A comprehensive study of the Black church as an institution of social welfare from 1865 to 1900

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A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF THE BLACK CHURCH
AS AN INSTITUTION OF SOCIAL WELFARE
FROM 1865 TO 1900

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY
MARGIE K. WALKER

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
ATLANTA, GEORGIA
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CHAPTER I
THE ORIGIN OF THE BLACK CHURCH

As a result of slavery, black people were stripped of their heritage physically as well as spiritually. Their original African heritage was torn to pieces and swept away by the winds of Western civilization, leaving only shreds and traces as such. Being physically and spiritually naked, this emergency was met by covering their nakedness with the oppressor's cast off clothes ——meaning that blacks adapted themselves to their new social environment by discovering original meanings and values in Christianity that otherwise had no meaning to Western life styles. This then was the beginning of an embryonic invisible institution—the black church.

This institution, having its birthplace in slavery, has long addressed itself to the spiritual, emotional, and social welfare of its recipients—black people. It has


2 Ibid.
served as an outlet for the expression of emotions. It has provided race leadership, strengthened the black family, and as a social center, provided fellowship, shelter and mutual aid. Without such an outlet, racial progress would have undoubtedly been hindered.

**Statement of the Problem**

Wilensky and Lebeaux define social welfare as an organized system of social services and institutions, designed to aid individuals and groups attain satisfying standards of life and health. It aims at personal and social relationships which permit people the fullest development of their capabilities and the promotion of their well-being in harmony with the needs of the community.

It is impossible to discuss social welfare without including the institution of religion. The black church has long been an institution of social welfare, continuously expanding its significance in the black community through an increasing number of social and economic ventures.

In order to study the black church, it would be significant to trace its historical origin and development. Hence, the investigator feels that a brief discussion of its origin and development is, thus, in order.

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The uprooting and the transportation of blacks to an alien land undoubtedly had a shattering effect upon their lives. The peoples from which the slaves were drawn possessed highly developed systems of religious beliefs concerning their place in nature and in society. In the crisis which they experienced, the enslaved blacks appealed to their ancestors and their gods. But their ancestors and their gods were unable to help them. A vast majority of the slaves, in their state of bewilderment, sought a meaning for their existence in the European's world. The orientation for socializing blacks into the alien European life style was provided by Christianity and was communicated to the slaves by their white masters. This was accomplished in part by familiarizing the slaves with the Bible. It was at this point that the "invisible institution" of the black church evolved. It was invisible to the extent that it was not recognized as a formal established institution.

"The black church is the only social institution which started in the African forest and survived slavery. Under the leadership of a priest or medicine man or the Christian pastor, the Church preserved in itself the remnants of African tribal life. After the enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation, the Church became the center of Negro social life. Hence, the population of blacks

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in the United States is virtually divided into church congregations which are the real units of race life.\textsuperscript{5}

Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to show the transition of black religion from an embryonic, invisible institution to the establishment of the black church.

The great majority of African slaves imported into the Western Hemisphere came from the west coast of Central Africa.\textsuperscript{6} The region that is now the nation of Ghana was one of the focal points of the slave trade. The natives of this region who were caught and sold into slavery came from tribes that had well-developed religions. Therefore, religion played a large and fervent part in their lives. The fact that the African slaves already had a highly developed religious life when they arrived in America probably explains why many slaves took so readily to the Christian religion, and had so little trouble making the transition despite language and cultural barriers.\textsuperscript{9}


\textsuperscript{6} Joseph Priest, Bible Defense of Slavery (Detroit: Negro History Press, n.d.), Chapter I.

\textsuperscript{7} Frazier, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.
From the beginning, there was a serious effort to convert the slaves to Christianity. Opinionately, this effort was a rationalization for the slave trade. Not only were scriptures cited in an attempt to support the belief that blacks were cursed, but they were used to support the very institution of slavery itself. As years passed, the question of converting slaves became a controversial issue, and conversion, therefore, was not as effective as it might have been. For example, at the time when the importation of slaves began, it was commonly believed that one Christian should not hold another Christian in bondage. This meant that when a slave became a Christian, he also should have been freed. This concept would have undoubtedly ruined the intentions of those who had invested in slavery.

In an attempt to settle the issue, the Virginia legislature, in 1967, declared that "baptism did not change the condition of a person as to his bondage or freedom". In 1731, the Bishop of London declared:

"... Christianity does not make the least alteration in civil property; that the freedom which Christianity gives is a freedom from the bondage of sin and Satan, and from the dominion

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of their lusts and passions and inordinate desires; but as to their outward conditions they remained as before, even after baptism. 12

Prior to the American Revolution, few slaves were converted to Christianity. These reasons are summarized as follows:

1. Masters feared that conversion would interfere with slave labor. Slaves were required to work on Sundays, which conflicted with the teachings of Christianity. In addition, when converted, slaves would be equal in one respect to their masters. Undoubtedly, this would make them harder to control. 13

2. Masters were not interested in their own spiritual welfare, and were not deeply concerned about the welfare of their slaves.

3. Many slaves were unable to understand religious teachings, due to their lack of knowledge of English language. 14

During the latter half of the eighteenth century, a number of significant developments took place that influenced the spread of Christianity among blacks and to shape black religion in America. First of these developments was the production of cotton, the demand for which was world-wide. Labor used in meeting this demand was found in African slaves. In 1860, there were 4 million slaves imported into

12 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
Over 3 million were in twelve Southern states, engaged for the most part in producing the cotton and other crops upon which Southern planters capitalized. This concentration of slaves on the farms and plantations of the South gave evangelists opportunities to win large numbers of them to Christianity.

A second great development took place that launched the rise of the black church. As stated by Carter G. Woodson, "The Dawn of the New Day" in the religious development of Negroes occurred when the Methodists and first all-black church was free of white control in 1787. (Although free blacks worshipped in white churches, white congregations kept black from leadership and forced them to sit in the rear of the balcony.)

R. Ethel Dennis gives an account of the efforts of Richard Allen and his colleagues as they refused to accept segregated worship:

"One Sunday morning in 1787, a Philadelphia free black named Richard Allen and a friend, Absolom Jones, were praying on their knees at the front of a white church when a trustee pulled them up and told them to go to the Negro gallery. Instead, they walked out. Allen proceeded to organize his

15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
own Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church, which admitted only Negroes.

Soon black Northern Baptists and other denominations followed suit. In the South, however, laws against the assembly of free Negroes generally prevented the rise of independent churches until the Civil War."17

In view of the historical development of the black church, the investigator has chosen to focus on studying the black church as an institution of social welfare from 1865 to 1900. Hence, this study entails an examination of the kinds of social services delivered by the church: (1) social, (2) economic, (3) education, (4) political, and (5) religious.

Moreover, within the content of this study, the investigator will discuss the following implications of the black church:

1. What effects did the black church have on the social cohesion and solidarity of the black community?

2. What are the types of social services sponsored by the black church and the need fulfillment of these social services?

3. What are the implications of this study for future research on the function of the black church as a social welfare institution?

17
Significance of the Study

The study is designed to examine the role of the black church in delivering social services to the black community from 1865 to 1900. "At that point in history, freedom was a nominal legacy of the war. Yet telling the slave that he was free did not make him so. Ultimately, the 'Negro' had to establish his freedom by some deliberate, conscious act entirely his own, or he would remain a slave in fact, if not in name."  

Despite the severe handicaps that slavery imposed on freedom, the black community nevertheless demonstrated abundant evidence that it could assume the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. For instance, in describing the black community in Charleston, South Carolina immediately after the news of Emancipation, Joel Williamson says:

Zion Church having been established before the war primarily for the accommodation of their Negro members, became the focal point of organized activity among the Negroes and their Northern friends... "

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The black church also became the agency for influencing social behavior through face-to-face relations and was the world of escape from the hard experiences shared by all. In this way the minister exercised power over the subcommunities and families by regulating behavior through the penalty of expulsion from the church. Thus the black church was the center of the black community, and the minister was its undisputed leader.

In reviewing the literature pertinent to this study, the investigator has explored a number of social, economic, and educational ventures implemented by the black church.

Although poor in the goods of this world, blacks soon made sufficient sacrifice materially to give to the relief work among themselves. Blacks in Maryland gave $23,371 to aid the relief work promoted by the Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of the Coloured People. They organized bodies of their own to participate directly in this uplift work. In 1865 there was established in Brooklyn "The African Civilization Society", which gradually extended its work through churches and schools into


21 Woodson, op. cit., p. 215.
the District of Columbia, the Carolinas, Maryland, Virginia, Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The reports of this organization show that in 1868 it employed 129 preachers instructing 8,000 students at an expense of $53,700. For some years the society operated in Brooklyn an orphanage with the aid of the Freedman's Bureau. From 1864 to 1868 the African Methodists extended its mission and school work as to have 40,000 Sunday School pupils and 39,000 volumes in school libraries.

Missionary teachers came with a determination to change the character of the freedmen through an intelligent religion based upon actual knowledge of God as revealed in the Bible. Among these workers one should mention Rev. K. L. Johnson, a teacher of refugees in Washington; Horace Bumstead, president of Atlanta University; Solomon Peck, a volunteer teacher of the Contrabands at Beaufort, South Carolina; and General O. O. Howard, president of Howard Uni-

22 Ibid., p. 216.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
The sort of education that these workers promoted further explained the significance of the movement. All of the church aid societies had as their purpose the industrial, social, intellectual, and religious improvement of the freedmen. The capstone of the structure they would build then had its foundation in moral and religious instructions.

Joseph R. Washington describes the late nineteenth century black church as follows:

"The meeting house became considerably more than a place of worship; it evolved into a community center, a club, a political arena for bidding politicians, a recreational hall for social activities, the major outlet for emotional repressions, the town hall, and the school room."  

In view of this, the investigator proposes to examine the role of the black church in delivering social services to the black community beginning with the Emancipation Proclamation.

The black church was one organization which black people controlled and which was strong enough to function as a social

26
Ibid., p. 230.

27
Ibid.

28
institution. Moreover, ministers were the best trained leaders in the black community. They were unique in the sense that they were able to administer to the needs of their people as they viewed them.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study is designed to give an over-view of the black church as an institution of social welfare from 1865 to 1900. The study will not focus directly on any one specific denomination. Nor does the study seek to focus on the rural church as opposed to the urban black church.

The design, however, does seek to examine the origin and functions of the black church as a delivery system in providing social services in the black community. In the final chapter, the study will address itself to the relationship of the study to the black church of today.

Due to the historical approach of the study, the researcher's information resources did not include a vast array of periodical literature, the limitation here being the paucity of periodical literature relevant to this study.

The focal point of this paper is to examine the role of the black church as an institution of social welfare from 1865 to 1900. This paper, in Chapter One, focuses on the

29

Ibid., p. 236.
role of the black preacher as an autonomous social work practitioner, meeting the social welfare needs of black people and adding to the social cohesion and solidarity of the black community. Chapter Three of this paper will describe the different services implemented by the black church---educational, political, economic, and social.

In the conclusion, the investigator will discuss the relationship of this study to the black church of today and will suggest a revamping of its goals and objectives to remain relevant to the black community. The objective here will focus on the role that the church must play to deal with problems of social welfare and making it a reality for black people.

Description of the Methodology

In view of the era being studied, the problem will be studied from a historical approach. The method of procedure to be employed by the researcher encompass the following: (1) an examination of the origin and function of the black church and (2) an investigation of the different kinds of social services provided by the black church from 1865 to 1900, and the impact of these services on the black community.

Collection of data entails gathering data from primary sources, which are fundamental to historical research, such as autobiographies, journals, magazines, books, and previous research reports.

Secondary sources of data will include books and written
reports of persons who relate the testimony of an actual witness of, or participants in the black church during the period being studies.

Utilizing the data gathered in this study, the analysis of data will encompass an examination and evaluation of the various social services provided by the black church from 1865 to 1900. The analysis of data is designed to focus on the following:

1. The origin of the black church,
2. The impact of the black church on the black community,
3. The black church as a viable tool in providing social welfare services to the black community, and
4. Programs or organizations as outgrowths of the black church.
CHAPTER II

THE ROLE OF THE BLACK PREACHER IN CREATING SOCIAL COHESION AND SOLIDARITY IN THE BLACK CHURCH

In the period after the Civil War to the Migration Movement, the black preacher played an increasing role as a religious, political, and social leader with the work of the black church. At the end of the Civil War black people began to build up their denominations. Blacks were converted to the Christian faith in great numbers. The black preacher was the undisputed leader of the black church and community. He played a two-fold role: serving the people in the community as a worship and social leader; and communicating with whites in order to soften their harshness towards blacks.

To examine this increasing role of the black preacher, it becomes necessary then to analyze his role during both the slavery era (1619 to 1865) and the antebellum period (1865 to 1900). On the plantation the black preacher served as a

healer of the sick and infirm, interpreter of the Scripture, comforter of those in despair, and as one who expressed the longing and resentment of an oppressed people. Most of the religious services were secret; and here the black preacher gave forth prophetic promises of deliverance from slavery by a righteous God. The black preacher was called to his position through some religious experience, and through his personal qualities achieved a dominant role.

Black ministers sometimes took the initiative in bringing about separation of blacks from white congregations because of discrimination against blacks during worship. For example, Richard Allen left St. George Methodist Church in Philadelphia in 1787, because of segregation practices by whites.

In the face of all hardships, black preachers helped the slaves to find fulfillment of two essential values: spiritual uplift and social intercourse.

2 Woodson, op. cit., Chapter II.

From 1865 to 1900, the black minister played a most vital role in administering to the social welfare needs of black people. Charles Sanders had the following to say in his description of the "Black Minister as an Autonomous Practitioner":

"Because the black church was the chief social welfare institution, the black minister was the key social welfare agent and pioneer in building black institutions. Because of his emotional appeal, he formulated a stronger tie between the blacks as the new religion flourished."4

According to Sanders, Lloyd Yabura defines an autonomous social worker as one who views problem solving in its systematic dimensions and proceeds to try to do whatever is necessary to solve the problem and thereby deliver needed services to his target population... In light of this definition, Sanders goes even further to describe the black preacher as an autonomous social work practitioner, exercising problem solving organizational, interpersonal and survival skills:

"The role of the black minister, like that of the

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5 Ibid.
church, was a diverse one. He was a natural leader to whom the masses responded, especially since there was opportunity for self-assertion on the part of strong men. Thus the organized community life came under the leadership of black ministers. He was often the best educated man, which lead to his educational role. With the Baptist church and independent status, the individual preachers, could rule their followers more antonomously. It was not unlikely that most of those who were ministers who chartered new fields and built new institutions, became the fathers of black America."6

Mays and Nicholson also saw the black preacher playing a significant role in the social and religious development of the black church for two reasons:

1. Preaching was an outlet for leadership ability. It was the only position of leadership permitted to blacks which carried considerable prestige. It kept alive aspirations among gifted black men.7

2. Secondly, the black preacher was able to communicate religion to black people in a useful and intimate form. "Being one of the people and suffering with them, he could make religion not only a discipline, but also a ground of hope."8

Strangely enough, most black leaders of the nineteenth century were ministers. Among them were Richard Allen, bishop of the first African Methodist Episcopal Church in America and a well known spokesman of Philadelphia; Rev.

6 Charles Sanders, op. cit., p. 29.
8 Ibid.
Thomas Paul of Boston, who pioneered the development of independent Baptist churches; the Rev. J. W. C. Pennington, escaped slave, scholar, and fighter for abolition; A.M.E. Bishop Daniel A. Payne, a Southern clergyman forced to continue his career in the North; Andrew Bryan, founder of the First African Baptist Church of Savannah; David George, preacher of the first Negro Baptist Church at Silver Bluff, South Carolina. Leaders such as Absolom Jones, Daniel Coker, and Morris Brown helped to promote the African Methodist Episcopal branch of Methodism among blacks in the South as well as the North.

Two quotations illustrate the use of the black church as a social center. George E. Haynes writes:

"The Negro as worker makes contact with the white when on his job, and receives information, instruction, and stimulus so far as his occupation influences his life. All of leisure-time activities that condition intellectual development and emotional motivation under present conditions of segregated Negro life must find their channel mainly through the principal community agency the Negro has---his church." 9

Forest Washington, the trail blazing dean of the Atlanta University School of Social Work states:

"From the very beginning the Negro has had to make numerous approximations and substitutions to supply himself with decent recreational opportunities. In both city and country, he has made of the Negro church a quasi community center."\textsuperscript{10}

In deed it was in the church that black people—especially the black preacher exercised great power, and maintained a sense of religious and social unity among black people in the local community. Carter G. Woodson concludes that the role of the black preacher was not limited to pulpit reading and soul saving. But rather, he was a walking encyclopedia; the counselor of the unwise, the friend of the unfortunate, the social welfare organizer, and the interpreter of the signs of the times.\textsuperscript{11}

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\textsuperscript{11}Carter G. Woodson, \textit{op. cit.}, ed. by Sanders, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 29.
\end{flushright}
CHAPTER III

AN ANALYSIS OF THE KINDS OF SOCIAL SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE BLACK CHURCH

Many scholars are of the opinion that during this period, 1865 to 1900, the black church largely ignored the practical problems of the black man's fate in this world. Others believe that the black church functioned only to support the theory of accommodation to an inferior status. Still another school of thought addresses itself to the belief that the black church served only as outlet for the expression of emotions.

It is our purpose in this chapter to prove that the black church functioned as an institution of social welfare from 1865 to 1900 providing an upward thrust for black people.


Hence, the black church became the birthplace of educational, political, economical, and social advancement during this period. As stated by E. Franklin Frazier, the black church gave rise to a "nation within a nation" functioning in its many capacities and providing the needed services in the community.

Black churches in the latter part of the nineteenth century engaged directly in a variety of activities. Mutual aid societies grew out of the church. Assistance in the time of sickness and distress, help for widows and orphans, homes for the aged, handicraft clubs, and schools for domestic training were some of the types of mutual aid offered. The segregated society forced blacks into these self-help organizations. Participation in society was restricted severely, especially when Reconstruction ended. Therefore, the church tried valiantly to fill the gap. Booker T. Washington gives a vivid description of this era as it affected the four million blacks emerging from slavery.

"During the whole Reconstruction period, our people throughout the South looked to the

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4 Frazier, op. cit., p. 29.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., p. 36.
Federal Government for everything, very much as a child looks to its mother. This was not unnatural. The central government gave them freedom, and the whole nation had been enriched for more than two centuries by the labor of the Negro. Even as a youth and later in manhood, I had the feeling that it was cruelly wrong in the central government, at the beginning of our freedom, to fail to make some provision for the general education of our people in addition to what the States might do, so that the people would be better prepared for the duties of citizenship.7

After freedom had been granted blacks, white Protestants ceased their efforts to convert the masses of blacks, therefore leaving very little means for education. Blacks then took the initiative to set up their own schools. However, such activities did not emerge over night. It should be mentioned, however, that the first attempt to educate blacks came about as a result of white missionaries spreading the gospel among blacks by teaching them how to read the Bible. Many of the schools and colleges established during this era are still in existence today. Among the institutions established and maintained by the Baptists are Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia in 1865; Shaw University, Raleigh, North Carolina in 1865; Benedict College, Columbia,

South Carolina in 1870; and Bishop College in Marshall, Texas in 1880. Some of the schools established by the Methodists in this era are Clark College in Atlanta, Georgia in 1869; Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1973; Morris Brown in Atlanta in 1881; Allen University in Columbia, South Carolina in 1881; and Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina in 1879.8

Through the church came social cohesion, self expression, recognition, and leadership. Self respect and pride were stimulated and preserved, and education was promoted. If nothing else, the church became the black man's very own. It was the most powerful organization of the black man in America. DuBois said:

... "a little investigation reveals the curious fact that in the South, practically every American Negro is a church member. Some, to be sure are not regularly enrolled, and a few do not habitually attend services; but, practically, a proscribed people must have a social center, and that center for this people is the Negro church. The concensus of 1890 showed nearly 24,000 Negro churches in this country, with a total enrolled membership of over two and a half million, or ten actual churches to every 28 persons, and in some southern states in every two persons. Besides these there is the large number who, while not enrolled as members, attend and take part in many of the activities of the church. There is an organized Negro church for every 60 black families in the nation, and in some States for every 40 families, owning on an average a thousand dollars worth of property each, or nearly 26 million dollars in all."9

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8Rose, op. cit., p. 285. See chart on the next page.

<table>
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<th>Denominational Schools</th>
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<th>Date Founded</th>
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<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>Lincoln University</td>
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E. Franklin Frazier contends that the Negro preacher was an asset in aiding the establishment of educational institutions to raise the educational level of blacks. However, it should be noted that these schools began with the primary function of raising the moral and religious level of blacks. Consequently, many of them were merely Sunday Schools. "The schools—elementary, secondary, and those which provided the beginning of college education—were permeated with a religious and moral outlook."\(^{10}\)

Frazier also cites a very good example of how instrumental the "Negro" preacher was in promoting education:

"A preacher who was a graduate of a Baptist college founded by white missionaries and who had helped to make the bricks for the building of the college, said that when he was graduated, the white president addressed him as follows: 'I want you to go into the worst spot in this state and build a school and a church.' This minister followed the instructions of his white mentor and established the school that provided the primary school and later four Baptist churches."\(^{11}\)

With the aid of philanthropists such as Julius Rosenwald, the church played an important role in establishing schools aided by the Rosenwald fund. "Negroes contributed 17 per cent of the total cost of the schools" by sponsoring various fund raising programs that were conducted by local churches.\(^{12}\)

DuBois said, "The Negro churches were the birthplaces of Negro

\(^{10}\)Frazier, op. cit., pp. 39-40.

\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 40.

\(^{12}\)Ibid.
schools and of all agencies which seek to promote the intelligence of the masses. Night schools and kindergarten are still held in connection with churches, and all Negro celebrities, from a bishop to a poet like Dunbar, are introduced to Negro audiences from the pulpit.\textsuperscript{13}

Perhaps the most important role of the black church in this era was played in political life. Since blacks in the South enjoyed civil rights on a wide scale, many of the politicians of this period (1869–1900) were recruited from among religious leaders. They served in state legislatures, in the Freedman's Bureau, and in many federally appointed positions. Two of the twenty blacks elected to the House of Representatives between 1869 and 1901 were ministers, as was one of the two Senators.\textsuperscript{14} Bishop J. W. Hood of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church was elected president of the first black political convention ever to be held after Emancipation.\textsuperscript{15} Bishop Hood has also served in other appointed positions such as Deputy Collector of Internal Revenue for the United States and assistant Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of North Carolina.\textsuperscript{16}

Bishop Henry M. Turner of the African Methodist Episcopal Church was also a political activist during Reconstruction. He is noted for his attempt to organize blacks in the Republican Party and was elected to the Georgia State Legislature.

\textsuperscript{13}Nelsen, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 81. See also Woodson, \textit{History of the Negro Church}, Chapter II.
\textsuperscript{14}Williamson, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 205-8.
\textsuperscript{15}Woodson, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 236-38.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid. See also Lerone Bennett, Jr., "The Black Worker," \textit{Ebony} (November, 1972), pp. 150-153, 158.
An in-depth depiction of the career of Bishop Turner reveals that he is famous for his "Back to Africa Movement" during the Reconstruction era. According to the Bishop, "the sequel to increasing oppression would be war, efforts of extermination, anarchy, horror, and a wail to heaven, for he observed that whoever the white race does not consort with, it will crush out."17

Among other black politicians during this period was Moses Broyles, a republican of the Second Baptist Church of Indianapolis, Indiana, who frequently used his church for political meetings.18 R. McMary, another Baptist minister, was one of two black delegates from Indiana to the Republican National Convention in 1872.19 As far back as 1869, Reverend James R. Howell of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in New York organized the Zion Union Apostolic Church in protest against white discrimination.20 Personal and political friction led to the disruption in 1881.21 This political struggle, moreover, was internal in nature. In Sumter, the Reverend William E. Johnson of the African Methodist Church became the dominant black Republican, serving as a delegate to the Republican Convention in 1868 and later became State senator.22


19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.


22 R. Ethel Dennis, op. cit., pp. 152-54.
Reverend R. H. Cain of the Emanuel Church in Charleston, South Carolina is considered one of the most influential black politicians of his time. Reverend Cain, like other ministers used their churches as political vehicles during the period of Reconstruction.\textsuperscript{23}

After Reconstruction many of these preachers returned to their pulpits. While there was little real chance during this period of rebellion against the caste system, there was opened however, a new possibility for the black church to serve as a power agency for blacks. Writing in 1903, DuBois concluded:

\textit{"The Negro church of today is the social center of Negro life in the U.S. . . . Various organizations meet there—the church proper, the Sunday School, two or three insurance societies, and mass meetings of various kinds. Entertainments, suppers, and lectures are held besides the five or six regular weekly religious services. Considerable sums of money are collected and expended here, employment is found for the idle, strangers are introduced, news is disseminated and charity is distributed. At the same time this social, intellectual, and economic center is a religious center of great power."}\textsuperscript{24}

Frazier suggests that the black church became an arena of political activities as a result of blacks being eliminated from secular politics after Reconstruction. Only in the church—on local, associational or denominational levels—could black men hope to become leaders. Outside the church there was little opportunity for the black male to exercise authority or play the role of a man.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{24}\textit{DuBois, op. cit., pp. 142-43.}

\textsuperscript{25}\textit{Frazier, op. cit., pp. 43-4.}
Methodist ministers in their "denominational hierarchies" and Baptist preachers in the "autonomous local assemblies" ruled as monarchs on thrones. The people took great pride in their church meetings, in voting for church officers or electing delegates to the various conventions and associational meetings. Unable to vote in the white man's world, they were serious about every opportunity within the church to participate in expressing their choice and making known their will.

As DuBois pointed out, "a study of economic co-operation among Negroes must begin with the church group." Although this paper deals with the black church from 1965 to 1900, the reader should be aware of the fact that blacks who were free before the Civil War had already implemented a number of economic ventures, most of which were based upon skills which they had acquired in supplying services to the white community, i.e., such as livery stable businesses, tailoring shops, and clothing business.

According to Frazier, the role of religion and the black church in elementary form can be best seen in mutual aid, sickness and burial societies, and fraternal organizations that sprang up after Emancipation. The avowed purpose of the mutual aid societies was to aid the poor in times of sickness, distress, or death. The sickness and burial societies functioned only to insure blacks of a decent Christian burial.


The former as well as the latter of the two societies were supported by pennies that blacks could scrape up to insure themselves of security benefits during the time of a crisis.29 The very names of these societies reflect the religious influences of the church, for example, Love and Charity, and Brothers and Sister of Love.30 In the cities churches did many things to assist blacks in adjusting to their new environment. In New York, Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, and other cities, the black church established employment bureaus, maintained schools of domestic training, and organized various clubs for boys and girls. In Atlanta Dr. H. H. Proctor's Congregational Church organized a day nursery, kindergarten, gymnasium, and school of music. In Springfield, Massachusetts, Dr. W. N. DeBerry led his Congregational members in the establishment of a home for working girls and a welfare league for women.

Fraternal organizations were local, state, and national in scope. Their essential purpose was to aid widows and children and individual members or sick members. Among some of those fraternal organizations were the Knights of Liberty, organized by Reverend Moses Dickson of Cincinnati, the Grand United Order of True Reformers, the Colored Order of Elks, Knights of Pythias, and Nine Masons.31 Out of these fraternal organizations came the establishment of various insurance companies and banks maintained solely by black businessmen. John Merrick, who had been

29 Frazier, op. cit., p. 36.
30 Ibid.
31 Woodson, op. cit., pp. 252-3.
a True Reformer, joined several others to establish the North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company. S. W. Rutherford also left the True Reformers to organize the National Benefit Life Insurance Company of Washington, D. C.

The first banks organized and owned by blacks were the Savings Banks, emerged from the True Reformers, in Richmond, Virginia and the Capital Savings Banks in Washington, D. C. in 1888. In 1890 the Alabama Penny Savings and Loan Company was organized by a minister in Birmingham, Alabama. Hence, the outcome of the mutual aid societies was the establishment of black businesses which were more economic than social in their functions.

During the Reconstruction period the black church provided a source of social organization and social control in a time of social disruption for the newly freed slaves. There were conflicts, however, between the freedmen and those blacks who had been free before the Civil War. Fortunately, these conflicts were short lived and very soon diminished.

"Socially and culturally it was necessary for the Negro to maintain a separate existence . . . Whites kept a discreet distance from the everyday lives of Negroes . . . In a complex industrial society, Negroes had to work out their own formulas for survival. An important agency for maintaining group cohesion and rendering self help was the church.


34Franklin, op. cit., p. 397.
Frazier discusses the black church as an agency of social control in that it attempted to combat some of the evils that the newly freed blacks faced during the years following Emancipation.

The church waged a war against sexual promiscuity, bigamy, etc., in an attempt to raise the social, religious, and moral level of blacks. The black church has therefore grown by leaps and bounds and became the very center of social life—a means for self expression, recognition, and shelter from the cruel white world. In the outside world, blacks worked as maids, butlers, cooks, shoe-shine boys, janitors, etc., but in the church they were deacon X, Reverend Y, and Sister Z.

In summation, Mays and Nicholson, in their work support the contention that the black church was indeed an institution of social welfare:

... "There is in the genius or the 'soul' of the Negro church something that gives it life and vitality, that makes it stand out significantly above its buildings, creeds, rituals and doctrines, something that makes it a unique institution."35

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35 Washington, op. cit., p. 296.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The investigator has thus far attempted to convey a precise picture of the black church as an institution of social welfare from 1865 to 1900, expounding upon the following: (1) the impact of the black church on the social cohesion of the black community and (2) an examination of the kinds of social services provided by the black church.

Being that this study was dealt with from a historical approach, the writer found it necessary to make it relevant to the present as well as the future. Consequently, this raises the following questions: How does this study relate to the lives of black people today? Can the black church still be viewed as a relevant institution to the needs of black people today? Just what should the black church of today be about?

From this investigation, one would thus be correct to conclude that the black church has provided black people with the ability to build a "nation within a nation". The church has transmitted survival and coping skills to its members that have over the years been incorporated into its teachings. First, the black church has instilled within blacks the concept of a never-ending hope of endurance to cope with the hardships of life. Secondly, the black church builds on the strengths of black people, always creating that force and incentive to survive regardless of the obstacles confronted.
Coretta King, prominent wife of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in her most recent book had the following to say:

"The church has served as a motivating force——its heritage having a very distinct bearing upon the lives of black people... It was this church atmosphere which gave birth today's concept of 'soul'. Soul music was the music of the older black church—a mixture of Christianity."

During the period between 1865 and 1900, the black church was the center of black life. As a result of not being able to become active participants in society, blacks were forced to create a world of their own. The church, moreover, gave rise to that world and was the birthplace of educational, economic, political, and social opportunities for blacks.

As opportunities have opened to blacks during the twentieth century, they have been free to move about in pursuit of those rights that are supposedly "God given". The church, in order to remain relevant and accountable to black people, must revamp its program and address itself to goals and objectives that reflect the needs of its members. As an agent of social welfare, it must reflect the following in its teachings:

1. The Church must develop an arsenal of tactics and strategies geared toward attacking problems in this world as opposed to waiting to get on "the other side of Jordan".

2. The church must educate the masses to the extent that interpretation of the scripture fits our historical position in the world.

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3. Lastly, the church must act as a unifying agent providing blacks with self-determination, creativity, purpose, and faith in the concept of black pride and black power. In essence, the black church should be involved in building institutions that reflect the black experience. In comparison to the programs and services that derived from the original black church—mutual aid societies, burial societies, fraternities, insurance companies, etc.—the black church of today should be about developing credit unions, consumer and housing cooperatives, etc. With intra-support of all black churches—not so much proselyting but building corporate systems—the black church should be about creating alternative social systems of caring for black people:

a. Building institutions that reflect the educational needs of our people.

b. Strengthening black families in the black community by providing programs that teach families how to meet our own needs. Such programs can be tutorial and programs providing a knowledge of how to produce food and build homes.

James H. Cone concluded the following about the black church:

"Some ultra-blacks discard the black church, but there can be no revolution without the masses, and the black masses are in the churches. The purpose of the church is to provide the religious demansion inherent in all struggles for freedom. Therefore, Black Theology's critique of the Post-Civil War black church is not a put down but a call to face reality in order that the church may move in the direction laid down by its fathers."

The black church is however, beginning to realize that blackness has new content, and it involves more than color. It means sharing the conditions of those who are oppressed and participating in their liberation.

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3Harold B. Kuhn, "Examining Black Theology", Christianity Today (March 27, 1970), XII, p. 34.

Therefore, unless the black church redefines its present existence, it can no longer be about institution-building in the way that the fathers of the Black Church intended.

As an instrument of social change, theoretically, the black church has the potential of being one of the most viable and most important instruments of social change affecting the lives of black people today. In addition, the church has as its vantage point the fact that a large percentage of blacks are affiliated with the church in some way or another. Therefore, the black church has the potential for reaching the masses of black people. Andy Billingsley made the following statements in his most recent book, *Children of the Storm*:

"The Black church has had a tremendous role in meeting the social welfare needs of black families. The white community, including the professional community of child welfare experts and planners does not generally appreciate this historical fact, nor does it recognize the extraordinary potential of this institution today."

The black church has provided blacks with a unique experience, and that experience has molded the lives of Afro-Americans. Thus this institution is an expression and reflection of the totality of the black experience.

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