregation be retained by the General Conference engendered even more discussion, no doubt because delegates viewed the recommendation in the context of their own experience within the Seventh-day Adventist organization. Still, delegates

ultimately adopted the resolution by majority vote.⁷¹

Early Challenges

Humphrey's problems with the Seventh-day Adventist Church did not end in January, 1930. One of the struggles United Sabbath-Day Adventists had with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination during the 1930s was for the property United Sabbath-Day Adventists believed was rightfully theirs. Quite understandably, Humphrey wanted the deed to the church building located at 141 West 131st Street turned over to his group. Sabbath-Day Adventists sued to recover the building, and a lower court sided with them. Yet the New York State Supreme Court reversed the lower court's decision, stating in its judgement that for the group to retrieve its property it would have to rejoin the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Sabbath-Day Adventists refused, electing to stand in solidarity with Humphrey. In a move replete with irony, Humphrey's new congregation was forced to rent the building from the Baptist congregation that had purchased it.⁷² An avalanche of negative emotions inundated Sabbath-Day Adventists as a result. Exacerbating the unhappiness, disgust, and resentment of the Sabbath-Day Adventists was the fact that promptly at 6 p.m. every Saturday janitors moved in to begin readying the facility for the Sunday morning services of the landlord. Often interrupted, if not aborted, by this practice was the Youth Meeting. Yet one of the practice's enduring legacies is the support it gave to the erroneous notions that the

⁷¹Ibid., 8.

⁷²Mesar and Dybdahl, 41.

Sabbath begins at 6 p.m. on Friday and ends at the same time on Saturday.⁷³

Sabbath-Day Adventists had a difficult time procuring adequate, affordable facilities to worship in New York City during the 1930s, the Great Depression conspiring with other factors to make their quest more difficult. At their General Conference session of 1938, they met in rented quarters for which they paid \$20 per Sabbath, the “heavy financial burden” causing them to groan. The following year they were able to convene the session in their own facility, a \$50,000 structure that they had purchased for \$27,000 with a down payment of \$3,000 and a \$24,000 mortgage at four percent interest. The building, located at 36–38 135th Street, became home to the New York congregation and the headquarters of the General Conference.⁷⁴

Today the New York United Sabbath-Day Adventist congregation worships in a structure they funded themselves. Completed three years after their founding pastor died, the one-story stone and brick structure is located on 110th Street in Manhattan, just across the street from Central Park North. As such, it is a prized piece of real estate that is well-kept. The sanctuary on the first floor seats approximately 400, and in the basement is a spacious fellowship hall and several offices, including the pastor’s study. Huge pictures of some of the first General Conferences Sessions of the United Sabbath-Day Adventists adorn the walls of the fellowship hall. The pictures tell a poignant tale of the origins of the group and serve as a stark reminder of the birth pangs it experienced. United Sabbath-Day Adventists are proud of their facility, which has the distinction of being the only Adventist

⁷³Olga La Beet, interview.

⁷⁴*United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, June 1939, 2.

church building in New York City that was not purchased from another organization.

Conspicuously displayed on the walls in the narthex of the building are plaques bearing images of Humphrey. Identified as the pastor of the organization from 1929 to 1952, Humphrey is eulogized as a great leader who was “Faithful unto death.” Another plaque places the date of the organization of the church as 1936, but does not cite Humphrey as its founder. To be sure, Humphrey’s name and image are also on that plaque, leaving one to imply that he was the founder. Yet that Humphrey was pastor and not founder of the group underscores an important point in Adventist ecclesiology. That point is that God and not a human being is the foundation of his church.

Sabbath-Day Adventists did not only face challenges from without, but from within as well. Almost from their inception, United Sabbath-Day Adventists experienced internal conflict. To be sure, the squabbles never imperiled their existence nor dampened their determination to press on. Still, they consumed time and resources, and detracted from the primary objective of the group. It appears that as early as 1934 the Sabbath-Day Adventists organization became caught up in the throes of a power struggle. At the Fourth Annual Convention of the General Conference, held between May 18 and 27, 1934, R. Leo Soaries, vice-president; Hubert Gauntlett, secretary; and P. J. Bailey and C. J. Lewis, editor and assistant editor of the *Messenger* respectively, were all removed from office and church membership. No reasons for the actions were ever divulged, although notice of them

were given in the January, 1935, edition of the *Messenger*.⁷⁵ Also at the Fourth Annual Convention, Humphrey's title was changed from president to moderator of the Session. Saying it regretted that some members were not present at the Session and thereby were unable to hear the discussion that resulted in the action, William Samuels, the newly elected secretary of the General Conference, informed readers that "it was decided that the word 'President' is more political than religious." Samuels, who succeeded Humphrey as leader of the organization in 1947, claimed that the only religious body that used the term for its chief officer was the Seventh-day Adventists, and that since moderator denotes a chairman, "it seems to us more fitting than the word 'President.'" ⁷⁶ That the change in Humphrey's designation, at least for General Conference sessions, may have been the result of a power struggle is a reasonable inference given the fact that years later Samuels, when he became the leader of the denomination, assumed the title of "President."⁷⁷

The immediate impact of the departure of Soaries, Gauntlett, Bailey and Lewis could be seen in the appearance and content of the *Messenger*. The January, 1935, issue of the paper carried only one picture, that of James K. Humphrey on the front page. Humphrey's caption identified him as moderator of the United Sabbath-Day Adventists. Noticeably absent were the reports from around the field and articles challenging readers to a higher level of living. The issue was half the length of

⁷⁵*The United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, Vol. VI, No. 1, January, 1935, 8.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

⁷⁷See the *United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, Vol. 28, No. 4, January–March, 1953, 3.

previous editions, and listed Humphrey and Samuels as its new editor and the assistant editor respectively. A lengthy, detailed article painstakingly detailing the activities of a recent “Man’s Day Program” at New York United and naming the twenty-eight individuals who planned and executed the event suggests that the new editor may have been desperate for material. An “Aunt Lou” appealed for stories for children, and even the article on the edition’s front page, a “New Year Greeting” penned by Humphrey, seemed lackluster.

Sometime between their 1938 and 1939 General Conference sessions, the Chicago congregation withdrew from the organization’s sisterhood of churches, the reasons for the group’s action never being tendered or divulged to the delegates at the 1939 Session. Humphrey did inform the delegates to this Session that the organization had not heard from congregations in Jacksonville, Fresno, and Boston.⁷⁸ One year later, a major split of the New York congregation occurred. Centering around allegations of financial and marital improprieties by Humphrey, it was a major blow to the organization. Yet to this day the few individuals who were a part of New York United at the time resolutely defend Humphrey. To them he was a leader of unassailable character, though, admittedly, a human being subject to temptations like all people. Early in the tenure of Humphrey’s successor another group left to form their own church because members disagreed with the new leader’s recommendation that tithe funds be used with the proceeds from the sale of the building on West 135th Street to procure property on which to build a church.⁷⁹

⁷⁸*United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, June 1939, 3,4.

⁷⁹Dybdahl and Mesar, 54.

To this day, speculation abounds about Humphrey's marriage, with detractors claiming that Humphrey was an incurable womanizer who maintained a formal relationship with his wife only to preserve his position as founding minister of the Sabbath-Day Adventists. Humphrey's wife, Violet R. Humphrey, remained with her husband until her death. Fully aware of the rumors about her husband's philandering, she responded with stoic dignity and grace, telling those close to her that it was difficult being married to a minister. Yet the difficulty was due to the long hours and unpredictability of the ministry and not to her relationship with her husband. Violet Humphrey did not work outside the home, but was an untiring worker for the church. She founded the Women's Week, and superintended the Sabbath School on numerous occasions.⁸⁰

The United Sabbath-Day Messenger kept the face of Mrs. Humphrey before readers, once captioning her as the "Wife of the President, who has stood faithfully by him for over 30 years."⁸¹ The picture of the "First Lady" was of a serene, confident woman devoid of the trappings of worldly success. Like her husband, Mrs. Humphrey shunned fanfare and ostentation, weaving her hair simply yet stylishly in the bun fashion of the day. At the Ninth Session of the General Conference of United Sabbath-Day Adventists, Ada Daley, a New York delegate, singled out Humphrey's wife for her "courageous spirit." Mrs. Humphrey had been among the first to address the delegates, declaring that she was thankful for her role in the organization. She introduced several motions at the Session, and was elected to direct the Sabbath

⁸⁰La Beet, interview.

⁸¹*The United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, Vol. II, No. 11, November 1931, 2.

School department.⁸²

Humphrey had one child with Violet Humphrey, a daughter they named Ruth. Always referred to as “My Ruthie” by Humphrey, she was quick-witted, intelligent, and outspoken. Ruth graduated from college and pursued a career in nursing, later working for the United States Army. She was a registered Democrat and community activist who marched and picketed, claiming that she derived her activist proclivities from the father she adored. Ruth married twice, and lost several babies at delivery. As such, Humphrey’s progeny ended with Ruth. Yet Ruth claimed that her father had other children, and she traveled to Jamaica on numerous occasions to search for a brother she had heard lived there. It is unclear whether she ever met this person, though she often shipped foodstuff and other commodities to Jamaica addressed to him.⁸³

The Theology of James K. Humphrey

Born in Jamaica, James K. Humphrey came to America in search of a better life. Here he heard stories of what the America brand of slavery had been like, and here he experienced first hand Jim Crow practices that provoked his racial consciousness. He lived through World War I, the Harlem Renaissance, the Stock

⁸²*United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, June 1939, 7.

⁸³Felix Murray, interview with the author, tape recording, New York, New York, June 10, 2000. Murray, whom Ruth predeceased, was Ruth’s second husband. Her first husband was named Spencer. Born in Harlem in 1919, Murray married Ruth in 1972, twenty years after her father, James K. Humphrey had died. He remembers her speaking fondly of her father, and cherishing pictures and objects of his. Ruth Humphrey, who was childless, died in 1997. With her death the known Humphrey legacy ended.

Market Crash, the Great Depression, World War II, and the start of the Cold War. The first half of the twentieth century was a period of upheaval and “Hard Times” interspersed with stints of glamour and vigor. When Humphrey died, America was entering the “Fabulous Fifties.”

A product of his times, James K. Humphrey was not trained in theology, and may never have attended a seminary for ministerial instruction. Yet as a minister he performed with distinction, and exhibited an appreciable knowledge of the Bible. His theological understanding was grounded in the Bible, which was his standard and rule. Humphrey believed that “the Bible and the Bible only is the indisputable word of God,” adding that “there is no other book upon which the world may depend for the gospel but the Bible.” As such, he appealed to his members to live up to “the truths of the gospel brought forth in God’s holy book.”⁸⁴

Humphrey held that history was purposeful, with events moving inexorably toward a definite goal. He based his belief on the “biblical” passage: “There is a time and place for everything under the sun.”⁸⁵ For Humphrey, time was about to run out. His was earth’s last generation, making the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom an urgent matter. “Jesus Christ is very near at hand,” Humphrey affirmed, calling upon followers to “prepare the people to meet this solemn event.” Yet to do so meant paying heed to and proclaiming God’s Ten Commandments Law, especially the fourth which “calls upon every man, woman and child to remember the Sabbath

⁸⁴*United Sabbath-Day Messenger*, August 1932, 3.

⁸⁵The biblical passage Humphrey was alluding to is Ecclesiastes 3:1, which states: “To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven.” See *United Sabbath-Day Messenger*, August 1932, 2.

Day which is the seventh day of the week (Saturday) to keep it holy.” Humphrey contended that Scripture contained no warrant or backing for the observance of Sunday as the Bible Sabbath.⁸⁶

For Humphrey, the time was right for “members of the Ethiopian race” to take “a pure and true gospel” to the world. To be sure, the gospel was not the exclusive property of any race or group of people. Yet it had been bequeathed to the “dark-skinned peoples of the world who have been slighted and segregated and discriminated against by both Jews and Gentiles.” God, in his providence and wisdom, had elevated “downtrodden and despised” Blacks by giving them an opportunity “to help themselves in the knowledge of the Gospel of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.” It was now the “duty and obligation” of the people of African descent to promulgate the gospel.⁸⁷

Referencing Genesis 10:1–5, the bishop posited that Jews had descended from Japheth and were once the chosen people of God, but that they had been replaced when, believing themselves better than the rest of humankind, they had failed to share their knowledge of God. Subsequently, God conscripted the Gentiles for service. Yet the Gentiles had failed “just as lamentably as the Jews,” discriminating against both Jews and Blacks, and becoming in the process “unfit to proclaim the gospel.” It had become the lot of Blacks to preach the gospel, and Humphrey, as an “Apostle to the Negro race,” felt constrained to “point out the prophecies that relate to the dark-skinned peoples of the world in the call to give the

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid.

closing message to mankind.” This call to service humbled the bishop, who believed that all people were to be addressed with the gospel, even though some would reject it.⁸⁸

Humphrey believed that the world wide economic depression was the direct result of humanity’s selfishness. One reason he believed this was that he understood God to be omnipotent and, as such, able to supply all the temporal needs of the human family. The Depression was viewed as an embarrassment to individuals and entire nations alike, with England and the United States the two main culprits. As a consequence, these two nations were primarily responsible for implementing the drastic measures needed to deal with the crippling effects of the Depression. The selfishness of humanity was at variance with the love and benevolence of God, which, coupled with his power and mercy, were reason for thanksgiving. Yet the Thanksgiving season of 1931 would be marred because of the crippling effects of the Depression.⁸⁹

Humphrey thought World War II was a fulfillment of Bible prophecy, and a sure sign that the end of human history was imminent. To be sure, war had always been a fact of human existence, with nations and empires rising and falling by war. Yet World War II was a unique conflagration in which new artillery was being used for the first time, causing the bishop to cast and view the war in apocalyptic images. His fundamentalism showing, Humphrey saw no safety or deliverance for the faithful in human ingenuity, but in God, who was an ever-present recourse and refuge.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹*United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, Vol. 11, No. 11, November 1931, 3.

Moreover, in spite of the breathtaking inventions of humanity, the victory of God's people was guaranteed. The bishop did not advise congregants if they should enlist in the armed forces or seek employment in any industry directed tied to the war.⁹⁰ Yet Humphrey supported the New Testament teaching that Christians ought to support their governments and leaders, leaving members with the impression that the church would not look with disfavor upon those who enlisted in the armed forces or worked in the defense industry.

According to Ucilla La Condre, Humphrey claimed he had been received information from the Spirit of God about World War II and some of the political, social, and economic developments that would occur during and as a result of the conflict.⁹¹ She says that he urged members to pray, keeping them informed about the war as it progressed. Additionally, he appraised members of other social issues, including the Civil Rights movement then emerging. The bishop may have been in agreement with the New Testament teaching that Christians should be supportive of their leaders and governments, but he approved of civil disobedience as a legitimate strategy to call attention to the inequities in society. La Condre avows that Humphrey believed people angry as a result of being oppressed should register their anger in tangible, recognizable ways. Yet he condemned the looting that often accompanied civil disobedience, saying that looters were lawbreakers who should be arrested,

⁹⁰*United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, Vol. 16, No. 3, July–September, 1944, 1–5.

⁹¹World War II did have an impact on United Sabbath-Day Adventists operations. Among other things, it led to the cancellation of their 1944 General Conference Session. *Ibid.*, 6.

prosecuted, and imprisoned.⁹²

That Humphrey was not a crusader who espoused views that pushed the boundaries of the church is seen in elements other than his preaching style, which was anything but the animated, expressive type of many Black preachers in Harlem at the time. Evidence of the bishop's conservatism is seen in some of the policies he adopted. For example, Humphrey allowed no one who was not in full agreement with the doctrines and practices of the denomination to teach in the Sabbath School department. Freedom of thought did not apply in this regard, his teachers having to march to the drumbeat of conformity to the organization's policies. To be sure, for Humphrey this was a matter of setting the right example for the rest of the membership. The same principle applied to the support of the church through the tithes and offerings. Humphrey resolutely refused to allow anyone delinquent in remitting a faithful tithe and returning a freewill offering to hold a church office. The bishop also spoke out against the practice of some of his branch churches to use the tithe for reasons other than for that of remunerating clergy, asserting that such a practice was contrary to God's plan. Additionally, he bewailed the fact that some United Sabbath-Day Adventist ministers had to work at other jobs to sustain themselves, a contingency he held was in opposition to the biblical Old Testament model.⁹³

Like Seventh-day Adventists, Humphrey made a sharp distinction between the use that could be made of tithes and offerings. The tithe was to be used exclusively

⁹²La Condre, interview.

⁹³*United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, June 1939, 5.

for the support of the credentialed and licensed clergy. Humphrey appealed to the Melchizedek model of the Old Testament Scriptures for warrant and backing for his position.⁹⁴ He said that Jesus was now the High Priest of the Christian, and, as such, desired to see “his ministers kept on the job by the faithfulness of His people bringing their tithes into the storehouse.” Offerings were intended either for foreign or home missions. As the former, they were to be used beyond the precincts of the church that generated them, while home mission offerings could be used to meet the operating expenses of the local congregation, including the salaries of church personnel other than the minister.⁹⁵ Founded around the Stock Market crash and weaned during the Great Depression, the Sabbath-Day Adventist organization struggled to meet its financial obligations throughout its history. Consequently, Humphrey and his leaders were forced to utilize fund raising techniques that did not reflect biblical stewardship principles. For example, La Condre recalls that Sabbath School classes competed with each other for the honor of raising the most money. Members utilized financial rallies to solicit funds from relatives and friends, often taking to the streets to canvas well-wishers and sympathizers, too. Still, members were encouraged to commit sacrificially to the church, with some going into debt to do so.⁹⁶

Humphrey prized young people, whom he believed faced an inordinate amount of temptation to evil. He frowned upon the penchant of adults to condemn youth for the “frivolity and fickleness” which often come about because of their

⁹⁴Melchizedek was an Old Testament priest to whom Abraham, the first Jew and father of the faithful, remitted tithes of all he earned. See Genesis 14:20.

⁹⁵*United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, June 1939, 5.

⁹⁶La Condre, interview.

distaste for religion, reminding the adults that they were still in the process of becoming, too. At the same time, adults were not to give blanket endorsement to the activities of youth, allowing them to indulge their every whim and fancy. Youth needed to be taught, and it was incumbent that adults mentor and model for them. Of special concern to Humphrey was the practice of parents to criticize the church and its leadership in the presence of children. Such a practice almost always engendered profound feelings of apathy in youth, whose parents would then seek out the bishop to decry their children's attitude. Humphrey reminded parents that their most effective teaching was a life that exemplified the truths and principles they expected their posterity to emulate.⁹⁷

Citing the economic crisis then gripping the world as proof that governments and nations were unable to provide meaningful relief for the critical challenges and issues of life, or that past successes guaranteed future triumphs, the bishop believed that the youth of society constituted the best hope for the future of the church and the world. He called upon churches to partner and collaborate with homes to “understand the thoughts, feelings, interests, and actions of the youths committed to their care.” With a view to making Christianity “real, practical, and meaningful,” Sabbath-Day Adventist youth systematically visited the sick and suffering, leaving behind cheer and goodwill. The New York congregation often partnered with other congregations in these humanitarian services, realizing that in unity there is strength.⁹⁸

⁹⁷*United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, June 1939, 5.

⁹⁸*United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, November 1931, 11.

**Seventh-day Adventists and Sabbath-Day Adventists:
A Comparative Analysis**

James K. Humphrey and the United Sabbath-Day Adventists may have splintered from the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in name, but not in theology, ecclesiology, or church polity and organization. The bishop's troubles with the Seventh-day Adventist church did not center around these elements, a fact that made for much similarity between Sabbath-Day Adventists and Seventh-day Adventists.⁹⁹ Sabbath-Day Adventists did hammer out a set of "fundamental beliefs," frowning, like their Seventh-day Adventist counterparts, upon the notion of dogmas and creeds. They opted for the less problematic term "Fundamental Beliefs" to designate the set of biblical truths and doctrines they considered critical mass for membership in the organization, and a comparison of the Fundamental Beliefs of the two religious groups shows many similarities. Yet it is possible that Sabbath-Day Adventists do not believe that the prophetic gift was bestowed on Ellen G. White, something the group's Fundamental Beliefs do not address. Little editing or updating of their fundamental beliefs has been done by Sabbath-Day Adventists since their adoption. This is also true of their Constitution, which was ratified by 1936.¹⁰⁰

The idea that Sabbath-Day Adventists do not believe Ellen G. White was an

⁹⁹Indeed, many members of Humphrey's United New York congregation have maintained cordial relations with members of the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist church. Throughout the history of the two congregations, some individuals from the same family attended one church, while other family members attended the other. Additionally, especially up until the late 1970s, many youth would attend the divine worship service at one church in the morning, and the youth meeting at the other church in the afternoon. La Condre, interview.

¹⁰⁰Kevin L. Jenkins, telephone conversation with the author, November 20, 2000.

authentic prophet may have been fueled by Humphrey himself. To be sure, Humphrey initially believed in the authority of Ellen G. White, who was a contemporary of his for almost two decades of his association with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. While it is uncertain whether the two ever met,¹⁰¹ it is true that Humphrey became increasingly disillusioned with White's counsel on the race issue. It is also true that there was one significant development in the bishop's teaching and preaching after his break with the Seventh-day Adventist organization. Noticeably absent was an emphasis on Ellen G. White as an authoritative prophet sent by God with an urgent message for earth's last generation. Humphrey never quoted Ellen G. White to augment the material in his church's Sabbath School booklet. This fact alone made the publication stand out in sharp contradistinction to the Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly published by the Seventh-day Adventists, which is always buttressed with quotations from Ellen White. More significantly, Humphrey, unlike most Seventh-day Adventist preachers, never used Ellen White in any of his sermons. For him the Bible was the only source he needed, and it required no outside interpretation or elaboration. The bishop painstakingly stressed the difference between the writings of Ellen G. White and the Holy Scriptures, arguing that White was to be used and understood as a reference only. For him, White's works could never approximate the canonicity of the Holy Bible. Humphrey did so good a job at explaining the difference between the writings of White and the Bible that some

¹⁰¹ Given Humphrey's involvement on many of the denomination's conference, union, and General Conference committees, it is reasonable to assume that he may have seen her.

members concluded their leader neither believed in nor accepted her works.¹⁰²

Others have asserted that the founding pastor's position on Ellen G. White is the main reason the Sabbath-Day Adventists have never been able to reconcile with Seventh-day Adventists.¹⁰³

Sabbath-Day Adventists were comfortable with most of the doctrines and teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist church, their theological beliefs not just approximating those of their former associates but mirroring them. Sabbath-Day Adventists accepted the teaching of the Holy Spirit as the third member of the Trinity, emphasizing that a belief in, and, more important, a reception of the Holy Spirit, did not entail glossalia¹⁰⁴ or the emotional outbursts that others claimed it did. They believed in the imminency of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone, the efficacy of Christian stewardship, and the power of the gospel to transform lives and characters through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Obedience to the Ten Commandments of God continued to receive special emphasis from them, as did faith in Jesus Christ. Like Christians everywhere, they desired to see the gospel preached around the world, believing that transformed lives on earth offered a glimpse and foretaste of what life in the world to come would be like.¹⁰⁵

Like Seventh-day Adventists, United Sabbath-Day Adventists believed that

¹⁰²La Condre; Simmonds; La Beet; interviews.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Glossalia is the term used for speaking in tongues.

¹⁰⁵*United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, November 1931, 3.

the gospel of the kingdom was to be preached to everyone as a prelude to the second advent of Jesus Christ. The objective of the gospel is to prepare people to live at peace with God in a society ruled by God. Given first to the Jews, the gospel was then directed to the Gentiles, who, after two millennia, had failed as miserably as the Jews to execute the mandate. Segregation and discrimination were two of the evidences of this failure, Sabbath-Day Adventists held. Yet Sabbath-Day Adventists took their theology of the gospel farther. They held that as had happened with the Jews, the gospel was retrieved from the Gentiles and given to the dark-skinned peoples of the world, who, fully aware that civilization was in its eleventh hour, were working feverishly to alert all people that “the coming king is at the door.”¹⁰⁶

Not surprisingly, the sanctity of the Sabbath was an item on which both groups agreed. While Humphrey contended that Sabbath keeping did not inherently contain any soteriological or salvific properties, he believed that it was the single most distinguishing feature of his group. He often reminded members of this fact, imploring them to exercise maximum care with the start and conclusion of the Sabbath, when people are prone to violate the Sabbath. In encouraging greater fidelity in Sabbath keeping, Humphrey cautioned against the temptation to lapse into spiritual pride or the “holier-than-thou” attitude of many Christians who fall victim to a “works theology.” Yet he asserted that more faithfulness in Sabbath keeping would engender conversions among neighbors, whom the bishop believed were hungry for truth. Getting people to keep the Sabbath was what Humphrey was all about. As such, the spiritual leader of the Sabbath-Day Adventists preferred that the heretofore

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 2, 3.

unchurched joined his congregation, not former Seventh-day Adventists disgruntled with their organization.¹⁰⁷

An emphasis was placed on Bible study by United Sabbath-Day Adventists, who bemoaned the unacceptably high level of biblical illiteracy among the population in general, and youth in particular. Members took special note of the results of a test conducted some time earlier among the “best families” which revealed an ignorance of biblical knowledge thought to be elementary by Sabbath-Day Adventists. Believing that knowledge of the Holy Scriptures benefitted people both spiritually and socially, United Sabbath-Day Adventists sought to engender a love for the Bible among its members by offering a plethora of opportunities for its study. More importantly, Humphrey anchored his preaching in the Bible, unapologetically pointing members to the Bible’s primacy and potency, and reminding them that the Bible supplied powerful antidotes for the vicissitudes and voids of life.¹⁰⁸

One tool used to encourage Sabbath-Day Adventists to study the Bible was *The Sabbath School Tutor*. Authored by Humphrey, and with the text “Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my Path—Psalm 119:105,” *The Sabbath School Tutor* was a virtual spinoff of the Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly of the Seventh-day Adventists. Published quarterly, its lessons consisted of a main passage of Scripture to be memorized, and a series of questions followed by a verse of Scripture which supplied the answers. Little supplementary material was used, although, from

¹⁰⁷ *United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, June 1939, 4. Speaking more on the issue, Humphrey claimed that former Seventh-day Adventists made “bad members.”

¹⁰⁸ *United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, November 1931, 14.

the way the material was presented, one could detect the influence of outside sources. The lessons were well-written and attractively presented, each lesson ending with a thought provoking question on a practical element of faith, and a reminder that members not forget to support the Thirteenth Sabbath offering.¹⁰⁹ Each Sabbath School *Tutor* contained a review of the quarter's lessons, and a series of lessons for the youth, too.¹¹⁰

Sabbath-Day Adventists also believed in the primacy and power of prayer. For them, God was capable of doing anything, including restoring health to the sick. God was an unchanging God, who, to the extent of the faith exercised in him, could repeat any of the miraculous feats recorded in sacred Scripture. An objective of United Sabbath-Day Adventists was relating to God in such a way that they would be in a position to receive from him spiritual help and physical healing. Believing that the human being is an integrated whole, the bishop sought to bring spiritual, social, and physical healing to his members. In keeping with the Biblical injunction found in James 5:12, the bishop prayed for the sick, anointing them as he laid hands on them. Humphrey also believed in the power of God to bring deliverance to demon-possessed people. Yet the bishop's anointing and liberating services were not like the flamboyant ones practiced by some of the African American preachers of the era.¹¹¹

According to members of the congregation, uncommon phenomena were

¹⁰⁹Like Seventh-day Adventists, Sabbath-Day Adventists divided the calendar into four quarters, the last Sabbath of each quarter being designated Thirteenth Sabbath. On this Sabbath, a special offering was collected for missionary endeavors around the world.

¹¹⁰*The Sabbath School Tutor*, July-September, 1944, Vol, 16, No. 3, 7-14.

¹¹¹La Condre, interview.

known to occur at New York United. On one occasion while Humphrey was preaching about spiritualism, a strange figure assumed a position behind him and began to tap him on the shoulder. Humphrey tried brushing the hand away, finally spinning around to see who was trying to distract or interrupt him. As mysteriously as the figure had appeared, it disappeared. On another occasion an impeccably dressed man entered the church as the bishop was preaching, sitting down on a chair behind him on the rostrum. Tall and handsome, the stranger, who vanished without a trace during the service, caused a commotion among the young women. Members interpreted both incidents as extraordinary phenomena orchestrated by the devil himself.¹¹²

In matters of lifestyle, Sabbath-Day Adventists, did not always live what they preached and believed. For example, in the area of dress members early demonstrated a stubborn independence, opting to wear jewelry, the absence of which was a hallmark of Seventh-day Adventism.¹¹³

United Sabbath-Day Adventists continued more than the doctrinal traditions of the Seventh-day Adventists, perpetuating also many of the programs, ministries, and organizational structure of their former associates. For example, the Sabbath-Day Adventists continued the annual Fall Week of Prayer, publishing the readings for the week in their official organ, *The United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, in much the same way as Seventh-day Adventists published their readings in the *Review and*

¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³Samuels, interview. The bishop was jolted when his daughter showed up at church one day with her ears pierced. Thereafter, their relationship suffered. In time, Ruth stopped attending church altogether, even though she lived across the street.

Herald, their official organ. Yet it was in structuring their congregations like the Seventh-day Adventists that Humphrey showed a disinclination to veer away from his former church in discernible and distinguishable ways. The religious services and ministries of United Sabbath-Day Adventists were like those of Seventh-day Adventists. In addition, Humphrey grouped his congregations together in conferences, calling his flagship group in New York City the General Conference. Like Seventh-day Adventists, he convened General Conference sessions, holding his sessions annually for the first decade of the organization's existence. To be sure, other Protestant organizations are structured along similar lines to this day. Still, given Humphrey's experience within the Seventh-day Adventist organization, and the deep-seated feelings of disappointment and disillusionment engendered as a result, his decision to maintain so much of the Seventh-day Adventist church is noteworthy. Indeed, the similarities between the two religious bodies have created confusion among the uninformed, and not a few individuals have associated with the United Sabbath-Day Adventists thinking they had joined the Seventh-day Adventist church.¹¹⁴

In the end, Humphrey's troubles with the Seventh-day Adventist church did not center around the denomination's theology or with its ecclesiology, a fact that saw his preaching remain mainstream Adventist. His orthodoxy did not veer much to the left or right of Seventh-day Adventism's fundamental beliefs. In spite of the negative experiences he had had in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, James

¹¹⁴The fact that Sabbath-Day Adventists abbreviate their name as Seventh-day Adventists do (SDA) has contributed to the confusion. There is no evidence that Sabbath-Day Adventists have done so precisely for this purpose.

K. Humphrey never publicly condemned or spoke ill of the denomination. In the pulpit he was all dignity and decorum. The bishop never used the “sacred desk” as a vantage point from which to lob verbal assaults or denunciations. When the situation warranted it, Humphrey did use the pulpit to deny allegations of wrongdoing leveled at him. He also tried to clear up some of the controversy surrounding Ellen White’s counsels regarding African Americans from the pulpit. Even then, he was not harsh or accusatory but civil, choosing to remain busy “preaching the word.”¹¹⁵

Summary

The Sabbath-Day Adventists emerged at one of the most ominous eras in American history. With the country caught up in the throes of the Great Depression, the new religious body experienced “Hard Times” economically and organizationally, and challenges without and within tested the will of Sabbath-Day Adventists to be a viable alternative to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. Yet the energy and excitement that often accompany the creation or launch of a new organization propelled the group forward.

James Kemuel Humphrey, not surprisingly, was the first leader of the group, almost immediately assuming the title of “Bishop.” Humphrey managed the new organization closely, superintending all facets of the group’s operations. He is remembered as suave, intelligent, and visionary by members, and as a Bible-based, Christ-centered preacher. Throughout the 1930s, Sabbath-Day Adventists gave birth to congregations in the United States and the West Indies, hammering out a set of

¹¹⁵La Beet, interview.

fundamental beliefs and a constitution and staging elaborate General Conference sessions along the way. The infant group succeeded in attracting middle-class individuals as well as the poor to itself, and members state it engendered among them a sense of community and belonging. The group not only offered sanctuary and support to the African Americans from the South and Caribbean in search of meaning in the city, but provided them with opportunities for self-expression and self-determination. It especially prized youth, creating contexts for nurture and professional growth for them.

James K. Humphrey's preaching remained, for the most part, mainstream Adventism after he splintered from the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. Additionally, the structure and operation of the Sabbath-Day Adventist organization reflected that of its precursors. To be sure, Sabbath-Day Adventists promulgated a brand of the gospel that lifted up the Black presence in the Bible.

Yet Sabbath-Day Adventism did not exhibit a heightened sensitivity to the crucial social and political events that were its context. Humphrey's understanding of the Great Depression, World War II, the start of the Cold War, and the Korean conflict reflected a conservative, even fundamentalist, interpretation. The bishop may not have been of the "pie-in-sky, sweet by-and-by" mindset, but he did encourage members to focus on the imminent second coming of Christ, when all injustices would be addressed and an age free of discrimination and segregation would be ushered in.

CHAPTER VII

THE SABBATH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH AFTER HUMPHREY

James K. Humphrey gave up the leadership of the Sabbath-Day Adventist organization in 1947, five years before his death. In this concluding chapter, I explore the post-Humphrey church, analyzing its strengths and weaknesses. I begin with a summary of attempts at bringing Sabbath-Day Adventists and Seventh-day Adventists back together, following this with a look at the pastors who succeeded Humphrey and a review of the challenges they faced and the triumphs they experienced. The chapter concludes with an examination of the social and political context of the Sabbath-Day Adventists and an evaluation of the group.

Attempts at Reconciliation

Almost from the moment they splintered, attempts to reconcile Sabbath-Day Adventists with Seventh-day Adventists have been made by both groups. One major factor that frustrated the early attempts at reconciliation was the property Sabbath-Day Adventists believed was rightfully theirs. Property ownership had played no small role in the break of 1929, and it was only after the local conference, union and General Conference officials had agreed on the night of November 2, 1929 to turn over the title of First Harlem's building that they had been allowed to leave the premises unharmed. After temporarily getting the property back as the result of a lower court's ruling, Humphrey's group jealously guarded it. The new religious body

fundamentally disagreed with the policy of Seventh-day Adventists that the local conference should hold the title to all property belonging to its constituent churches.

The attempts at reconciliation intensified after the death of Humphrey in 1952.¹ A couple of years after the bishop's death, William Samuels, Humphrey's successor as bishop, went so far as to invite a delegation from the Northeastern Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to make a case for reconciliation before his congregation.² The move was watershed in that it represented the first time a Seventh-day Adventist representative had met with Sabbath-Day Adventists to intentionally try to broker an agreement between the two religious bodies. Fully aware of the magnitude of the moment, the conference president himself appeared at New York United Sabbath-Day Adventist Church, delivering the sermon that Sabbath morning. In spite of his theme of love and forgiveness, and an emphasis on disregarding past misunderstandings, the Sabbath-Day Adventist congregation opted to maintain the status quo.³

Samuels' attempts to return his group to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination was frustrated not because of theological differences, but because of

¹Before his death, Humphrey visited Seventh-day Adventist churches. Worshipping at the Ephesus SDA Church one Sabbath, he was invited to the rostrum. Why Humphrey was at Ephesus and not New York United that Sabbath is unknown. Was he thinking of or nursing thoughts of returning to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination? Probably not. Humphrey was retired and had given up the leadership of New York United at the time he worshiped at Ephesus. Still, Humphrey's presence at Ephesus shows that at the very least he was not averse to worshipping in an African American Seventh-day Adventist congregation.

²The Northeastern Conference is the regional conference comprising the states of New York, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, Massachusetts, and Connecticut.

³Mesar and Dybdahl, 53.

matters of church polity. A faction of the New York United Sabbath-Day congregation, still seething over the loss of the church's property almost two decades earlier, refused to accept Seventh-day Adventist policy on the issue of property ownership. A majority also disagreed with Seventh-day Adventist General Conference financial policies toward the local conference, holding that they were restrictive and perhaps even unfair. Yet the main reason United Sabbath-Day Adventists refused to return to the Seventh-day Adventist organization was their belief that Black conferences lacked the autonomy and power James K. Humphrey had envisioned they would have. The late bishop had pictured regional conferences as the answer to the absence of self-determination among African American Seventh-day Adventists, a dream Sabbath-Day Adventists believed had not come true in the present structure.⁴

Attempts to reconcile United Sabbath-Day Adventists with Seventh-day Adventists decreased after the former group rejected the plea of the local Seventh-day Adventist conference president, and any possibility of the merger happening was all but completely erased when the New York United congregation joined a small, fledgling Adventist organization in 1956. Together, they became the Unification Association of Christian Sabbath keepers. Asserting that it had branches in the West Indies and as far away as West Africa, the organization was a loosely knit coalition struggling to maintain an identity and to convey a sense of mission. Samuels, bishop of the United Sabbath-Day Adventists when the merger occurred, immediately became its titular head, and delivered the keynote addresses at several of the

⁴Ibid., 80.

organization's yearly celebrations. Terminally optimistic, Samuels always preached Bible-based messages seasoned with hope and courage.⁵

Today, the pastor of New York United has as one of his major objectives the return of the congregation to the Seventh-day Adventist organization. A former Seventh-day Adventist minister and youth departmental director of the South Central Conference of Seventh-day Adventists with headquarters in Nashville, Tennessee, Princeton Holt is a graduate of Oakwood College and a native New Yorker who grew up in Brooklyn hearing about the United Sabbath-Day Adventists. He accepted the invitation to pastor the church because of its strategic location in Harlem and his passion for urban ministry. Holt is a creative, visionary leader courageous enough to challenge members to focus on the future, and unashamed to point out mistakes and flaws in the group's history. That he desires to see the group once more a part of the Seventh-day Adventist organization is no secret. Yet Holt knows that he faces daunting challenges, not the least of which is the deep-seated attitudes of distrust and hostility a feisty minority still has for the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.⁶

Post-Humphrey Sabbath-Day Adventist Leadership

Humphrey's last days were difficult ones that are shrouded in uncertainty, conjecture and suspicion. He succumbed to the encroachments of glaucoma, becoming legally blind toward the end of his life. Ernie Chandler remembers her husband, who was First Elder of the Ephesus Seventh-day Church at the time, taking

⁵Ibid., 54.

⁶Princeton Holt, interview with author, tape recording, New York, New York, August 11, 2000.

Humphrey for medical attention on a few occasions, and says that one rumor making the rounds in Humphrey's twilight was that his family had threatened to terminate his pension if he were to return to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.⁷ At the very least, the rumor betrays the murkiness that covers Humphrey's last days.

Yet the challenges Humphrey's physical health presented paled in comparison to those he encountered in evaluating his life and accomplishments. Simply put, Humphrey died a sad man. His spouse of almost half a century having pre-deceased him, his daughter from that union having long terminated her association with the United Sabbath-Day Adventists, and with his familial situation the subject of conjecture and allegation, Humphrey often felt alone and misunderstood. On occasions, he confessed he felt he had not achieved his objective in establishing an independent religious organization that provided African Americans with the power and self-determination they lacked in ones run by Whites. Ironically, for reasons that are unclear, the bishop's funeral service did not take place at the New York United church facility.⁸

After Humphrey, New York United was led by William A. Samuels from 1947 to 1987. An Antiguan who had moved to New York City in the 1910s, Samuels was married by Humphrey in 1919 and was a member of First Harlem SDA Church throughout the "Roaring Twenties." He was a carpenter who served the church in various capacities, including those of usher, Sabbath School teacher, and local elder. Samuels aligned himself with Humphrey during the pastor's problems with the

⁷Chandler, telephone conversation.

⁸La Condre, interview.

Seventh-day Adventists, and became his “right-hand man” when Humphrey established the Sabbath-Day Adventist organization. The major accomplishment of his forty-year tenure as leader of the Sabbath-Day Adventists was the erection of New York United’s present facility. Yet New York United lost a significant number of members over the move to 110th Street because tithe funds were used to build the property.⁹

A succession of “first day” ministers followed Samuels.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, the organization has experienced difficulty bringing credentialed or licensed Seventh-day Adventist ministers to pastor Sabbath-Day Adventist congregations. The “first day” ministers were more preaching or pulpit pastors, fulfilling the need for the congregation to be spiritually fed. The day-to-day operation and strategic planning of the church remained in the hands of the Board of Trustees, made up today mostly of women. This arrangement may have worked for both entities, but failed to engender a sense of belonging on the part of the “first day” clergy. Additionally, it created problems in terms of their doctrinal and theological beliefs, not to mention their preaching at New York United.¹¹

William Pointer, Jr. was the first of these “first day” pastors, leading the New York United congregation from 1987 to 1992. A charismatic personality, Pointer sought to inject life into the worship service by introducing up-beat music and other

⁹Hunter, interview.

¹⁰A “first day” minister is a pastor of a different religious persuasion, usually one that does not hold that Saturday is the Bible Sabbath. Like the majority of Protestants, these ministers accept Sunday, the first day of the week, as the Bible Sabbath, professedly in honor of the resurrected Christ.

¹¹Kevin Jenkins, telephone conversation with the author, November 10 2000.

elements that were averse to the taste of some conservative seniors, a sizeable number of whom comprised the congregation. The result was that the seniors balked, and Pointer, unable to effect a change in them, was muscled out. In the aftermath of his departure, attendance at New York United plummeted, with most of the youth leaving for various “Sunday keeping” churches.¹²

Following Pointer was Berwyn La Mar, who says he was an “interim” pastor for about a year and a half. Born in Georgia and with degrees from Faith Baptist Theological Seminary and Louisiana Baptist University, La Mar was an assistant pastor of another independent Seventh-day Adventist group in Brooklyn when he received the call to lead New York United. He says that he did not know about the history of the church until he began serving, and that he found out information as he went along. La Mar states that attendance averaged thirty during his short stint, and that he was able to baptize one individual, a young man from Africa. Currently pastor of the Greater Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church in Waycross, Georgia, La Mar found the people at New York United loving and supportive, though not disposed to discourse about reconciliation with the Seventh-day Adventists. Additionally, they were “Seventh-day Adventist” in every way but with respect to the writings of Ellen G. White. According to La Mar, one reason they believed Ellen G. White was not inspired was because the judge, in ruling on their property in the 1930s, had stated that Mrs. White was not a prophet.¹³

La Mar was asked to leave because his commuting back and forth to Georgia

¹²Hunter, interview.

¹³Berwyn La Mar, telephone conversation with the author, March 4, 2001.

posed challenges the membership could not accept. His successor was Howard Brooks, formerly a Black Jew who wore and preached in ostensibly authentic Jewish religious garb. Brooks, who served from 1993 to 1996, ran up against opposition over the number of times the church wanted to have Communion services. He wanted to celebrate the service annually, not quarterly as members desired. When a compromise could not be brokered, Brooks departed.

When Kevin L. Jenkins was invited by the Trustee Board to serve as pastor in 1996, he met a congregation mired in the past and still furious because of the treatment Humphrey had received from the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. So strong was the anti-Seventh-day Adventist sentiment among the congregation, that the first question posed to Jenkins at his job interview was whether he had any intentions of attempting a rapprochement between the two religious entities. Jenkins, himself a former Seventh-day Adventist who had been defrocked for alleged improprieties, was struck by the pall of death hanging over the premises. When he arrived, weekly attendance averaged thirty to forty, peaking at 100 for a Homecoming Celebration that saw many former members return to recount tales of the Humphrey era.¹⁴ Jenkins found the stationary of the church “archaic looking,” the carpeting in the sanctuary grey and dirty, and the membership unsure of its identity. The congregation was a classic example of sheep without a shepherd. The church seemed to have lost both its vision and mission. Yet what troubled the pastor the most were the exorbitant dues New York United was paying to the Unification

¹⁴ A gospel concert held in conjunction with the Homecoming Celebration attracted almost 300 people.

Association of Christian Sabbath keepers.¹⁵

Try as he might, Jenkins could see no substantive benefit coming to New York United as a result of its association with this group. To be sure, New York United served as the headquarters for the association, and hosted at least one of the group's annual conclaves while Jenkins served as pastor. Yet the Sabbath School study guide that his congregation received from the association was a hodgepodge of Bible texts lacking a theme or focus. Certain that the time for a separation had come, Jenkins convinced the Trustee Board to opt out of membership in the Unification Association of Christian Sabbath keepers.¹⁶

An Oakwood College graduate with a Doctor of Ministry degree from United Theological Seminary, the young, visionary pastor plunged into his tenure with determination, seeking to transform first the sanctuary from a cold, uninviting room to a bright, cheery auditorium. New carpeting was installed, walls were painted, and, in keeping with his Afrocentrism, kinte cloth decorations were brought in to adorn the pulpit and rostrum. Yet his most significant accomplishment was convincing the membership to return to the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Lesson Study Guides as their source for small group interaction and study during the Sabbath School.

The twenty-first century brought with it new leadership to New York United. Princeton Holt arrived in January 2000 determined to effect a revival. Within a year he revamped the worship service, utilizing more music and audience participation,

¹⁵Jenkins, interview.

¹⁶Jenkins argued that getting out of the Association would save the church money it could not afford to waste, and the congregation accepted his argument. Ibid.

and early in 2001 he superintended a watershed event—the ordination of the church’s first woman elder. On January 6, 2001, as church officers were installed, and as the Communion Service was conducted, Agatha Phillips was ordained as an elder. The spirit of celebration and worship was high that day, even though attendance was down due to a snow storm a few days earlier that had beset the city. Members seemed to be genuinely in love with Holt and his family, whose wife and daughter preached the morning sermon that Sabbath. Holt’s vision calls for the church to implement an aggressive urban ministry that will transform the area, and he is optimistic that the greatest days of the church are before it.¹⁷ In February, 2001, seven individuals were baptized, evidence to the new life permeating New York United.

Contextualizing the Sabbath-Day Adventists

Almost from the instant people of African descent in America began to appropriate the symbols of the Christian religion their European masters practiced and taught them, their brand of Christianity exhibited a conflicting strain and contradictory nature.¹⁸ Eugene Genovese calls the phenomenon the “dialectic of accommodation and resistance.”¹⁹ On the one hand, their religion was a retooled Christianity that provided emotional and psychological strength to live in an alien,

¹⁷Princeton Holt, conversation with the author, January 6, 2001.

¹⁸The contradictory nature of African American religion is given full treatment by Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer in *African-American Religion in the Twentieth Century: Varieties of Protest and Accommodation* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992).

¹⁹Genovese, 659.

unfriendly world. On the other hand, their Christianity was a veritable form of self-expression and a vehicle of resistance to the discrimination of the White-dominated culture. African American religion did not oscillate between these two poles, holding them instead in dynamic, dialectical tension. Unarguably, United Sabbath-Day Adventists exhibited this contradictory nature of African American religion. In holding on to several of the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination as well as elements of its organizational structure, Humphrey's group is an example of the juxtaposition of accommodation and activism characteristic of African American religion.

In his historical overview of ministry in the Black church, E. Forrest Harris, Jr., offers the following division: (a) the pre-Civil War Black Church; (b) the Formative Period, from the Civil War through Reconstruction; (c) the Maturation Period, from Reconstruction to the beginning of the Great Migration; (d) the Expansion-Renaissance Period, from the Great Migration to World War II; (e) the Passive Protest Period, from World War II to 1955; and (f) the Radical-Reassertion Period, since 1955. The period during which Humphrey labored as a Seventh-day Adventist and later a Sabbath-Day Adventist minister was the Expansion-Renaissance Period.²⁰

Describing a watershed era in the social history of ministry in Black churches, Gayraud S. Wilmore says that it was during this period that people of African descent in America needed the church more than ever. Contending that by World War I Blacks were more segregated and discriminated against than they had been when the

²⁰Forrest E. Harris, Jr., *Ministry for Social Crisis: Theology and Praxis in the Black Church Tradition* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1993), 19.

Fugitive Slave law was enacted, he cites an “unprecedented wave of lynchings, Ku Klux Klan and other anti-Negro hate groups, violence and dire poverty in the black community” as reasons for the deluge of Blacks seeking asylum in the North. As a consequence, Black churches were hard pressed to provide sanctuary to the newly arrived, some of whom turned up at their doorsteps with all their belongings.²¹

From the last decade of the nineteenth century to about World War II, African American religion, never a homogenous, monolithic phenomenon but a dynamic, creative force that expresses itself in a rich variety of ways, exploded in a number of forms. Mainstream Black denominations saw many of their members leave to join store front groups that seemed to meet the needs of the thousands of Blacks then pouring into America’s cities, especially those in the North. The sheer diversity of these groups testify to their fierce independence, a fact that receives additional backing when the names of these groups are brought into focus.²² Yet not all African Americans left predominantly White congregations to join or to form Black ones.

Why did some African Americans remain with predominantly White congregations? Why did some Blacks establish congregations affiliated with White-controlled religious groups? How did these Black congregations adapt the content of these White-controlled religious organizations to the African American experience? Baer and Singer pondered these questions, failing to come up with credible answers. Noting that Blacks belonging to White-controlled denominations fell into three broad

²¹Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black and Presbyterian: The Heritage and the Hope* (Philadelphia: Geneva Press, 1983), 43.

²²Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1983), 152.

categories—middle class who tended to join the mainstream denominations, new middle-class who tended to join unconventional religious groups, and working class Blacks who tended to join White-controlled sects like Jehovah’s Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists²³—the authors stress that Blacks in these religious bodies were still predominantly members of all-Black congregations.²⁴ Citing Du Bois, Baer and Singer claim that in the early twentieth century most African American congregations of White-controlled denominations pitched their appeal to elite Blacks, and that all-Black denominations catered more to the middle and lower-middle class.²⁵ This was not the case with either First Harlem or the United Sabbath-Day Adventists. Yet First Harlem’s giving patterns may have been due to the importance Seventh-day Adventists ascribe to stewardship, a concept the denomination view as contemplating much more than financial contributions. And Humphrey’s independent

²³The debate whether Seventh-day Adventism is a cult has raged for years, with church leaders vigorously denying the charge that the denomination is a cult. Walter Martin has given extensive study to the issue. See Walter Martin, *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960) and *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1997). In the latter, Martin devotes a chapter to “The Puzzle of Seventh-day Adventism,” saying “it is perfectly possible to be a Seventh-day Adventist and be a true follower of Jesus Christ despite certain heterodox concepts” (517). See also Richard Kyle, *The Religious Fringe: A History of Alternative Religions in America* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), in which the author says that Seventh-day Adventists are “an established, institutionalized sect that is set off from society by certain peculiar beliefs and practices.” Included in those beliefs are the Sabbath and dietary practices (151). For Kyle, Seventh-day Adventism is a sect, though one that possesses cultic characteristics. H. J. Bergman, *The Religious Fringe: Cults, Cultists and Seventh-day Adventists* (College Place, Wash.: Walla Walla College, 1991) argues that whether Seventh-day Adventists are a cult or sect is not as important as why cults exist and the reasons people join them.

²⁴*African American Religion in the Twentieth Century*, 103.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 49.

movement struggled financially from its inception not because it catered to middle to lower-class Blacks, many of whom were expatriates from the West Indies, but because Adventists look askance at independent movements. Do African Americans who belong to White-controlled religious bodies tend to be less activist than African American in Black-controlled ones? Not so, according to many scholars.²⁶

In an attempt to understand the religious diversity evident in African American religion, Baer and Singer proposed a typology of Black sectarianism, coming up with a four-cell matrix. Each cell represents a different type of religious sect. Mainstream denominations accept the cultural norms of the broader society, aspire to obtain a piece of the American pie, and primarily draw members from the middle class who have achieved a measure of social legitimacy and stability. Messianic-Nationalist sects combine religious beliefs with a goal of achieving political, economic, social, and cultural autonomy. Founded by charismatic individuals whom followers tend to view as specially gifted leaders, messianic-nationalism touts a glorious Black past and a future age of accomplishment for Blacks. Conversionist sects lean toward an otherworldly apoliticalism, eschewing activism. They prize conversion and sanctification, and are often criticized as being escapist. Thaumaturgical sects utilize the magical as a means of achieving such socially acceptable goals as wealth and health. Like mainstream denominations, they

²⁶Ibid., 108. See also, August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880–1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), 222.

generally accept the cultural norms of the larger society.²⁷ In this typology, United Sabbath-Day Adventists fall into the messianic-nationalist category.

United Sabbath-Day Adventists, like their progenitors and counterparts, the Seventh-day Adventists, resist being identified as a cult, holding that they are in the mainstream of evangelical Christianity.²⁸ Yet one reason Sabbath-Day Adventists may have flourished during the 1930s was because of the social climate permeating Black America. According to Miles Mark Fischer, during the era “some unorthodox religious group which makes a definite appeal to Negroes” was to be found “almost in every center, particularly urban.”²⁹ Exploiting the slowness of the organized Christian churches to address the spiritual, emotional and social needs of the urban masses, these groups were led, for the most part, by unlettered individuals who eschewed the historical critical method of biblical interpretation popular at the time and appealed directly to Scripture in search of material for the proof-text kind of preaching for which they were known. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 55–64. See also Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer, “Toward a Typology of Black Sectarianism as a Response to Racial Stratification,” in *African-American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*, edited by Timothy E. Fulop and Albert J. Raboteau (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 257–276.

²⁸ The terms cult and sect are used pejoratively. Yet, As Joseph Washington, Jr. reminds us, historically religions were cults before they evolved into sects and then churches. Christianity itself began as a Jewish cult. It then became a persecuted sect before growing into a denomination and finally into a triumphant church. Joseph R. Washington, Jr., *Black Sects and Cults* (New York: University Press of America, 1986), 1, 2. A recent contribution on the phenomenon of cults is James R. Lewis, *Cults in America* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 1998).

²⁹ Miles Mark Fischer, “Organized Religion and the Cults,” in *Afro-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness*, Milton C. Sernett, ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 392.

contend that this was an era characterized by “a relative quietism and an apparent vacuum of church leadership” into which cult leaders flowed with promises of utopia.³⁰ Cults and sects met in store-fronts and other unpretentious assembly halls, often operating social ministries out of them.

Joseph R. Washington, Jr. states that sectarianism is the response to power desired and denied, adding that the Black “cult-type” was not just a religious movement, but a political, social, and economic force as well that spoke of ultimate Black triumph over principalities and powers. It was a “call to new life,” and “a call to new power” in this present world. Though they created an abundance of myths, they themselves lived in a world devoid of myths. Their central and ultimate power was God, who empowered their leaders to transcend the immediate materiality of the world with transcendent, supernatural force.³¹

Arthur Huff Fauset posits that people were drawn to the cults because of (a) a desire to be closer to the supernatural, (b) the charismatic personality of the leader, and (c) race consciousness. Additionally, they wanted to rid themselves of physical and emotional illness. The first three of Fauset’s reasons seem to apply to the United Sabbath-Day Adventists. They desired “a closer walk with the Lord,” the articles that appeared in the *Messenger* speaking to that desire and need, and race consciousness was a factor that drew people to the Sabbath-Day Adventists. After all, the group had splintered from the Seventh-day Adventists on that issue. Lastly, Humphrey’s charismatic personality was no small draw to the group.

³⁰C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 121.

³¹Washington, *Black Sects and Cults*, 140, 13–15.

That Humphrey had had problems with the law and may have spent time in jail on charges that were ultimately dropped in no way detracted from his appeal or discounted his influence. Not a few of the cult leaders of the day had run afoul of the law. Yet, according to Fischer, it was uncommon for a cult leader to be “adjudged guilty of anything other than insanity.” According to him, one cult leader was arrested twenty-six times, six times for insanity, and another, Father Chester Talliafero, founder of Saints’ Rest in Philadelphia, was thrice arrested for gross misconduct “only to be detained in an asylum from which he was released.”³² Cult leaders were charismatic personalities whose appeal depended in part on physical and psychological idiosyncracies, if not quirks. Humphrey’s bearing helped set him apart as a specially chosen vessel of God, and his struggles with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination only added to his allure.

Arthur Huff Fauset also has pointed out that the penchant of Black churches to split in the early part of the twentieth century was due in part to their nationalist tendencies. Especially when the groups existed as “cults,” nationalism often eclipsed a focus on more traditional and widely accepted Christian tenets, including foundational doctrines like the Trinity.³³ A distinguishing feature of these groups was the captivating, if not transfixing personality of the leader, an element of the United Sabbath-Day Adventists.

The most celebrated Harlem religious leader during the 1930s was Father Divine, or George Baker, as he was named at birth. More than any other African

³²Fischer, 397.

³³Arthur Huff Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, (New York: Octagon Books, 1970), 9, 76, 107–109.

American religious leader at the time, Father Divine personified and epitomized the “Black Gods of the Metropolis” tradition. Divine’s Peace Mission achieved legendary, perhaps even mythical, status in New York City. Allegedly, a letter was once addressed to him simply as: “God, Harlem, U.S.A.,” the United States Postal Service delivering the piece of correspondence to Father Divine.³⁴ Yet Divine’s fame and notoriety was challenged by Daddy Grace, the most flamboyant and controversial of the “Black Gods of the Metropolis.” Grace, who was born in Cape Verde Islands, established the United House of Prayer For All People in Massachusetts in 1921. More messiah than nationalist, Grace held up himself as the liberator African Americans had been looking for, appealing to them to turn to him for salvation. Still, Grace never promoted himself as any deity. His penchant for flashy jewelry, shoulder-length flowing hair, and fancy suits did set him apart, as did the assortment of household goods and toiletries bearing his name that his organization promoted.

There are stark differences between Humphrey and these “Black Gods of the Metropolis,” the most obvious being that at no time did Humphrey conceive of himself as a messiah or deliverer. Humphrey had no delusions of grandeur, and never called himself God or the son of God in the theological sense. He eschewed the life of flamboyance and ostentation. He was never carried on the shoulders of followers, driven in a horse-drawn carriage, or chauffeured in a limousine. To be sure, Humphrey was urbane and suave, but empire building was never on his agenda. His book was the Bible, and he remained a Bible student and preacher to the end. He

³⁴Two excellent works on Father Divine are Robert Weisbrot’s *Father Divine and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1983), and Jill Watts’ *God, Harlem, U.S.A.: The Father Divine Story* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

kept the attention of his members riveted on the Bible, and lifted up Jesus Christ as the living word. Yet, as all conscientious clergy still do, Humphrey appealed for funds to keep his organization afloat. But the bishop never focused attention on finances to the exclusion of other critical organizational issues.

What kind of Black religious leadership did Humphrey provide? E. Forrest Harris, Jr. has identified four styles or models of Black religious leadership relative to the “liberation praxis” in the African American church: the pastoral, prophetic, reformist, and nationalistic. The pastoral model seeks to “comfort and to console those battered by life’s adverse circumstances;” the prophetic seeks “to reveal the contradictions inherent in the life of the community and dominant culture and to clarify the ethical vision of justice in situations of human oppression;” the reformist is a “mix of politics and religion” on behalf of a disenfranchised Black community; and the nationalistic, which believes that self determination is a basic ethical and political right of people, advocates “some form of racial separation to allow blacks to gain a self-determined vision and control over their own destiny.” The effectiveness of each model is tied to “moral accountability to the black community.” Summing up, Harris says that ministry in the Black church “is an attempt to preach, teach, and live out the biblical message of freedom under God so that it powerfully impacts “the realities of black existence in a context of cultural, social, political, and economic oppression.” Yet this does not mean that Black religious leaders discount inner transformation. Indeed, they hold that inner renewal is both a prelude and postlude to social transformation.³⁵

³⁵Harris, 93–98.

Using the scheme of Harris, a reasonable conclusion is that Humphrey was prophetic and nationalistic as a Seventh-day Adventist minister, and more pastoral as a United Sabbath-Day Adventist leader. To be sure, as Harris has allowed, African American religious leaders have seldom been exclusively one or the other, combining many elements of each model in their attempts to be self determining.³⁶

An Assessment

Did Humphrey accomplish his objective of creating Black self-determination among Adventists? Are the United Sabbath-Day Adventists the autonomous religious organization its founder envisioned?

Viewed from the standpoint of numbers, the United Sabbath-Day Adventists are a failure, especially when compared to Black Seventh-day Adventists churches. Today, after thirty years of existence, New York United's attendance averages sixty, and there are no branches of the group elsewhere. Most urban African American Seventh-day Adventist congregations, especially those in New York City, boast memberships in the hundreds, and the Ephesus SDA Church, which grew out of the reorganized First Harlem, has a current membership of approximately 2200. Yet success is not always a function of numbers. New York United may be small in numbers, but not in spirit or pride. Unbowed and indefatigable, the group forms an important chapter in the history of race relations in the Seventh-day Adventist church. Humphrey's break with the Seventh-day Adventist church set the tone for Black-White relations in the Seventh-day Adventist church and was the catalyst that

³⁶Ibid., 93.

sparked the creation of a separate administrative structure for Blacks in the denomination in 1945. Thus, Humphrey's split helped modernize the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Regrettably, not many African American Seventh-day Adventists know the name James K. Humphrey or the group he founded, and among those familiar with their history there is much confusion. Yet Humphrey's bold move in establishing an independent religious organization, replete with General Conference sessions modeled after those conducted by Seventh-day Adventists, inspired a generation of African Americans caught up in the throes of the Depression. To West Indians struggling to resonate with a new culture, and to indigenous Blacks, many of them newly arrived from the South, his stance against an established power heralded a new day of resistance to and non-acceptance of unacceptable conditions and practices. Standing up to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination was a defining moment for African Americans.

Unable to reconcile Christianity's teaching of inclusion and community with what he considered the church's racist tendencies and behavior, Humphrey concluded that the independent church, founded and operated by Blacks, was the antidote to the lack of self determination and power among African Americans. Such a church would more effectively evangelize the Black community, meeting not just its spiritual but social, political and economic needs as well. More important, it would be a visible monument to the Black theology of liberation.³⁷

³⁷ According to James H. Cone, the establishment of independent Black churches is a "visible manifestation of Black Theology." See James H. Cone, *Liberation: A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970), 59.

To be sure, Humphrey's brand of activist rhetoric did not approximate that of the nineteenth century Black liberator David Walker, whose cry to "awaken his afflicted brethren" struck a responsive strain in them.³⁸ Nor was his message a new interpretation of what some had been saying for a long time. Even his act of leaving the Seventh-day Adventist church, a predominantly White religious denomination, was not unprecedented. Long before he established his independent organization, Richard Allen had walked out of the Methodist Church to do just that.³⁹ In fact, in its break from the Seventh-day Adventists, Sabbath-Day Adventists had seen history repeating itself, claiming that Richard Allen and James Humphrey broke from their denominations because of White mistreatment of Blacks.⁴⁰

To the Sabbath-Day Adventists, launching an independent religious organization was a truly revolutionary act. They claimed that Christianity was steeped in revolution, having been founded by an individual who renounced the "ideas and ideals of the religious teachers of his day" in favor of the "practical and humane." Protestantism, too, had been born in revolution, the Protestant church developing and growing through the sacrifices of pioneers like Huss, Jerome, Zwingli, Melancton, Tyndale, Latimer, Knox, Ridley, and Cranmer. It was in the tradition of these men also that Humphrey had stood up to the Adventists. Inspired by their legacy of

³⁸See Peter J. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

³⁹See Carol V. R. George, *Segregated Sabbath: Richard Allen and the Emergence of Independent Black Churches, 1760–1840* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

⁴⁰*United Sabbath-Day Adventist Messenger*, August 1932, 14–15.

resistance to injustice and error, Humphrey and his supporters had “raised their voice against such enormities, realizing that all men are created equal.” They had been compelled to create an institution “where all can serve the creator instead of the creature, and work in fairness and righteousness to all.”⁴¹

Humphrey never claimed to be a deliverer of his people like the Old Testament biblical character Moses did. Instead, he chose to cast his struggle with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination within the broader framework of race relations. Yet one reason people embraced him was because of the mood of the times. A glut of migrants from the South and a stream of immigrants from the West Indies conspired with economic uncertainty to create the ideal conditions for a religious leader like James K. Humphrey. As thousands of Blacks searched for meaning amidst the limited material resources they encountered in American cities, they turned increasingly from the mainline church to the small, independent sects and groups with unique names and extraordinary leaders. Thus, Humphrey was but one in a generation of religious leaders who held themselves out as viable options, if not irrefutable answers, to the strange and new challenges of urban life.

Summary

The post-Humphrey Sabbath-Day Adventist church has been beset by challenges that have seen its numbers reduced. Attempts at reconciliation with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination were frustrated by long-held, deeply-entrenched grudges and policies of the Seventh-day Adventist church Sabbath-Day Adventists

⁴¹Ibid., 13–14.

could not accept. Sabbath-Day Adventists have experienced difficulty attracting clergy aware of its history and committed to its vision, with the result that pastoral tenures since Samuels have been marked by tension and apprehension, if not suspicion. Yet, the new millennium brought with it the hope and promise of a return to the “glory days,” and the current pastor has connected with the congregation on levels the last three were unable to. A collaborative partnership exists between the United New York United Sabbath-Day Adventist church and Pastor Princeton Holt, and together they hope to usher in a day of church growth and outreach that will bring transformation to the Harlem community.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Scholars have stressed the dynamic role religion has played in African American history. Robert T. Handy, for example, has stated that religion has been so important in African American history that any credible understanding of African American history calls for “careful attention to religion.”¹ In a similar vein, C. Eric Lincoln avows that “religion was from the beginning the organizing principle of the black experience in America.”² As such, a study of a group of African Americans that does not contemplate their religion is destined to be incomplete, if not problematic. In this study, an investigation of the Sabbath-Day Adventists, the history and religion of a population of African Americans come together in a particular social and political context—early twentieth century Harlem.

African Americans may have boasted that by 1930 Harlem was an empowerment zone for Blacks, but it was more a colony of Black disenfranchisement. Beneath the surface of self-sufficiency were disturbing conditions that the Depression revealed. Yet long before the Great Depression those willing to look objectively at the situation of Blacks in Harlem admitted that alienation and

¹Robert T. Handy, “Negro Christianity and American Church Historiography,” in Jerald C. Brauer, ed., *Reinterpretation in American Church History*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 111.

²C. Eric Lincoln, “Foreward,” *A Black Theology of Liberation*, James H. Cone, author (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970), 10.

powerlessness more accurately characterized African Americans in Harlem during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Exacerbating matters was the fact that indigenous African Americans and Black West Indians were coming together in large numbers for the first time.

The relationship between West Indians and indigenous African Americans was strained by distrust and suspicion, born in part by an ignorance of each other. Cultural differences gave rise to stereotypes, which in turn engendered a complex web of likes and dislikes, and division in the West Indian community. A “Civil War” of sorts took place within Black America, with West Indians and indigenous African Americans arrayed against each other. Yet West Indians experienced another “Civil War” within themselves. On the one hand, West Indians felt pulled toward the larger American culture; on the other, they wanted to retain their unique West Indian identity and culture. Amidst this struggle, the myth of West Indian superiority developed, West Indian hard work and achievement serving to fuel the myth. Yet the radicalism of the act of immigration may have contributed to West Indian success more than any innate or cultural superiority on their part. In the end, West Indians and indigenous African Americans came together to combat common injustices and to pursue common goals. The result was a collaboration that may be termed intra-racial progress.

James K. Humphrey was one of the West Indians who flooded Harlem in the early twentieth century. A Baptist minister from Jamaica, Humphrey was introduced by a layman to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a group that had grown out of the Millerite movement of the early nineteenth century. Organized during the Civil War, the denomination demonstrated uncertainty in dealing with the Blacks who filtered

into its tent meetings and churches. Ellen G. White, considered by the denomination as an inspired prophet, counseled the church as to how Blacks were to be evangelized and treated, and her son, Edson White, pioneered evangelistic efforts among Blacks in the South.

Humphrey began pastoring in New York City shortly after joining the Adventist church, quickly leading his Harlem congregation to a position of prominence and primacy. Blessed with presence and bearing, he commanded the admiration and respect of old and young alike, and was a father figure to the youth, many of whom he mentored into adulthood. He was conservative in dress and impeccable in manners. Yet the minister was disturbed by what he perceived as a lack of self-determination among Blacks in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In an attempt to address the need, he began to promote a project called Utopia Park, which, denominational leaders argued, was outside of stated church policy. When Humphrey refused to alter his plans, he was defrocked, and his congregation, which overwhelmingly stood in solidarity with him, expelled.

In the wake of his expulsion from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Humphrey established the United Sabbath-Day Adventists. A look at the history of this group shows that it struggled to make it financially, a fact that does not beg for explanation given the reality that it was born at the start of the Great Depression. Humphrey and the United Sabbath-Day Adventists certainly give the lie to the myth that during the Depression all “black preachers drove Cadillacs” and all “black churches had plenty of money.” His organization was poor, like most other small independent Black churches, and experienced the secularism that was beginning to

inundate city churches.³ Yet Sabbath-Day Adventists were able to establish congregations as far west as Omaha and in the West Indies.

Humphrey founded the Sabbath-Day Adventist organization because of the treatment people of color were experiencing in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Yet the bishop had no doctrinal disputation with the Seventh-day Adventists, unless, of course, his unclear position on Ellen G. White is counted. Doctrinally a Seventh-day Adventist to the end, his contention was that their theology was stained by discriminatory practices that betrayed an unacceptable dichotomy between the secular and the sacred, and, more important, led to powerlessness and disenfranchisement for African Americans. Like other African American religious leaders of his era, Humphrey's theology of service reflected a historic synthesis of pietism and pragmatism. He refused to drive a wedge between the spiritual and social needs of his people, combining moral regeneration and renewal with economic and educational self-help initiatives. His was a "practical theology" that saw no distinction between the cardinal Christian doctrine of grace and the Black need of self-worth and self-determination.⁴ For Humphrey, any theology that failed to resonate with pressing,

³See, Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People*, 2nd edition (New York: Orbis Books, 1983), 161.

⁴James H. Cone says that the organizing of Black churches "is a visible manifestation of Black Theology." See, James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1969), 59. Other works that deftly explore the phenomenon known as Black Theology include James H. Cone, *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968-1998* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); Will Coleman, *Tribal Talk: Black Theology, Hermeneutics, and African American Ways of "Telling the Story"* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); James H. Evans, *We Have Been Believers: An African-American Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992); and
(continued...)

real-life issues like social injustice was meaningless, and when it became clear to him that Seventh-day Adventist theology was not addressing Black issues, he reasoned that he could remain true to Adventism's essence while repudiating its practices. Indeed, Humphrey may have aggressively pursued reconciliation with the Seventh-day Adventists if its leaders had hinted of a desire to redress the injustices meted out to Blacks.

Assessing Humphrey's career based on his personality is difficult. That he was part of a generation of ambitious West Indians who rose to leadership in Harlem is a tenable argument. Yet what motivated him psychologically is difficult to gauge. Admittedly, his immigrant status, as well as his status as an African American in a segregated society, shaped his thinking and ministry. Additionally, what has been preserved of his writings and sermons offers clues to his personality. Based on these, Humphrey emerges as a complex individual, a study in paradox and ambiguity. That he was a gifted leader is certain. During his tenure as bishop of the Sabbath-Day Adventists, congregations were spawned and attendance at Sabbath-Day Adventist General Conference sessions were high. To be sure, Humphrey managed his organization closely, but Humphrey does not appear to have been victimized by megalomania. To the congregations spawned across the country he assigned and fostered indigenous leadership and autonomy.

Yet Humphrey never pursued his dream of Utopia Park once he split with the Seventh-day Adventists. Undoubtedly, the struggle to keep a new religious

4(...continued)

Dwight N. Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1999).

organization afloat during economically difficult times, as well as conflicts within the infant organization, consumed much of the bishop's time and energy. Still, that Humphrey aborted the project for which he gave up a successful career as a Seventh-day Adventist minister is noteworthy. More important, it does not appear that the United Sabbath-Day Adventists promoted or ran any coherent, comprehensive program for the economic uplift of its members or community. Admittedly, Humphrey encouraged youth to seek higher education, but he never entertained plans to operate a school on any level in New York City. United Sabbath-Day Adventists sponsored no benevolent or burial societies, as other Black religious groups did. Indeed, it appears that after his split with the Seventh-day Adventists Humphrey was far more conservative in this theology, and the group he established, to borrow Gayraud S. Wilmore's term, was a "deradicalized" church.

The African Americans who remained with and joined Humphrey's group did so for several reasons, including the emotional and psychological benefits they received from a religious organization that to this day is misunderstood and miscast as a renegade cult which, at least in its early days, was woefully out of kilter with mainstream American values. Sabbath-Day Adventists of the Humphrey era speak fondly of the vibrant relationships that were nurtured and fostered within the infant group, and of the sense of community and belonging it engendered. To them, being a part of the Sabbath-Day Adventist church was like experiencing "Utopia" on earth, and Humphrey, in spite of the legal issues and allegations of marital improprieties that dogged his tenure, is remembered positively by them as a courageous, visionary leader who wanted the best for his people.

Sabbath-Day Adventists tend to view their church history as one of resistance

to, not one of domination by, an established, superior power. They are pleased about the stand Humphrey and they took against the Seventh-day Adventist church. Today, United Sabbath-Day Adventists are a proud, indefatigable group determined to perpetuate the legacy of their founding pastor and to fulfill his dream. To be sure, the New York congregation is all that is left of Humphrey's religious organization, and the congregation numbers less than 100. Still, it occupies the building that is the only one ever built by Black Adventists in New York City, and the structure stands as a monument to the refusal of African Americans to accept discriminatory practices.

One reason the Sabbath-Day Adventist organization may have failed to attract new members is because of the premium the Seventh-day Adventist church places on loyalty to the organization and the unique perception it has of its place and role in world history. Individuals who join the church early understand that Seventh-day Adventists are a "special" people to whom have been bequeathed the task of disseminating the Gospel in the context of the "Three Angels' Messages" of Revelation 14. The acceptance of this mindset militates against speaking out against the organization, even on race issues, and of joining Sabbath-keeping and Adventists groups other than the Seventh-day Adventists.

Sabbath-Day Adventists argue that their stance is the reason for the gains African Americans have made in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The real beneficiaries of Humphrey's stance are not so much Sabbath-Day Adventists, they believe, but the African Americans in the Seventh-day Adventist church. As such, they view James Kemuel Humphrey as a pioneer in the struggle of people of African descent for autonomy and self-determination within and without the church.

Appendix A

**Greater New York Conference, Comparative Statement
of Membership as of December 31 for 1920–1927**

**Greater New York Conference
Comparative Statement of Membership
as of December 31 for 1920 - 1927**

Church	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927
Danish Norwegian	126	127	132	132	130	118	128	124
Finnish	17	17	8	10	12	13	12	12
First Brooklyn	425	410	407	383	354	343	307	314
First Harlem	615	622	637	616	497	532	525	567
German Brooklyn	323	302	296	290	234	222	239	249
German New York	146	121	128	149	149	151	169	185
Hungarian	19	17	23	19	18	22	26	28
Italian Brooklyn	19	34	43	34	44	44	41	41
Italian New York	0	0	0	22	29	28	45	50
Jamaica - White	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	19
Jamaica - Colored	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24
Middletown	96	106	117	95	102	105	100	93
Mt. Vernon	29	25	25	23	17	0	0	0
Newburgh	40	37	33	41	39	31	35	49
New Rochelle	0	18	26	32	39	39	36	42
Patchogue	10	14	13	16	15	13	12	14
Peekskill	0	0	0	0	0	15	20	24
Port Jervis	41	45	45	37	36	33	30	28
Poughkeepsie	27	25	34	38	41	33	31	46
Second Brooklyn	79	71	75	86	75	92	80	97
Second Harlem	0	0	0	0	166	213	226	226
Sharon	0	0	0	0	32	38	34	37
Staten Island	41	35	35	32	34	34	31	28
Swedish Brooklyn	52	58	59	48	45	50	46	56
Swedish New York	85	88	82	81	85	69	71	80
Temple	497	466	458	503	524	565	537	500
White Plains	34	24	18	20	25	25	25	24
TOTAL	2721	2662	2694	2707	2742	2828	2806	2957

*Disbanded January 1, 1925

Appendix B

**Greater New York Conference, Comparative Statement
of Baptisms for the Years 1920–1927**

**Greater New York Conference
Comparative Statement of Baptisms
for the Years 1920 - 1927**

Church	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927
Danish Norwegian	26	13	4	6	4	6	8	7
Finnish	3	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
First Brooklyn	50	26	32	9	11	17	10	15
First Harlem	110	73	63	0	48	41	25	48
German Brooklyn	26	52	14	7	11	32	13	25
German New York	39	23	9	22	15	7	14	16
Hungarian	3	4	5	0	4	2	0	2
Italian Brooklyn	4	10	10	11	10	2	3	4
Italian New York	0	0	0	5	7	5	19	8
Jamaica - White	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
Jamaica - Colored	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Middletown	7	7	5	0	0	8	7	0
Mt. Vernon	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newburgh	0	0	0	0	2	0	3	7
New Rochelle	0	5	6	3	7	2	2	2
Patchogue	1	3	0	2	0	0	0	1
Peekskill	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0
Port Jervis	14	4	3	0	1	0	0	0
Poughkeepsie	4	0	0	3	9	0	0	1
Second Brooklyn	5	4	1	20	0	12	6	6
Second Harlem	0	0	0	0	11	10	18	2
Sharon	0	0	0	0	7	5	0	4
Staten Island	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	0
Swedish Brooklyn	1	5	4	2	6	7	0	17
Swedish New York	2	7	1	8	6	4	0	13
Temple	53	67	29	46	36	54	31	26
White Plains	3	0	0	0	7	0	1	0
TOTAL	352	304	186	144	206	215	165	213

*Disbanded January 1, 1925

Appendix C

**Greater New York Conference, Comparative Statement
of Tithe for the Years 1920–1927**

**Greater New York Conference
Comparative Statement of Tithe
for the Years 1920 - 1927**

Church	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927
Danish Norwegian	5,581.73	4,570.09	4,884.30	5,846.40	6,124.54	6,104.82	6,268.34	7,088.79
Finnish	1,280.33	918.31	965.87	1,077.66	1,353.43	1,382.60	1,602.29	1,283.38
First Brooklyn	28,821.83	25,638.14	24,463.89	28,314.76	24,083.33	25,361.65	28,124.64	30,622.00
First Harlem	18,022.71	13,750.19	14,462.07	16,307.84	11,786.06	10,985.40	10,667.65	10,282.97
German Brooklyn	12,781.88	12,516.68	14,891.48	13,000.44	12,237.28	12,874.00	13,830.60	14,488.48
German New York	7,986.80	9,896.96	9,962.96	10,671.97	11,823.96	10,619.00	12,611.99	13,378.70
Hungarian	1,027.90	1,100.48	831.80	938.35	1,072.78	1,231.24	1,398.09	1,728.13
Italian Brooklyn	893.89	1,781.41	2,672.31	2,381.46	1,637.16	1,734.00	1,821.78	2,211.20
Italian New York	0.00	0.00	0.00	686.68	1,584.38	1,886.99	2,191.37	2,470.71
Jamaica - White	† 0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Jamaica - Colored	† 0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	716.23
Middletown	3,449.29	3,171.36	3,036.66	2,884.04	3,489.73	4,666.20	6,286.72	4,919.36
ML Varnon	* 1,661.82	1,661.80	1,731.99	1,997.94	1,607.01	0.00	0.00	0.00
Newburgh	1,947.85	1,872.45	1,337.82	1,624.83	2,046.66	1,809.13	1,888.88	2,796.63
New Rochelle	0.00	0.00	1,078.44	1,907.91	2,241.78	1,997.29	2,279.80	2,664.24
Patchogue	339.15	528.34	520.78	931.67	687.91	782.24	661.76	777.41
Peekskill	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	299.00	968.09	1,289.85
Port Jarvis	1,143.37	1,208.19	1,287.61	1,693.63	1,211.71	1,196.57	927.43	816.73
Poughkeepsie	1,055.39	1,277.83	1,481.09	2,272.29	2,044.67	1,612.80	1,073.20	1,502.02
Second Brooklyn	2,086.25	1,661.15	1,958.92	3,998.61	3,478.83	3,950.81	4,069.27	3,588.85
Second Harlem	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	7,971.13	9,349.58	10,067.39	9,796.19
Sharon	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,367.34	1,687.18	1,830.99	1,478.41
Staten Island	2,854.43	2,735.14	2,085.25	1,852.74	1,822.69	2,073.08	2,726.67	2,268.74
Swedish Brooklyn	2,168.08	2,308.09	2,313.36	2,664.09	2,966.97	3,448.61	4,068.20	4,921.21
Swedish New York	5,777.07	6,611.95	6,087.01	6,641.76	6,676.00	6,900.38	6,643.63	10,399.66
Temple	33,300.97	37,698.63	39,769.18	42,696.71	41,396.11	42,717.86	43,671.75	44,775.08
White Plains	1,486.80	1,337.72	996.86	1,113.14	1,103.34	1,589.49	1,836.71	1,404.42
Individuals	81.71	0.00	0.00	0.00	258.46	1,336.70	680.80	1,401.35
TOTAL	128,598.56	112,054.91	135,433.50	150,043.01	152,289.87	157,465.51	168,881.05	178,870.94

† Newly Organized
 † 26 Weeks
 * Disbanded 01-01-25

Appendix D

**Greater New York Conference, Comparative Weekly
Tithe Per Capita for the Years 1920–1927**

**Greater New York Conference
Comparative Weekly Tithe Per Capita
for the Years 1920 - 1927**

Church	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927
Danish Norwegian	0.98	0.70	0.71	0.85	0.89	0.90	1.02	1.07
Finnish	1.76	1.04	1.09	2.59	2.60	2.22	2.37	2.07
First Brooklyn	1.31	1.16	1.14	1.34	1.21	1.38	1.63	1.91
First Harlem	0.53	0.43	0.45	0.46	0.47	0.43	0.39	0.38
German Brooklyn	0.80	0.75	0.92	0.84	0.81	1.06	1.20	1.17
German New York	1.21	1.30	1.58	1.59	1.54	1.37	1.61	1.51
Hungarian	1.52	1.11	0.94	0.79	1.09	1.32	1.22	1.28
Italian Brooklyn	2.87	1.72	1.17	1.05	0.93	0.76	0.84	1.04
Italian New York	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.47	1.38	1.25	1.51	1.06
Jamaica - White †	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Jamaica - Colored †	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Middletown	0.80	0.64	0.55	0.47	0.70	0.86	1.15	0.95
Mt. Vernon *	0.85	1.04	1.33	1.46	1.34	0.00	0.00	0.00
Newburgh	0.71	0.90	0.70	0.95	0.96	0.89	1.23	1.54
New Rochelle	0.00	0.00	1.15	1.34	1.35	0.98	1.12	1.42
Patchogue	1.63	1.02	0.72	1.38	1.07	1.02	1.01	1.25
Peekskill	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.24	1.24
Port Jervis	0.85	0.57	0.55	0.64	0.63	0.64	0.54	0.52
Poughkeepsie	0.73	0.91	1.12	1.29	1.03	0.76	0.63	0.93
Second Brooklyn	0.52	0.40	0.53	1.02	0.78	1.01	0.85	0.86
Second Harlem	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.42	1.08	0.91	0.83
Sharon	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.90	1.01	0.93	0.84
Staten Island	0.98	1.28	1.15	1.02	1.16	1.17	1.54	1.41
Swedish Brooklyn	0.77	0.85	0.77	0.87	1.19	1.47	1.56	2.06
Swedish New York	1.29	1.50	1.33	1.53	1.56	1.56	1.82	2.82
Temple	1.16	1.46	1.64	1.80	1.58	1.57	1.48	1.60
White Plains	0.80	0.76	0.80	1.19	1.06	1.20	1.18	1.08
TOTAL	0.95	0.93	0.98	1.07	1.08	1.10	1.15	1.23

†Newly Organized

*Disbanded January 1, 1925

Appendix E

**Greater New York Conference, Comparative Statement
of Foreign Mission Funds for the Years 1920–1927**

Greater New York Conference
Comparative Statement of Foreign Missions Funds
for the Years 1920 -1927

Church	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927
Danish Norwegian	1,980.02	1,731.86	2,048.98	3,411.31	2,829.68	2,968.91	4,167.32	4,072.77
Finnish	477.13	431.04	324.68	844.90	908.62	1,016.19	972.34	1,048.01
First Brooklyn	11,070.51	12,616.16	12,900.31	13,303.68	11,594.63	11,993.87	13,886.54	13,166.06
First Harlem	12,190.26	12,361.86	12,913.73	14,434.89	9,921.82	8,633.36	12,668.46	12,131.30
German Brooklyn	6,108.24	6,198.63	7,389.29	9,422.66	6,676.69	9,106.39	9,907.20	9,881.76
German New York	3,122.16	3,478.67	4,623.62	4,886.17	5,579.18	6,251.02	6,106.81	5,888.69
Hungarian	891.17	541.75	422.43	657.26	789.65	966.42	998.82	974.10
Italian Brooklyn	316.90	930.77	862.25	1,204.83	946.78	1,068.80	1,372.88	1,373.66
Italian New York	0.00	0.00	0.00	569.83	549.78	699.18	919.49	935.71
Jamaica - White	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	292.64
Jamaica - Colored	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	648.63
Middletown	1,779.18	1,886.48	1,868.69	1,987.72	2,422.37	3,012.34	2,982.15	2,768.13
Mt. Vernon	431.28	673.98	867.67	711.92	427.10	0.00	0.00	0.00
Newburgh	1,368.21	1,146.62	1,277.98	1,282.28	1,806.83	1,716.14	1,846.62	2,000.83
New Rochelle	0.00	0.00	603.40	994.80	1,099.66	644.63	621.86	657.72
Patchogue	133.09	227.84	270.99	852.26	671.77	640.57	561.88	498.49
Peekskill	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	166.69	482.36	888.47
Port Jervis	819.04	930.90	1,211.60	1,423.66	1,215.21	971.74	906.98	785.64
Poughkeepsie	959.21	926.38	1,119.64	1,231.22	1,352.80	1,194.88	615.44	1,223.86
Second Brooklyn	1,483.62	1,154.60	1,397.83	2,328.32	1,772.74	1,961.81	2,096.41	1,846.46
Second Harlem	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3,574.10	3,638.93	4,008.28	5,234.39
Sharon	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	917.47	822.32	684.52	1,045.18
Staten Island	736.83	863.82	783.80	818.89	1,227.24	1,122.67	1,014.82	1,042.71
Swedish Brooklyn	1,483.73	1,474.36	1,801.84	1,816.35	1,866.47	1,648.21	2,100.11	2,343.08
Swedish New York	2,143.46	2,273.32	2,383.36	2,748.70	2,619.19	2,827.20	4,525.11	3,067.99
Temple	14,229.28	12,887.06	14,064.67	17,673.78	17,139.43	17,896.07	19,781.86	19,484.16
White Plains	820.15	826.27	669.85	636.83	726.25	781.87	786.12	681.60
Individuals	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	278.20	24.49	0.00	115.89
TOTAL	62,501.59	65,149.38	69,817.02	83,295.26	80,803.85	80,342.40	93,901.90	94,117.73

* Disbanded 01-01-25

Appendix F

**Greater New York Conference, Comparative Weekly Foreign Missions
Per Capita for the Years 1920–1927**

**Greater New York Conference
Comparative Weekly Foreign Missions Per Capita
for the Years 1920 - 1927**

Church	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927
Danish Norwegian	0.39	0.31	0.31	0.52	0.43	0.43	0.61	0.66
Finnish	0.66	0.59	0.37	1.07	2.18	1.95	1.56	1.55
First Brooklyn	0.59	0.62	0.58	0.62	0.55	0.60	0.75	0.74
First Harlem	0.50	0.43	0.40	0.45	0.38	0.35	0.49	0.44
German Brooklyn	0.45	0.51	0.44	0.60	0.56	0.61	0.81	0.86
German New York	0.59	0.53	0.60	0.77	0.84	0.68	0.79	0.75
Hungarian	1.47	0.80	0.43	0.74	0.66	0.88	1.07	0.85
Italian Brooklyn	0.00	2.98	0.87	0.68	0.87	0.62	0.60	0.60
Italian New York	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.48	0.61	0.61	0.64
Jamaica - White †	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Jamaica - Colored †	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Middletown	0.37	0.44	0.36	0.36	0.40	0.61	0.56	0.51
Mt. Vernon *	0.33	0.31	0.59	0.55	0.33	0.00 *	0.00	0.00
Newburgh	0.50	0.42	0.61	0.67	0.94	0.80	0.91	1.30
New Rochelle	0.00	0.00	0.64	1.06	0.81	0.39	0.31	0.32
Patchogue	0.64	1.10	0.52	1.17	1.29	1.01	0.72	0.74
Peekskill	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.10
Port Jervis	0.00	0.69	0.57	0.61	0.52	0.51	0.48	0.45
Poughkeepsie	0.92	0.64	0.80	0.95	0.77	0.60	0.29	0.71
Second Brooklyn	0.38	0.29	0.34	0.63	0.45	0.44	0.54	0.39
Second Harlem	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.64	0.65	0.46	0.47
Sharon	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.63	0.56	0.41	0.53
Staten Island	0.24	0.29	0.36	0.45	0.67	0.67	0.57	0.50
Swedish Brooklyn	0.48	0.53	0.56	0.60	0.54	0.66	0.90	0.90
Swedish New York	0.44	0.51	0.53	0.60	0.61	0.60	1.02	0.86
Temple	0.49	0.44	0.57	0.73	0.71	0.67	0.73	0.66
White Plains	0.56	0.44	0.67	0.51	0.78	0.75	0.60	0.52
TOTAL	0.50	0.48	0.49	0.60	0.57	0.57	0.66	0.64

†Newly Organized

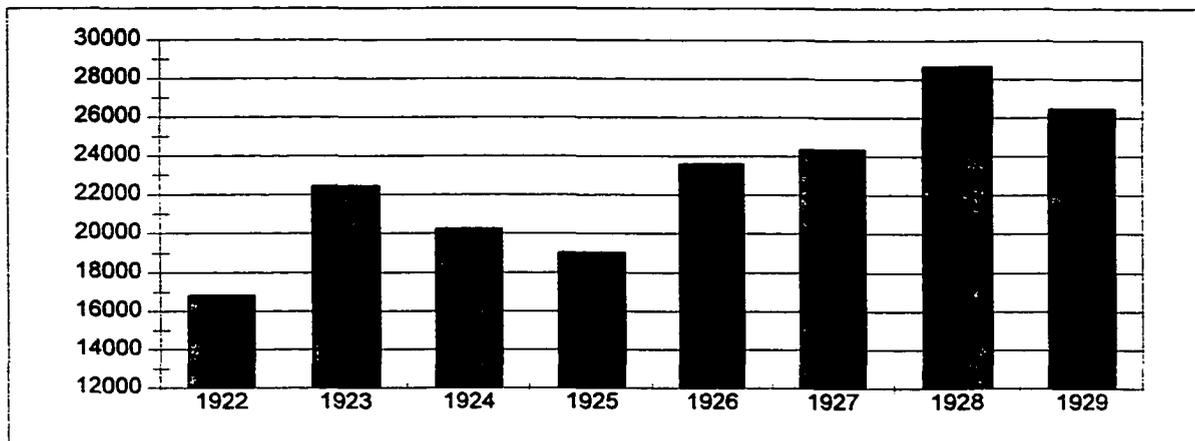
*Disbanded January 1, 1925

Appendix G

**Greater New York Conference, Report of the Home Missionary
Department, Harvest Ingathering Statement, 1922–1929**

**Report of Home Missionary Department
Harvest Ingathering
for the Years 1922 - 1929**

Church	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
Ced. Manor							180.77	160.16
Danish Norwegian	637.49	1,256.66	1,030.11	816.94	1,638.69	1,223.20	1,218.73	1,260.36
Finnish	85.43	298.06	273.27	285.53	286.25	242.95	397.06	351.10
First Brooklyn	4,356.83	3,859.09	3,587.33	2,276.24	2,213.25	3,689.50	4,583.78	3,142.24
First Harlem	982.07	1,228.67	111.70	226.15	831.95	594.15	933.54	110.76
German Brooklyn	1,777.34	3,412.43	3,149.36	3,076.75	3,335.07	3,451.73	3,458.07	3,376.89
German New York	1,311.73	1,363.20	1,327.76	1,523.69	1,902.44	1,688.58	1,940.55	2,033.01
Hungarian	185.09	250.35	360.20	341.57	402.66	418.60	371.23	541.27
Italian Brooklyn	342.00	453.11	330.84	425.56	506.60	637.85	402.83	477.09
Italian New York	0.00	358.53	23.28	164.92	255.33	84.14	539.40	660.79
Jamaica	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00	123.57	286.04
Kingston	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	226.15
Middletown	439.90	740.46	671.32	997.26	677.24	680.87	696.57	1,089.31
Newburgh	442.82	318.68	403.00	472.51	336.27	431.02	592.77	617.63
New Rochelle	52.51	103.60	59.89	4.00	37.65	44.21	198.23	284.81
Patchogue	81.47	315.67	153.53	187.95	44.62	87.16	150.27	72.26
Peekskill	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	40.76	291.01	259.83	259.81
Port Jervis	455.25	381.60	560.81	348.97	305.31	255.94	325.17	329.79
Poughkeepsie	297.16	333.20	409.48	377.20	119.45	565.04	1,187.65	388.79
Second Brooklyn	125.04	614.25	112.25	163.89	199.90	244.61	1,216.83	906.03
Second Harlem	0.00	0.00	240.06	304.52	505.21	664.82	695.36	427.00
Sharon	0.00	0.00	200.50	247.40	150.75	348.96	154.17	52.28
Staten Island	357.43	334.84	520.57	364.10	347.88	337.69	372.91	354.01
Spanish	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	29.65
Swedish Brooklyn	625.09	726.50	659.16	547.40	640.89	720.40	650.05	691.33
Swedish New York	880.08	967.57	818.07	708.34	2,665.02	952.49	1,027.94	1,001.33
Temple	3,266.93	5,097.47	5,181.75	5,156.55	6,050.99	6,526.71	6,863.60	7,135.37
White Plains	136.76	49.49	62.00	42.59	107.06	61.70	131.56	133.85
Individuals	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	11.00	90.15
TOTAL	16,838.42	22,463.43	20,249.24	19,060.03	23,601.24	24,343.33	28,683.44	26,489.26



Appendix H
Fundamental Beliefs of Sabbath-Day Adventists

SOME THINGS WE BELIEVE

United Sabbath Day Adventists Believe

That the Bible is the word of God, and that all scripture was given by inspiration and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, in order that believers may attain unto perfection. 2 Tim. 3:16.

That the Holy Scriptures are sufficient to impart unto us all the wisdom, knowledge and understanding necessary to salvation. 2 Tim. 3:15.

That the word of God should be studied and rightly divided by those who are seeking God's approval. 2 Tim. 2:15.

That prophecies were not given by the will or intelligence of men, but holy men wrote as they were moved upon by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:20,21.

That the prophecies of the Bible are sure to be fulfilled, that, like a giant indistinguishable ray of light, they shine through the darkness of time until Jesus Christ returns. 2 Peter 1:19.

That those who follow the word of God will never walk in darkness. Psa. 119:105.

That God used Jesus Christ as the Creator of all things in heaven and earth. John 1:1-5; Col. 1:13-16; Heb. 1:1,2.

That Jesus possessed a human and divine nature to successfully accomplish the work of redemption; that he had to be human and divine to make the connection (that was broken through the sin of our first parents) between fallen man and Jehovah. Phil. 2:8; Matt. 1:21, 23; Heb. 2:14-18.

That Christ is able to save the vilest sinner from sin and eternal death. Matt. 1:21; Acts 16:31; Rom. 5:1; John 3:16; Matt. 9:13.

The eternal life is a gift which was made possible through the death of Christ, and we also believe that the wages of sin is eternal death. Rom. 6:23.

That death came as a result of man's disobedience. Rom. 5:12-19.

That man was created a mortal being in a condition where death was possible. Gen. 2:16, 17; 3:22.

That the soul of man himself, that the term "Immortal soul" is contrary to the Scriptures, and that at death the soul dies. Gen. 2:7; Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 16:3.

That the dead are in their graves, and there they shall remain until Jesus comes. Job 14:7-15; 17:13.

That the righteous shall be rewarded at the Second Advent of Christ. Is. 40:10; 62:11; Rev.22:12.

That the wicked shall be punished with complete annihilation after the thousand years' reign of Christ and the saints. Rev.20:7-9; Mal. 4:1; Psa. 37:10, 20, 38; 34:21, Prov. 2:22.

That the Judgment takes place after the coming of our savior Jesus Christ. Psa. 96:13; 50:3; 2 Tim. 4:1; Matt. 25: 31-40.

That the testimony of Jesus Christ is the spirit of prophecy; that is was the Spirit of Christ that prompted and actuated the prophets, and that, therefore, Christ was the directing intelligence behind every statement made, whether orally or in writing, by them. It was Christ who testified, through the prophets, therefore the testimony of Christ is the spirit of prophecy, and not the gift to prophesy. 1 Peter 1:10, 11; Rev. 1:9; 19:10.

That the martyrs throughout the Dark Ages had the testimony of Christ, and suffered for it. Rev. 20:4.

That the one hundred and forty-four thousand are not Gentiles, but Jews from the fleshly stock of Abraham, who shall be saved in God's kingdom; that they are not contaminated with popular false doctrines, hence they are considered virgins and are the first fruits of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We further believe that they form a special class, which follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Rev. 7:1-4; 14:1-5.

That Holy Spirit is the seal of God and that we are sealed with that Spirit. Eph. 4:30; 1:13, 14; 2 Cor. 1:22. We believe that Christ was sealed with the Holy Spirit on the day of His baptism. John 6:27.

That the Holy Spirit is given for the purpose of leading and guiding God's people into all truth, and to glorify Christ in their lives. John 16:13, 14.

That the Holy Spirit is given as the Comforter, and abides with the Christian for ever. John 14:16, 17.

That whenever a man repents and is converted and baptized, he receives the gift of the Holy Ghost. Acts 2:38; 3:19.

That a man should be converted, or should be the recipient of the "new birth" to enter into the Kingdom of God. John 3:5; Matt. 18:3.

That those who are looking for the coming of Christ should live such lives as will make the worthy of being caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Titus 2:12, 14;

2 Pet. 3:11-14; 2 Thess. 4:14-18.

That the law of God is a transcript of His character, and is therefore as eternal as God Himself. Psa. 111: 7, 8. Psa. 89:34.

That the seventh day of the week, commonly called Saturday was sanctified and set apart as the Holy Sabbath, and should, therefore, be observed as the day of worship by all Christian. Gen. 2:1-3; Exod. 16:23, 28; 20:8-11.

That the Bible plan of tithing and the giving of offerings by its members is the proper means for the support of the Church. Mal. 3:8-11; Matt. 23:23.

That we are living in "the eleventh hour" of the history of the world, and that the call of the hour is to Negroes to preach the gospel to the world, since, through prejudice and race hatred, and in God's economy of grace, the Gentiles' (white race) time has been fulfilled. Matt. 20:6; 16:21-24.

That the Gentiles, as originally defined by the Bible, were Japethites, or the white race, and that the terms "Ethiopian," "Egyptian," "Hamite," and "Cushite" are applied to the Negro or black race. Gen. 10:5; Mark 10:33; Rom. 11:11, 25; Isa. 19:23-25; 11:11.

R. Leo Soaries

Appendix I
Constitution and By-Laws of the
Sabbath-Day Adventists

**CONSTITUTION & BY-LAWS
OF THE
NEW YORK UNITED SABBATH DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH**

ARTICLE 1 - NAME

This church was incorporated under the laws of the State of New York, under the following name: - NEW YORK UNITED SABBATH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH.

ARTICLE II - POLITY AND DOCTRINE

This Church acknowledges Jesus Christ as its head, and finds in the holy scriptures interpreted by the Divine Spirit through reason, faith and conscience, its guidance in matters of faith and discipline. This Church further recognizes the Bible as the sufficient rule of faith and practice, and firmly believes that living in accordance with the teachings of Jesus Christ is the true and revealed test of human fellowship.

ARTICLE III - OBJECT

Section 1. The primary objects and purposes of this Church are to promulgate the Christian Religion according to the Sabbath-Day Adventist Doctrine and to advance the spiritual understanding of all worshipers and followers thereof, and devotedly seek to diffuse and extend the knowledge and realization of the "Commandments of God" and the true and everlasting gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Section 2. As a secondary object we believe that in order to effectively carry out our primary objects and purposes it is and will be the duty of the officers, executives, elders, members, and the bodies constituted by them to personally perform and cooperate in all our activities to establish moral and evangelistic instruction and training and in all our other religious and secular activities especially those which may tend to improve, extend and place upon a sound and permanent foundation the tenets of the United Sabbath-Day Adventist Denomination and thereby to extend the general moral and religious interests of the worshipers and followers thereof.

ARTICLE IV - MEMBERSHIP

All persons who have been first taught the doctrines of our church and accept the covenants of the church and its authority and to subscribe to the following covenants:

1. To believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ
2. To keep the seventh day as the Sabbath
3. To pay one tenth of all income as a tithe to the church
4. To be baptized by complete immersion
5. To believe in the unconscious state of the dead
6. To believe in dress reform and health reform

shall be eligible for membership in this Church.

Admission to membership in this church shall be made after presentation of an application for such membership made by the prospective member and such application shall be reported by the Board of Deacons, with its recommendation. The application and recommendation shall then be voted upon at the next meeting of the members. Before his election to membership the applicant shall publicly accept the covenants of the church and its authority. Members of the church may also be accepted on presentation of satisfactory letters of transfer from other churches, or if such letters are not available by reaffirmation of faith or confession of faith the baptism if not previously baptized.

Persons recommended by the Board of Deacons who have been approved by vote of the members at a regular meeting or at a service of the Church shall be received after full baptism (if not previously baptized) at a regular service after public assent and acceptance of the covenant or after thoughtful and written acceptance of the covenant, or at such other times as the members of the Church shall order.

All persons shall continue to be such members and shall be bound by this constitution and by-laws and any amendments thereof.'

Only such members who are in good standing may vote at any election, meeting or service of this Church.

Letters of dismissal and recommendation to another Church may be granted by a vote of the members of the church upon request. This letter shall be valid as a recommendation for one year only unless renewed, and the letter of recommendation shall so state. The right of any member requesting such letter to vote at any meetings of this Church shall terminated upon notice of acceptance into another church or at the end of one year if inquiry shall determine such letter shall not be renewed. No letter shall be granted except one addressed to a particular church, named by the applicant. If a member desires to join a religious body with which this

church may present to the applicant a certificate of his standing in this church and his

membership shall cease.

Should a member become an offense to the Church and to its good name by reason of immoral or unchristian conduct or by consistent breach of his covenant vows, this Church on recommendation of its Board of Deacons may censure such members, or member, and by a two-thirds vote of a duly elected called meeting, suspend or terminate his or her membership; but only after due notice and hearing and after faithful efforts have been made to bring such members to amendment in accordance with the law of Christ and the Church.

If, because of change of faith or for other reasons not involving Christian conduct, a member in good standing obligations, the Church shall patiently endeavor to secure his continuance in its fellowship but failing such efforts after a reasonable time, the Church may grant his request and terminate such membership, but no member shall receive any letter of transfer to a church of another faith.

Any former membership by a vote of the Church taken at a duly constituted meeting after notice of such restoration application has been given to the members, if such application is made after an offense, evidence must be given of reformation, and it, for any other cause, upon satisfactory explanation by the former member, and acceptance by the Board of Deacons. The Board of Deacons will report upon its resolution with its recommendations for approval or disapproval.

ARTICLE V - SERVICES AND MEETINGS

Section 1. Service of worship shall be held at given hours each Sabbath except when temporarily suspended by a vote of the members of the Church.

The ordinance of the Lord's Supper shall be celebrated on the first Sabbath of each quarter. Baptism of adults and Blessing of Children shall be administered at such time and times as the elders may appoint or designate. The annual meeting of the members shall be held on the first Sabbath in February at which meeting the annual reports of officers, organizations, and departments shall be given, and at this meeting there shall be elected the officers for the ensuing term, the adoption of the annual budget and the consideration and adoption of plans for the new year.

The regular Sabbath and mid-week services of the Church shall be considered competent in case of necessity to transact the business of the Church if a quorum is present; except for corporate actions requiring legal notices and except for business specifically referred to other meetings.

Special meetings for the transaction of business may be called by the elder, the officers, deacons and trustees, and shall be called by the clerk of the Church on written request of twenty five (25) adult members of the church, provided that the nature of the business to be transacted shall be stated in the notice calling the special meeting.

Any changes in the constitution, by-laws, or rules and regulations of the Church shall be made at a meeting of the members called for that purpose and nature of the change shall be stated in the notice of meeting.

A quorum shall consist of twenty five (25) members in good standing.

At any meeting involving elections of officers, trustees, or elders shall be by standing vote, unless the majority of the members present at such meeting shall decide to vote by ballot. In which case election shall be by ballot only. The President of the Church shall preside at all meetings of the members at which business is to be transacted, including meetings of the Board of Trustees. The presence of the Elder of the Church may be requested at any meeting.

Election of officers shall take place after nominations are made in the following manner. Officers shall be nominated for their respective offices upon the meeting of the members held on the first Sabbath in December of each year. Election of all officials shall take place at the meeting of the members, upon the first Sabbath in January and upon their election, they shall be immediately installed in office. Nomination and election of members of the Board of Trustees shall take place the first Sabbath in February of each year.

ARTICLE VI - OFFICERS AND BOARD

The activities of the Church shall be divided into two parts, namely, (a) Business and Administrative, (b) Spiritual.

The Spiritual division of the church shall be presided over by the Elder and assistant Elder of Elders, elected by the members as hereafter set forth and the Business and Administrative officers shall be as follows:

1. The President
2. The Vice President
3. The Treasurer
4. The Clerk
5. Financial Secretary
6. The Board of Deacons
7. The Board of Trustees

The duties of the various officers and boards shall be set forth in the by-laws and any amendments thereof.

The members may also at each annual meeting elect an Executive Committee composed of the Board of Trustees, the President, Clerk of the Church, the Chairman of the Board of Deacons, the Chairman of the Board of Deaconesses, and three lay members of the church. It shall be the duty of the Executive Committee to act in any emergency which cannot await the calling of a regular or special meeting of the members called after notice containing the reason and purpose of calling such special meeting. A vote of approval or disapproval shall be by 75% of a quorum of the members in good standing attending such meeting, or a majority thereof, whichever is greater in number.

A Board of Missions shall be elected at each annual meeting consisting of five (5) lay members. The Elder shall be a member of the missions board, ex-officio. This Board shall take the responsibility of spreading the gospel in such areas and places as the members shall approve at the annual meeting or at any special meetings called for that purpose. The budget of the missions board shall be submitted at the same time at the annual meeting as the budget for all other activities of the church.

At the annual meeting members shall vote upon a choir master, assistant choir master, organist and secretary of the choir.

At the annual meeting there shall be elected the officers of the Sabbath School, namely, Superintendent, Secretary, and Pianist in such number as the members shall approve.

ARTICLE VII - TITHES AND DUTIES

The Board of Trustees shall levy and assess all tithes and other payments to the church as they shall deem proper subject to the approval of the membership at the annual meeting or at any special meeting called for that specific purpose.

ARTICLE VIII - COMMITTEES

Committees shall be appointed by the President or Board of Trustees in such number and composition as the work of the church may from time to time find necessary. All committees shall report to the authority appointing the committee, for such action as may be found necessary. All such committees connected with the church and using its equipment shall be regard as an integral part of the church and under the supervision and control of the Board of Trustees and shall be generally supervised by them.

ARTICLE IX - PROVISION IN CASE OF CONFLICT

In the event that any disagreement or conflict shall arise between the Pastor or Elder and the officers, or between the members of the church and any elected or appointed official, the point of issue shall be formulated in writing signed by at least five (5) members and the matter shall be submitted to the Board of Trustees shall be made to the General Membership at a special meeting called for that purpose after due notice to all the members, which notice shall state the reason and purpose of calling the meeting and the issue to be determined by the membership. The vote of the membership shall be final and binding upon all parties. The action taken by the members at such meeting shall be by not less than 2/3 vote.

ARTICLE X - AMENDMENTS

This constitution may be amended at any time at an annual meeting or at any special meeting called for that purpose, the notice of which shall contain the reason and object of calling the meeting and the votes of 75% of the members shall be necessary to pass any amendment to this constitution.

BY-LAWS

ARTICLE 1 - OFFICERS

PRESIDENT: The President shall preside at all business and secular meetings of the members of the members, he shall conduct all of the business affairs of the church, subject to the approval of the Board of Trustees. He shall sign all checks for the withdrawal of funds. He is authorized to sign all contracts, agreements, or order of the church. He shall carry out all orders and decisions of the Board of Trustees.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: The Vice President shall do any and all things in the absence of the President which are delegated to the President.

CLERK OF THE CHURCH: The church clerk shall keep a faithful record of the proceedings of the church and of the Board of Trustees of which he shall be a member ex-officio and its secretary. He shall keep a register of addresses of members of the church, together with dates and modes of their reception and removal and also a record of baptisms and marriages. He shall issue letters of transfer voted by the church and notify the church to which such letters are addressed. He shall preserve on file all communication and written official reports; notify all persons elected to offices and committees; send out legal notices of all meetings when such notices are required or necessary; he shall conduct all correspondence in so far as the same is not otherwise provided for, and shall perform such other duties as are prescribed by law or as usually pertain to the office of the clerk or secretary of a church or assembly.

THE TREASURER: The Treasurer shall receive all monies from the financial secretary and all other monies of the church and give receipt for the same. He shall deposit funds received in such depository as the Trustees shall order. Under direction of the Board of Trustees he shall have custody of all papers relating to the property of the church. He shall pay all the bills of the church upon the order of the Board of Trustees or their properly appointed agent. He shall keep accurate and correct accounts of all receipts and disbursements and shall be required to give such bond as the Board of Trustees shall prescribe. He shall keep a separate account of benevolence funds in accordance with the order of the church.

FINANCIAL SECRETARY: The financial secretary shall be elected at the annual meeting. He shall receive all payments of current expenses and benevolence subscriptions and shall take charge of all offerings and special collections. He shall keep an accurate and correct account with each subscriber; he shall pay all monies received to the proper treasurer taking receipts for the same, and he shall furnish subscribers with quarterly statements of their accounts.

THE ELDER: The Elder shall be called or elected for an indefinite term by a 2/3 vote of the members of the church at an annual meeting or at a special meeting called for that purpose. The Elder shall have charge of the spiritual welfare and work

of the church and shall conduct his duties with the assistance of the Board of Deacons and under the supervision of the Board of Trustees. He shall seek to enlist men and women as followers of Jesus Christ, preach the gospel, administer the ordinances of the church and have under his chair all services of public worship and the spiritual activities of the church. He shall preside at all meetings of the church at which spiritual matters are to be discussed or voted upon except when matters concerning himself are to be considered or when another moderator is chosen by the meeting. The members of the church shall at any time by a majority vote, at a meeting called for that purpose, request the resignation of the meeting. The Elder shall have the right to give to the church sixty (60) days previous notice that he desires to leave of his own volition, except that in case of loss of ministerial standing on the part of the Elder, his right of office shall cease at once.

Whenever a vacancy occurs in the pastorate of the church, the members at a meeting specifically called for that purpose upon due notice, shall elect a pulpit committee; such committee after seeking the guidance of the Divine Spirit shall, with the cooperation of the Board of Trustees, and of the Board of Deacons, make a canvass of available ministers and settle upon the one who, in their judgment, should be called to the Eldership and introduce him to the church and propose his election as Elder or Pastor at a meeting duly called on notice for such purpose. When he has been so elected, and has accepted the call to the church, the Elder shall become a member of the church and subscribe to the constitution and by-laws of the church and be bound thereby.

ARTICLE II - ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES: The Board of Trustees shall consist of a minimum of nine (9) or a maximum of twelve (12) members elected at the annual meeting in accordance with the laws of the State of New York. There shall be three (3) categories of members of the Board of Trustees. Three (3) shall be elected for a term of three years, three (3) shall be elected for a term of two years, and three (3) shall be elected for a term of one year. At following annual meetings, vacancies in the board shall be filled by the election of three members for three year periods, so that three new members of the Board shall be voted upon at each annual meeting. If any other vacancies occur in the board, such vacancies may be filled at an annual meeting or at a special meeting called for that purpose for the unexpired term of the vacancy. The Board shall elect its own officers and committees and shall determine its own mode of procedure. There shall be a chairman of the Board of Trustees and the Clerk of the Church shall act as its secretary ex-officio, without right to vote. Under the direction of the church and except as otherwise provided for, the Board of Trustees shall have the care of and the custody of the property of the church and shall have charge of its financial affairs subject to rule and regulations prescribed by the membership and by the laws of the State of New York. The Board shall have no power to buy, sell, or mortgage, lease or transfer property without the specific authority given by a 2/3 vote of the church.

THE BOARD OF DEACONS: The Board of Deacons shall consist of (12) members. It shall be the duty of the Board of Deacons to cooperate with the Elder in ministering to the spiritual interests of the church and community.

They shall assist in preparation and administration of the ordinances in caring for the poor, sick, sorrowing, the indifferent and strangers. They shall give attention to the discipline as found in the by-laws. They shall receive applications by letter or otherwise for admission to church membership and shall examine all applicants for membership on confession of faith with respect to their fitness therefore. They shall provide for the supply of the pulpit in case of a vacancy, or in case of the absence of the elder.

THE BOARD OF DEACONESSES: The Board of Deaconesses shall be composed of five (5) members of the church. The Deaconesses shall visit the sick and needy, especially of their own sex, call upon new members, introduce new families into the life of the church, and cooperate with the Pastor or Elder in promoting the spiritual life of the church.

The deacons and deaconesses shall hold joint meetings whenever such meetings are deemed necessary to the development of the spiritual life of the church.

THE BOARD OF MISSIONS: The Board of Missions shall be composed of five (5) members who shall all be members of the church. They shall undertake such missions both at home and abroad as they shall be advised by the Board of Deaconesses acting jointly as to plans for such missions. They shall prepare a budget to be submitted at each annual meeting and report on their work at such meetings.

THE SABBATH SCHOOL: The Sabbath School shall be composed of as many members as the annual meeting shall deem necessary. The annual meeting shall also elect such superintendent, secretaries, and pianists as they may deem necessary and proper to carry out the work of the church. The officers of the Sabbath School shall prepare a budget to be submitted at the annual meeting and shall make their report upon their work at the annual meeting or at such other meetings as may be called for that purpose.

THE CHOIR: The choir shall assemble themselves to practice so, that they might sing to the honor and glory of God. They shall open their practice with prayer and close with prayer so that God might be well pleased. Members of the choir must be members of the church and prospective members of the church who are of good behavior. All members of the choir will be expected to attend practice except in case of sickness or matter over which they have no control, and in the latter cases, a note of excuse must be presented to the Choir Master. Perfect behavior will be expected of all members of the choir. Any member of the choir who is absent from choir practice for three consecutive practice nights without having reasonable cause therefore, shall be excused from the choir.

The choir shall be comprised of a Choirmaster, and Assistant Choirmaster, an Organist and a Secretary. The Choirmaster shall have full control of the choir and in his absence, the assistant Choirmaster shall have such control. The secretary will keep the necessary records of the choir and attend to all of their correspondence.

DISMISSAL OF A MEMBER: All members of the church are required to bear their share of the responsibility for the upkeep of the church according to their ability, to so conduct themselves as to be a credit to the church God.

A member of the church may be dismissed from the church in accordance with the rules laid down by the Master Himself. (See Matthew 18:15-19).

Any member who violates the principles of our faith and the doctrines of the church as we teach them, will be liable to dismissal by a vote of the members at an annual meeting or at a meeting specially called for that purpose.

Upon paying his tithe to the treasurer of the church, a member shall request and receive from the treasurer a receipt therefore.

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