

# Opinions

## Church must be a leader to help blacks in the future

As America approaches another celebration of national sovereignty, there still remains a penetrating doubt on the part of some Black Americans that this observance offers anything to shout about.

To intelligently understand the impact of the fact that thousands of Black patriots fought and died for liberty, one needs to look at the status of Blacks in colonial America and the role the church has traditionally played in the shaping and directing of black experiences. One needs to further understand that, although education and politics are two great institutions, religion has been the primary factor of influencing the progress and growth of Blacks in America; for the church has historically served as a "gathering place" for the presentation, discussion, implementation and finalization of programs of action which have greatly affected the educational, economical and legal status of Black Americans.

The 20 Negroes who were put ashore at Jamestown in July, 1619, were not slaves in the true sense of the word. They were indentured servants, the same as their White counterparts; and listed as servants

in the census count of 1623-1624.

As late as 1651 some Negroes whose period of service had expired were being assigned land in the same way as it was being assigned to Whites who had completed their servitude. During the first fifty years of existence, Virginia had many Negro indentured servants and an increasing number of free Negroes. As the years progressed, the population of Negroes increased in the new world, and legislation to control Blacks was enacted. Although enslaved, Blacks were an integral part of the American society. The southern plantation needed more field hands. It required skilled laborers who were Black.

Blacks welcomed the event of the American Revolution. It meant a change for the better. It brought an increase in the number of free Blacks.

From the establishment of the American nation emerged the creation of the Afro-American. A number of Black men and women begin to gain strength by demonstrating their own capabilities.

Soon after independence from

England, as White Americans began to form one organization after another, Afro-Americans felt a great urgency to band together and form organizations bearing the word "African" in their title, indicating a sense of racial identity and pride.

Significant among all the types of the organizations was the independent Black church which promised its members the opportunity for leadership posts, self expression and the assurance of self worthiness.

In the same year (1787) that Prince Hall founded the Black Masons, Richard Allen, Absalom Jones and a small band of Black Christians were pulled from their knees while praying in a segregated gallery in St. George Methodist Episcopal Church in the "City of Brotherly Love," Philadelphia. As a gesture of independence and fortitude, Richard Allen founded the first Black denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church, while Jones directed his energies to the Episcopalian ministry. Since that time, the A.M.E. Church (as all Black denominations who took



Looking On  
Ethelyn Holden Baker

their cue from Allen) has become a respected segment of the Christian faith.

The church has become a training ground for Black leadership. During the Civil War, Bishop Henry McNeil Turner (of the A.M.E. Church) was a highly regarded spokesman for the interests of all Black people. Since Turner, many others have been highly visible on the national level. The long and illustrious list includes nationally known figures Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph Abernathy, Jesse Jackson, Leon Sullivan and many other Christian leaders in and outside the clergy. (Our own Dr. Chancy R. Edwards, a veteran minister and a long time civil rights activist, has recently emerged as a State Representative in the North Carolina General Assembly.)

The Christian religion has been reflected in the Black experiences involving landmark decisions from President Harry S. Truman's Executive Order which required equality of treatment under the law in the armed forces to the Civil Rights Act of August 4, 1965.

Black church leaders were highly visible when the Civil Rights Bill was signed authorizing the suspension of literacy tests and the use of federal examinations in elections in the South.

Although outraged, hurt and disappointed on April 4, 1968, their love, respect and admiration for such a renowned martyr, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., has inspired Black theologians of today to continue in the search for more positive experiences and commitments.

According to Cardiss Collins, Black U.S. Representative from Illinois, "Blacks need to use their political participation. They need to learn to vote intelligently."

It is, in my opinion, crucially important that the church remain steadfast in its endeavor to completely emancipate Black Americans; that it continues to be

aware that the key to success in all jobs will lie in education - that Black Americans must come to grips with the fact that BLACK is only Power when: the B is a synonym for Brains and the Ballot, not Brawn and the Bullet;

•The L is synonymous with Learning and Labor, not Laziness and Licitiousness;

•The A means Academics and Achievement, not Athletics and Apathy;

•The C is synonymous with Content of Character and Christianity, not the Color of One's Skin or Conventousness;

•And the K means knowledge and Know-how, not Know-all and Knock-down drag-out.

Once this becomes a realization, many Blacks will be able to give honest, unbiased appraisal of their status, as well as their opportunities, in a free society and proudly proclaim with their counterparts, "I Too Sing America."

(Editor's Note: Ethelyn Baker is a former Hoke County teacher. This article first appeared in The First Baptist Insight, where Miss Baker is a regular contributor.)

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