

BLACK HISTORY MONTH SPECIAL SECTION, PART III

French 157th Division. At Verdun, over 3,000 large shells were poured onto the trenches half by the 371st. Not one man retreated. Both regiments received the Croix de Guerre with Palm.

Toward the war's end, the United States demanded that the 93rd Division be returned to the States. However, France refused to do so until the Armistice was signed. Finding untrue the information in Confidential Bulletins issued by the Department of the Army to the various European countries that maligned the black troops, the French waited to insure that the Division would get its just recognition and participate in the victory celebration. Participate they did in a parade up Fifth Avenue in New York, marching behind the famous band of "The Fighting 369th".

The 92nd Division did not fare as well. As part of the American Army, they were constantly afflicted with libelous charges by the white American officers. Only one regiment, the 368th saw prolonged combat duty during which it captured the town of Binerville. Its French commander, Colonel Durand, commended the men, five of whom were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the United States' second highest award. Considering that the regiment was poorly equipped (no artillery support, no grenades, no barbed wire cutting shears, etc.), it acquitted itself well in battle.

At the end of the war, the majority of black soldiers were eager to return to civilian life. However, those who wished to remain were assigned to the four Regular Black units (9th and 10th Cavalry; 24th and 25th Infantry). When all slots were filled, reenlistments were closed. The final total of black line officers in the regular army was two.

The other branches of the Armed Services evidenced strong prejudice against blacks during the hostilities. The navy, which had been particularly liberal in earlier wars, had only .01 per cent of its force composed of black men. Of this number the majority were messmen or coal passers. There were a few petty officers who were gunner's mates, electricians or water-tenders. Thirty black women were yeomanettes who performed clerical duties in the segregated office in the Navy Department. There were no black marines. And so it would remain until new hostilities resumed.

World War II

World War II was so extensive that it would require its own chronicle. Much of that which is common in today's armed services had its inception either during, or following, the conflict.

Blacks now enjoy opportunities and integration in and on all levels of the services. All have senior officers.

As a result of the successes of the 99th Fighter Squadron, which was born at Tuskegee Institute and commanded by (then) Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., the fourth black West Pointer, all areas of the Air Force are staffed by Black Regulars. One of the airmen trained at Tuskegee, General Daniel (Chappie) James, went on to become Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense. Although Tuskegee Institute deserves much of the praise for being the backbone of the early Black Aviator Corps, West Virginia State was the first black college granted the right to institute a Civilian Pilot Training Program in 1939.

Many black colleges and universities have ROTC programs, but Hampton Institute was the first to have a Navy ROTC program.

The Naval Air Force became integrated in 1948 when Jesse Brown was commissioned Ensign and received his wings. That same branch awarded (the late) commander Earl Carter his wings as their first jet pilot in 1950.

Women, too, have achieved status in the various branches. No longer must black "yeomanettes" toil in segregated offices, or tend the sick or wounded in inadequate separate facilities.

At this writing, inequities may still be found, prejudices in individual areas may still persist, but basically, the blacks in the military have finally achieved suffrage.



The famous Massacre at Fort Pillow, Tennessee

Spectacles: A Closer Look
Reflections On Miles Mark Fisher,
A Centennial Man

By Ada M. Fisher

It seems most appropriate now at this point in America's conservative political fervor that we try to examine the black historical record for those who might have called it right. In examining Durham's Centennial Celebration and the Durham Library's exhibit on "Black Durham", the line "The Old Time Religion" is applied to Miles Mark Fisher and his ministry. This line had an impact and a message worth reexamining in this the last week designated for Afro-American History Month.

An outspoken advocate of the needs of black people and a voice not to be silenced, Dr. Fisher spoke with understanding of the consequences of the integration moves of the 50's and 60's. He cautioned: When the schools are integrated, it will be the black teachers and principals who will lose their jobs; it will be our buildings and institutions which are brushed aside; and it will be our historical markers which will be demolished. He understood that it was essential for black institutions to be preserved in order that they serve as training grounds for future generations. He practiced what he preached using the pulpit at White Rock Baptist Church as a forum for young aspiring black ministers who learned under his watchful eye. He took life's sermons to Shaw University where he faithfully taught without pay for more than twenty years. As Professor of Church History for Shaw's Divinity School, his scholarly insights helped prepare his students who have reached every corner of North Carolina and this nation. His ministerial service prompted his 1954 designation by *Ebony* as one of ten outstanding preachers. Long before the 60's "Black Revolt", Rev. Fisher was saying it loud, "He was black and he was proud." To develop self reliance and feelings of accomplishment, the church under Fisher's leadership took its message and programs to the people.

Scholarship was stressed and students encouraged by Rev. Fisher to take advantage of educational opportunities. Scholarships honoring Dr. James E. Shepard and C.C. Spaulding, Sr., were established in his congregation and Shaw University's Mission understood and promoted. During his membership on the Durham Ministerial Alliance, the black church's obligation to support Shaw financially and otherwise was always at the forefront. From his own pocket, the cost of educating many students was often paid without their knowledge. The superintendents of the Durham City Schools annually were invited to White Rock. Dr. Fisher's letters of recommendation helped to secure countless numbers of jobs for black teachers in the Durham City and County Schools with no demands being asked of the giver or receiver other than that they do excellent jobs for our children. Fisher allowed no man to be held in awe by virtue of community standing, stature or color. All of the governors of North Carolina including Broughton, Umstead, Hodges, and Sanford spoke to White Rock's congregation and the black community. The Work Projects Administration (WPA) served the black community during depressed times through Fisher's efforts. What some parents couldn't provide, he tried to make sure all of our children shared. A Day Care Program was started at White Rock allowing parents to have a secure place for their children during their times away. The Vacation Bible School

Program was started here by Dr. Fisher running two weeks and averaging 500 children per week. This program was concluded by a "Bible School Parade" and gave the children a cross cultural exposure to places, things and experiences which might otherwise not have been available to them. Scouting at White Rock saw Troop 55 evolve and be vigorously promoted by Dr. Fisher. The development of young people's talent was always a top priority with him as he knew that talent was no respecter of class or ethnic origins.

The scholarly historical work for which Dr. Fisher is nationally recognized was his book *Negro Slave Songs in the United States*. Fisher's *Slave Songs* was the first book to analyze the deeper meaning of the spirituals. The obvious religious framework which many had thought to be paramount was shown interlaced with oral history and symbolism relating to the black man's life with its struggles for survival, hopes and aspirations. He preached on the African traditions passed on in our songs. The planning/teaching strategies of our historic "secret meetings" were revealed. He understood the need for freedom of assembly and White Rock was "a house of prayer for all people." The Durham Committee on Negro Affairs met there. And it was under Miles M. Fisher that the NAACP in Durham was restarted in the 1930's in Durham with the White Rock congregation being one of the first locally to become Life Members.

National recognition was again given Dr. Fisher in 1958 with his receipt of the National Recreation Association's Golden Anniversary Award for his outstanding efforts in the field of recreation which acknowledged his development of a superior community recreation program. His church recreation program was the forerunner of many of N.C.'s city

and state efforts. He started the Durham City-Wide Softball League. Long before America engaged the Chinese in international ping-pong, White Rock sponsored a traveling ping-pong team which went all over the United States to compete and provide a magnificent cultural exposure for the students involved. White Rock's "Church House" and "Parsonage" were the citadels from which "Rev" (as he was affectionately called by his youngsters) operated these athletic programs. The White Rock "Torpedoes" (the team's name) were on target and set a precedent in basketball, softball, ping-pong, checkers, boxing and other sports. "Rev's" programs provided a feeder system for North Carolina College and other black institution's athletic programs. For many these programs made Rev. M.M. Fisher synonymous with recreation in Durham.

His outspokenness made many uncomfortable for he didn't always talk about what ought to be or could be or what was politically expedient. He talked about what is and what was. He was an ardent supporter of black businesses providing the inspiration and financing for many when times were tough. He championed the cause of the little man and showed him he was important as well. He was neither a segregationist nor separatist, just a pragmatic realist. Dr. Gerald Edwards of the National Institute of Health related that it was Rev. Fisher who helped him become the first black paper carrier for the *Durham Morning Herald* in 1934, opening job avenues for income previously denied to blacks. In approximately 1939, the first black law student was enrolled in the UNC Law School with the help of Rev. Fisher and others. Clearly, Rev. Fisher understood that what the black man needed most was an opportunity. Given that, he could make his own way. Dr. Fisher's life was about providing this opportunity for others.

Fisher's efforts were supported by those who had the courage to stand and say we are men and women of accomplishment, dignity, beauty and potential. Every New Year's "Night Watch" saw the black community gathered to review their past and plan for their future saying "Here I am Oh, Lord, use me." He knew that the message was more than economics, fame and the here and now. His words of advice often noted, "You can be right and everyone else can be wrong. If you believe that you are right be willing to stand alone and stand up for your beliefs." "Rev" never dwelled on the price that had to be paid for taking such a stand. "The Reverend Doctor Miles Mark Fisher — educator, author and pastor of White Rock from 1933 to 1965 — believed in spreading the gospel into all aspects of community life for he understood "The Old Time Religion" and it's good enough for me.

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