

SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF BLACK RELIGION

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The Society's Continuing Mission

by: William C. Turner, Jr.

The Society for the Study of Black Religion was founded more than 25 years ago--to give affirmation to African Americans involved in theological education and the teaching of religion at a time when the study of the Black Religious Experience and the Black Church, were regarded as "suspect" at best. To its credit, it has been instrumental in the production of several generations of scholars, and in stimulating a lively challenge to the manner in which all related disciplines are conceived. With the present downsizing of graduate departments and programs in religion, the need for the Society is as great as ever. Without the identification and motivation of prospective students, and the nurture of scholars, the current setbacks could develop into a new crisis.

A salute to the Society is in order for holding its annual meeting in Jamaica this year. This move brings into focus one of the outstanding principles that has guided its work--namely, the enterprise is one that must be conceived broadly rather than narrowly. Indeed, the hemispheric and diasporic dimensions are crucial for what must be undertaken as our work. The matrix out of which the data emerge comes from currents that began in Africa, circulated into the Americas, returned to Africa, and continues in a cycle of regeneration. The venue of this session harks back to earlier times when meetings were more global in character.

Vitality in the study of Black Religion is related to the realities faced by people of African descent throughout the world. On the one

hand, this results from the way religion participates in meaningful human existence in the world. But it is also related to the structures of oppression that perpetually seek to construe the meaning of life for the children of Africa in ways that deny their humanity. This being so, the continuing need for this field of study is self evident.

For Your convenience, this issue of the Newsletter includes information sent earlier by the president pertaining to the upcoming meeting. Hopefully your plans have already been made, but the enclosed contents will give double exposure. Let us look forward to a productive session in Kingston.



FTE FUNDS CUT-OFF

The Reverend Oscar McCloud, Executive Director of The Fund for Theological Education has announced that Lilly has advised The FTE it will not renew the grant supporting the Black Doctoral and Mays Scholarship Programs after June, 1996. This means that this year [1995-1996] is the last year The FTE will grant scholarships....Between now and September. The FTE Executive Committee and Board will be determining the most appropriate way to bring to a close 41 years of unique service. The financial support system crucial to the M.Div. and doctoral programs of so many current SSBR members--on which numbers of future SSBR members are dependent, to stay in their programs--is now discontinued. It is a sad announcement, indeed. And it is all the more distressing in view of the on-going dearth of African Americans in programs of higher education, as either students or faculty. Any word of appeal, advocacy, encouragement, etc., from SSBR members to Lilly or other

funding sources cannot hurt and may be helpful at this time. The legacy of Shelby Rooks, Bill Deveaux, and others of our number stands at the threshold.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

GARRETT-EVANGELICAL SEMINARY is seeking to fill five faculty vacancies: Old Testament/Hebrew Scripture, New Testament, Church Administration, Evangelism, and Pastoral Theology/Pastoral Counseling. The person applying for either of these positions may negotiate to direct the Church and Black Experience Program, if interested. These positions are to begin in Fall, 1996. Minorities and women are especially encouraged to apply. Inquiries and applications may be sent to Dean Rosemary Keller or to Larry Murphy (SSBR member and G-ETS faculty) at 2121 Sheridan Road, Evanston, IL 60201, (708) 866-3900.

WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY, Department of Religion invites applications for a tenure-track junior-level appointment in The Religion of African-American and/or African Peoples, beginning July 1, 1996. Preference will be given to a promising scholar and teacher in both fields. Disciplinary expertise is open; areas include, but are not limited to comparative religion, philosophy, or historical study of religions. In addition to teaching introductory and upper-level courses in one's field of specialization, each Department member is expected to be submitted by November 1, 1995, to the Chair of the Search Committee, Professor Ron Cameron, Department of Religion, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT 06459. Wesleyan University is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer.

BOWDOIN COLLEGE seeks to make a tenure-track appointment contributing both to Africana Studies, and to an appropriate discipline, beginning in August, 1996. We encourage candidates whose research and teaching relate to

African Diaspora studies in the Caribbean/Latin America or focus on African-American religions. We are especially interested in perspectives from history, literature, cultural studies, or religion.

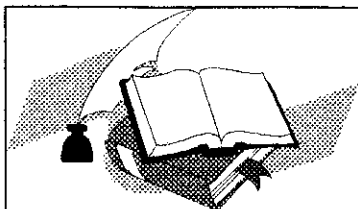
Successful candidates will have demonstrated the capacity for excellence in both scholarship and teaching. The Ph.D. is preferred, but ABD's will be considered.

To apply, please send a letter of application, curriculum vitae, and at least three letters of reference to Craig McEwen, Africana Studies, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine 04011. Review of applications started on November 15, 1995.

DUKE UNIVERSITY DIVINITY SCHOOL seeks to appoint a Director of Black Church Affairs. The Director, who reports directly to the Dean, is a member of the administrative staff of the Divinity School, and may be a member of the faculty. Responsibilities include the Black Church Studies Program, a relationship with the African American church community--both locally and nationally--advising students in regard to admissions and academic affairs, relationships with graduates of the Divinity School, and relationships with African American Studies programming throughout Duke University. The Director should have substantial experience in the church, a graduate, professional theological degree, and preferably, a Ph.D. in one of the theological disciplines. Previous experience as a faculty member is helpful and evidence of administrative ability is required. Rank and salary are open and will be determined according to experience. The appointment will be made July 1, 1996, if possible. Duke University is an affirmative action equal opportunity employer. Nominations and applications should be sent no later than February 15, 1996 to:
Chair, Search Committee
Duke University Divinity School
Black Church Affairs
Box 90967
Durham, North Carolina 27708

NEW BOOK RELEASES

-Larry G. Murphy, J. Gordon Melton, and Gary L. Ward, *Encyclopedia of African American Religions*. 1993. Garland Publishing, Inc. New York & London.



Dear SSER Member:

This is to inform you that the Annual Meeting of the Society will be held in Kingston, Jamaica, as designated at the last Business Meeting, held in Atlanta. The program Committee, chaired by Gayraud Wilmore, along with the Executive Committee, have worked diligently on the plans for the program, travel, and hotel arrangements. We thus have plans for a very informative, challenging, and exciting venture-- sharing with fellow scholars and public figures in Jamaica: from the University of the West Indies, United Theological College of the West Indies, and the Jamaican Government, among others. Horace Russell, from Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, who is a Jamaican native, has been the liaison, making all the contacts in Jamaica, and negotiating the travel and hotel packages. He has performed an enormous task; he traveled to the Island in November to finalize arrangements with speakers and other participants.

The theme for the Meeting is "African Spiritualities: Afro- American and Afro- Caribbean Manifestations."

The Meeting will open on Thursday, with a welcome reception and the first session of presentations.

Topics for Friday sessions include "Marcus Garvey: Identity, Race, Class, and Gender." Expected speakers include Rupert Lewis, Patrick Bryan, Elsa Loo Rhynie, Barbara Bailey, Hon. Portia Simpson (on the Beijing Conference and its meaning for the African Diaspora), etc.

Also included on Friday's agenda is a mini-tour of the city of Kingston-- arranged by United Theological College of the West Indies; and a formal dinner with the Prime Minister or Vice Chancellor of the University as Guest Speaker. Saturday morning sessions will be devoted to shared book reviews and discussions between Afro- American and Afro- Caribbean scholars, and the closing business Meeting.

Those who stay over until Sunday will have opportunities to visit local churches (arranged by the Jamaica Council of Churches), to dialogue with the Maroon Chief in Moore Town, and for in- depth discussion on Rastafarianism (to be arranged through the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University.

Mozella G. Mitchell
