SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF

BLACK RELIGION

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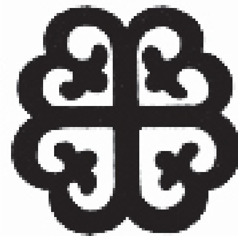

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IN THIS ISSUE

2 Message from the President
3 Executive Director's Corner
4 Letter from the Newsletter Editor
5 Featured Essays
32 Announcements

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Society Members:

Greetings to the Community of Scholars known as the Society for the Study of Black Religion. I hope all has been well with you over these past months since our 39th annual meeting.

Our meeting in Washington, D.C. was an absolutely wonderful experience. We had one of the best turnouts we have experienced in years! Approximately 60 Society members gathered in the spirit of collegiality and friendship. And our program this year was second to none. We heard great papers with cutting edge scholarship, phenomenal keynote addresses with deep reflection and sensitivity, and engaged in healthy, critical debate.

We experienced one another anew as we pushed each other to think about, and be more attentive to, the social and health challenges we face as a people, challenges we must address as scholars for the community. We laughed and cried together as we remembered the Rev. Dr. Ella P. Mitchell. We also instituted a New Members Induction Ceremony that will be a feature of every meeting to welcome people to our community of scholars.

Our work together during the business meetings included conversations on how to increase the value of the Society for our membership. To that end, we now offer letters of affirmation for program participants to be sent to your institutions. We are experimenting with a Call for Papers to encourage us to voluntarily share our scholarship and research. We are exploring multiple ways to increase the value of the Society for younger scholars seeking tenure and promotion. We are a community of scholars like no other!

The SSBR is on the move and making great strides as an organization. The 40th anniversary celebration of the SSBR promises to be a memorable gathering that will outshine any meeting we have had to date. Plan on being an active part of making history. Become active in the Society for the Study of Black Religion.

Cordially,

Lee H. Butler, Jr., Ph.D.
President

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Dear Colleagues:

Greeting! We are working hard on the program and activities for our annual meeting. As you know, it is the 40th anniversary of the organization and the program will reflect the significance and reach of this major accomplishment. The lectures and panels will cover a range of topics. And this year we are trying a new process by soliciting paper proposals for one of the sessions. Please keep this in mind, and submit your paper proposals before the December 1st deadline. Proposals should be emailed to LHButlerJr@cs.com and pinn@rice.edu.

You will receive details concerning the meeting shortly. I hope you will make plans to attend.

I approach this particular meeting with mixed feelings. I am delighted to celebrate the accomplishments and strengths of our organization. Forty years is no small accomplishment. However, this meeting will also mean my transition out of the position of Executive Director. For the past ten years, I have chaired the program committee and then served as the organization's first executive director. It has been a privilege. While I will continue my involvement, in Atlanta Stephen Ray will take over executive director duties, and the "office" of the SSBR will transition from Rice University to Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary. Please join me in welcoming Stephen into this new role.

As you know, Torin Alexander's duties related to the SSBR ended with his transition to St. Olaf College. Terri Laws replaces him for this year, and I would like to express my gratitude for her hard work.

The SSBR is a significant organization, and I am honored to be a member. Thank you for the opportunity to work on your behalf.

See you in Atlanta!

Sincerely,

Anthony B. Pinn

LETTER FROM THE NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Dear Colleagues:

The Society for the Study of Black Religion marked another successful conference in Washington, D.C. this past March: "The Voices of Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: Black Religion, Black Leadership, and American Politics." The excellent papers and a well-planned field trip to the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies were fueled by opportunities to become re-energized in the company of like-minded scholars.

This past year, our meeting encompassed a variety of scholars' reflections on "The State of Black Religion." The paper selections available in this newsletter, from the opening panel, "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen" to the closing Business Meeting give only a glimpse into the richness of the meeting itself. The papers in this issue of the newsletter include:

- Deborah Flemister Mullen's "The Boldness of the Matter: Black Religion and Black Leadership in the Public Square, Yester, Today, and Tomorrow." Dr. Mullen considers significant factors in the 40th anniversary of the Black Manifesto.

- Debra Majeed's paper, "Polygyny Among African American Muslims," led a reflection on some aspects of partnering and spirituality among one group of black Americans. She clarified that polygyny refers to one man with multiple wives; the term polygamy refers to either a man or woman with multiple partners.

- Beverly Mitchell, in "Lessons from the Past that Might Speak to us Today," highlighted how black abolitionists, in word and deed, give insights to contemporary decision making.

- Alton B. Pollard III's paper was presented as the banquet address. "Wise Ancestral Counsel: The Faith of W. E. B. DuBois" drew from historical precedent and connected it with the theme of the Society's conference—Voices of Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow—in a convincing argument to charge us all with responsible social action that is informed by faith.

We thank each of these scholars for allowing their papers to be reproduced for the membership this year.

Stephanie Y. Mitchem
University of South Carolina

THE BOLDNESS OF THE MATTER: BLACK RELIGION AND BLACK LEADERSHIP IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE, YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW

Panel Presentation

Deborah Flemister Mullen, Ph.D.
Director of the Center for African American Ministry and Black Church Studies
McCormick Theological Seminary

Yesterday

In many ways the opportunity to participate on this panel is a call to take time out for a *sankofa* moment. Popularly rendered in the symbolic form of a mythological bird whose head is bent looking backward, this Akan symbol or *andinkra* visualizes the "importance of learning from the past." Although interpreted and reinterpreted throughout the African *diaspora*, the Akan proverb and its symbol "san" (return) "ko" (go) "fa" (look, seek, take) literally mean "return and get it"; "there is nothing wrong with learning from hindsight."[1] As "The Voices of Today" we must remember our past even as we plant seeds for those that follow us. The Society for the Study of Black Religion embodies and honors the spirit of *sankofa.* Thank you, Drs. Butler and Pinn, for inviting me to this table.

For those of us in the room old enough to remember 1969, and likely that would be the majority of us, it was among the boldest, baddest, most bodacious acts of the Black Power movement to darken the doors of the citadel of white, middle class, liberal Protestantism - the Riverside Church of NYC. This year on May 4th the Black Manifesto turns 40. Of course, it is impossible to recall to our memory this hallmark epoch in American Church History in which three movements converged, Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black Theology, without invoking, with all due respect and gratitude for his role in what came to fruition on that day, the name of James Forman, now deceased. Drawing upon a paper by Dr. Gayraud S. Wilmore, Jr. entitled, "The Church's Response to the Black Manifesto," written June 23, 1969 for the United Presbyterian Church Department of Evangelism, an excerpt of which was published as "A Black Churchman's Response to the Black Manifesto," in *Black Theology A Documentary History 1966-1979,* I invite us to consider briefly some preliminary thoughts and questions surrounding the theme, *"The Boldness of the Matter: Black Religion and Black Leadership in the Public Square, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow."*

This topic, more broadly construed, continues to engage my scholarly aspirations flowing directly from my dissertation thesis on United Presbyterians and Racial Justice, in which the *Angela Davis Affair* was the centerpiece. In that historical case study of racial justice my hope was for Presbyterians to embrace a process of self-reflection on several levels. First, that they would come to better understand how social issues that raise theological questions, often will strain the "ties that bind" black and white Christians within the same denomination or faith community, sometimes producing theological convictions and commitments that are both church dividing and church uniting. Second, that they would examine the theological underpinnings of their motivation to become involved as allies, advocates, and activists in a civil rights movement led by members of historical black churches primarily located in the South. Third, that they would drill deeper still to explore their core values. Was the quest for social justice in the public realm the ultimate cause to rally the considerable resources of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA)

to the aid and benefit of African American brother and sister Christians whose civil rights had been abrogated for generations by discriminatory legal and judicial systems that were co-signed and sanctioned by a corrupted idea of Christianity blinded by racism and white privilege? Or was their engagement driven by something more pragmatic and visceral, something that arises when the sense of faith-based moral obligation experienced by the most highly privileged in church and society is encountered by the sense of faith-based moral outrage experienced by those most systematically disenfranchised even violated by church and society? In other words, when push comes to shove!

Finally, and perhaps most germane for this occasion, this research lifts up the boldness of leadership exercised by a handful of African American Presbyterians who held executive staff and high level elected positions, nationally and regionally, in one of the most powerful Protestant denominations, as the demands of a black church led, grass-roots movement for black liberation were bursting racial bonds that constrained the forward march toward civil rights and racial justice. In that regard, in the context of this gathering, this on-going research interest seeks to honor the legacy of Dr. Gayraud Wilmore who, though not physically present with us at this annual meeting, has mentored more than a few of us along the way.

As chairman of the Division of Church and Race within the Board of National Missions of the UPCUSA, the northern stream of American Presbyterianism, Dr. Wilmore unquestionably was among the most prominent black church leaders in this predominantly white mainline denomination. His standing as a division chairperson meant that he moved in the echelons where decisions were made at a time when precious few African-descended black Americans held such high level offices. Evidence of this auspicious distinction and the responsibility that came with it is provided in an accompanying document by David Ramage, Jr., Executive Secretary General, Department of Mission Strategy and Evangelism, Board of National Missions.

Ramage's "Forward" citing both General Assembly and the National Council of Churches policy statements reminded white Christians (and many Black Christians as well) of the theological and ethical commitments that were strained during turbulent times like those they were facing in the 1960s and in the wake of the Black Manifesto. Dave Ramage was known as "a takes no prisoners," "suffers no fools," urban savvy pastor, trained by Saul Alinsky as a community organizer on the southwest side of Chicago. Later in life, Ramage would run The New World Foundation and serve 10 years as president of McCormick Seminary, but on that day, he was earning his keep trying to keep the lid on a rapidly boiling pot. White church folks were not taking kindly to being publicly upbraided in their sanctuaries, offices, or anywhere near their bank accounts, and urgently needed to hear a word of prophetic proportion from someone who could shed light and provide theological meaning to the present "crisis." That ominous task fell to Gayraud Wilmore.

Ramage, a formidable ally in the struggle for racial justice writes:

> Dr. Gayraud S. Wilmore, Jr., Chairman of the Division of Church and Race, is as much as anyone in our Church a symbol of the black men among us who are struggling with the meaning of this time and attempting, with peculiar gifts of experience and insight, to reflect on the Church's responsibility. The statement which he has written is not a proposal for policy or program, nor is it, in any way, a statement of policy or program. It is, rather, a statement that

> should inform us as we struggle together to find our common understanding and faithfulness and out of which policy and program will grow.

It is with that introduction that Wilmore's nineteen page "Response," complete with Epilogue and a two page bibliography, was distributed to the full staff of the Board of National Missions and those in the wider church who received the Occasional Paper of the Division of Evangelism.

Wilmore's "Response" was organized in five sections with accompanying sub-sections. Under section I. The Need for Clarification and Commitment, he assigned historical significance to the "dramatic confrontation" at Riverside Church as "perhaps the most serious crisis in the American Religious establishment since the bitter polemics and antagonism which divided it just prior to the Civil War." Never one to mince words, Wilmore went on to clarify the boldness of the matter at hand writing:

> Actually the May 4th confrontation did not so much precipitate a crisis among the nation's churches and synagogues, as it revealed a crisis which had already existed in the major denominations for at least three years prior to Forman's return from SNCC obscurity. This crisis had to do first with a lack of theological clarity about the depth and seriousness of the Black Revolution in America. Second, it stems from an enervating battle fatigue among the liberal churches that had fought for civil rights. And third, the crisis comes from the fact that these churches, since 1966, had shown little enthusiasm for or commitment to the goals of the Black Power movement.

At the end of section I., Wilmore's call to commitment from white Presbyterians was unambiguous in its tone; notice had been served that "A Change is Gonna Come." He writes:

> It is now more obvious than before that something must be done to help white churchmen (and a large percentage of middle class black churchmen) to understand what has been happening in the United States—and especially in the churches themselves —since the Black Power slogan gained currency. They need to understand why it has happened and to perceive that it is time for a radical departure from what the church has known itself to be and do.

The Black Manifesto was first presented in public on April 26, 1969, on the final night of the National Black Economic Development Conference (NBEDCO) in Detroit, Michigan. The sponsoring organization, the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO), had been founded just two years earlier, in a climate slightly more conducive to interracial cooperation, as an ecumenical religious organization to fund local community organizations committed to self-determination and self-help programs [2] In February 1968, the National Advisory Commission of Civil Disorders, also known as the Kerner Commission, released its report concluding that "our nation is moving toward two societies, one black and one white—separate and unequal" and that "white racism" was the major cause of black riots and urban unrest due to the wide spread frustration with a lack of economic opportunities. The report called for the creation of jobs, construction of new homes, and an end to *de facto* segregation. Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated on April 4th, 1968.

Section II. of Wilmore's response, "The Theological Meaning of the Present Crisis: A

Historical View" set the new Black Theology movement in context as "evidence that the theology which has been dominant in the American churches has failed black Christians." Wilmore's indictment of American Churches as "racist all along" is unequivocal. Channeling the spirit of Malcolm X, he pronounced the "end of integration as a programmatic goal" for white churches. He named the system of white oppression as the handmaiden of white guilt and implicated members of wealthy white congregations as "the absentee owners and managers of the corporate and political structures which have kept black people in deprivation and powerlessness." Reparations, as demanded in the Black Manifesto, he called "a modest sum of 500 million dollars." These were bold words for a time that required bold actions on the part of black church leaders and black leaders in white denominations.

My contention and conclusion, having reviewed ever so briefly in our time permitted this slice of history, is that the times in which we live require no less if there is to be a place for the voices of tomorrow in the destiny of Black Religion and Black Leadership in the Public Square.

Notes

[1] See Andinkra Symbols of West Africa: Sankofa www.andinkra.org/htmls/andinkra/sank.htm; Sankofa Tattoo Meaning/Tattoo Symbol.com www.tattoosymbol.com/just-for-site/andinkra.html.

[2] Arnold Schuchter, *Reparations: The Black Manifesto and its Challenge to White America*, (Philadelphia: Lippincott), 1970, 2.

POLYGYNY AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSLIMS

Debra Majeed
Chair, Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies
Beloit College

My remarks draw attention to a larger project on Islam and marriage, particularly the practice of polygyny among Americans of African ancestry. This research is based on ethnographic work within more than a dozen communities in the U.S. in which polygyny has been or currently is practiced.

Such research fits the theme of this conference because the manner in which religious beliefs foster marital practices, particularly those that do not subscribe to the teachings of Christianity and/or reflect the norms of heterosexual monogamy, is an under-examined issue within the discourse on Black Religion.

Moreover, the limited research on marriage as experienced by African Americans or diverse forms of partnering, often masks internal and external struggles women confront in regards to their personal identity and self-worth, and the power they cede to males and other females in their homes and mosque communities.

Thus, for me, any "State of Black Religion" must report on the conditions of African American families and outline paths some travel to connect their partnering choices to the spiritual dimensions of their lives. To this end, the crisis of leadership may reflect a dynamic, spiritual, and gendered conflict as African American Muslim women ponder what they believe *obligates* them to polygyny as a way to remain "good Muslims" and the cultural norms they believe *compel* them to comply to maintain social stability. Given that we will only touch the surface of what needs to be a more nuanced portrait of the gendered realities of African American Muslim women, let us proceed.

As stereotypical as this ad for the HBO series, *Big Love*, might appear *reality* and what we *think* we know about plural marriage and its utility within African American family life share a distance "ripe with implications" (Habits of Hope, ix) about the complexity inherent in a phenomenon that has currency for an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 Americans in 30 states.[1]

Often misused in both popular and scholarly discourse, the term polygamy means multiple partners, husbands OR wives and refers primarily to two distinct forms of plural marriage: polygyny, which means a husband with multiple wives; and polyandry defined as a wife with multiple husbands. Lately, husbands with multiple wives have drawn the ire and attention of the public in relations to the behavior of some fundamentalist Mormons.

Fueling the debate, particularly in regards to polygyny and Islam, are perceptions about the power of women to freely exercise their partnering preferences. Indeed, critics of polygyny point to allegations of child abuse, sexual exploitation, and coercion of uneducated females in these "Mormon" households, who would welcome other choices if they knew they had them. Accordingly, at least 90% of Americans say polygyny is "morally unacceptable" or "wrong" in every Gallup Poll

that surveyed the issued since 2003. Let's listen to results from the two most recent polls

Understandably, most Americans struggle with the idea that *any* woman would voluntarily choose to share her partner and question whether the civil rights of women and girls in such families are protected. That doesn't stop proponents of polygyny from attempting to define the practice as an exercise of religious freedom, as is the current defense in a Canadian case.

Like black religion, polygyny is not monolithic and the practice of it varies, especially between off-shoots of the Church of Latter Day Saints and followers of Islam. The Mormon Church outlawed the practice in the late 19th century, but breakaway groups continue the practice today, as husbands marry as many wives as they choose. Islam permits a husband to take up to four wives with the Qur'anic revelation of a single ayat (or verse) from Surah Al Nissa, or chapter 4, verse 3: "If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, Marry women of your choice, Two or three or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess, that will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice."

This revelation did not accompany the introduction of polygyny,[2] but with it, one form of plural marriage was regulated and restricted more than 1400 years ago.[3] Men married as many women as they chose to in pre-Islamic Arabia. With the advent of the Qur'an, Muslim men were instructed to marry no more than four women, with the number dependent upon a man's ability to provide for and treat each woman with equity.[4]

Al Nisa 3 was revealed following the Battle of Uhud, and the deaths of 70 Muslim men. In Arabia's patriarchal, misogynistic society, the physical survival of women often necessitated provision from the men in their lives, through whom women also negotiated their legitimacy and social honor. Without recognition as being fully human, autonomous moral agents, women who outlived their "protectors" could traverse few avenues to secure their own survival or the survival of their children. That is to say, women displaced by war without a husband or male relative were suddenly on their own "in a society that confuses value with material wealth," and they were female in a male-privileging society that not long ago murdered female infants at birth.[5]

Accordingly, a normative social script introduced to Muslim girls is the importance of communal life and the centrality of marriage as a way to practice at least half of their religion. Depending upon the culture, young Muslim girls are also taught that the Qur'an permits *or* obligates Muslim men to take up to four wives, depending upon the *needs* of their society. That is, many Muslim girls become Muslim women who have been socialized to accept polygyny as a prescription for the true practice of their faith and/or as a way to ensure the survival of their community. Their struggles, however, are often used to confirm jealousy as a gendered emotion.

I've made copies of this email example of correspondence earlier this month between a Muslim woman in America and other Muslim women. The author subscribes to a listserv set up several years ago to provide a safe forum for this discussion among Muslim women. The majority of women on this listserv are wives married to polygynous husbands. They do not consider themselves to be polygynous as they are monogamously married to one husband. Since August 2007, nearly

1,000 messages, such as this one, soliciting and/or sharing advice, counsel, or encouragement about polygyny, have been posted to the site. While African American Muslim women are on the list, too, some do freely and publicly speak about polygyny, like these two sisters in Atlanta.

The sentiments of these sisters aside, my research suggests that African American Muslim women are caught in a web of shifting identities as they strive to be true to their faith and themselves. On the one hand, "first" wives *accepted* their husbands' decisions to take additional wives or located them for their husbands in compliance with their interpretations of the Qur'an and because "I want for my sister what I want for myself." On the other hand, subsequent wives agreed to marry polygynous men to establish a "family life" for themselves, and, thereby, gain the communal respect reserved for married women.

When the author of *Making Marriage Work: A History of Marriage and Divorce in the Twentieth Century* suggests that learning about someone's marriage is still female territory, as she did when she wrote about how the public learns about the marriage of Barak and Michelle Obama, she confirms one way Muslims under the leadership of the late Imam Mohammed explore and receive guidance on marriage and family issues. Your handout includes four columns published in the *Muslim Journal,* the newspaper of his community, between June 1996 and December 2002.

From columns like these, *khutbahs* (sermons or talks) delivered during Jum'ah (congregational prayer services) on Fridays, *Taleem* sessions (educational gatherings on Islam) on Sundays, and private and public encounters outside of the mosque, Muslims get the message that marriage is, as Huston Smith declares, "the sole lawful locus of the sexual act,"[6] and that one must be married to truly practice his or her *deen* (religion).[7] Similarly, married Muslim women are often extended a greater status in their community much in the same manner Muslim women who cover their hair are viewed as more pious and better role models for female identity than women who do not.

The African Americans I interviewed do not appear to be as comfortable with or glib about the polygyny as these African sisters. The Qur'anic passage associated with polygyny is *Al Nisa* 3 (Chapter 4:3) shared earlier, is often interpreted as a passage calling for justice, much in the same way a scale can be used to keep something (or in this case, someone) in balance. Some argue that the revelation of *Al Nisa* 3 serves a "specific purpose," and can be interpreted as a response to the welfare needs of unprotected widows and/or female orphans. Some of those who ascribe to this reading view the permissibility of polygyny through the narrowest of doors – one through which a husband may consider marriage only to female orphans in his care. My research has yet to uncover a polygynous marriage that meets this rationale.

Still others insist that like their Muslim ancestors, the entire African American community has been ravaged by war – this time in the form of domestic terrorism. There just are not enough marriage ready black men for Muslim women. Moreover, the reality that some African Americans might want to define marriage for themselves even if such definition was contrary to U.S. law is not surprising given the frequency with which African Americans have found themselves on the "back side" of "bad laws." Also, many African Americans who came to Islam through the doorway of the teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad are accustomed to responding subversively to government intervention into their domestic affairs. Furthermore, to many African American Muslims who

condone polygyny, the conditions of twenty-first century black America mirror the social fabric of seventh century Arabia. Then, as now, the lack of marriageable (i.e., single, heterosexual and available) men, and/or the high number of female-led households, and the continued economic disparity experienced by mothers and their children makes the practice of polygyny both mandated and permissible. "We **are** at war," insisted an Imam in the New York region. "With the high incarceration of our men and other social challenges, we have to find some solution to save our community. When polygyny is practiced correctly and honestly, it has tremendous results for everyone involved. When it is not practiced correctly and honestly, the suffering and hurt can be devastating."[8]

While abuses do occur, research suggests that the mistreatment of women and children documented in fundamentalist Mormon polygynist communities is far removed from the family life experienced by their Muslim counterparts. In fact, most of the co-wives I interviewed spoke of their home lives as challenging but healthy environments, though they acknowledged that polygyny is not for everyone.

For anthropologist Robert Dannin, the practice of polygyny among African American Muslims is representative of the desire to reconnect with the past. He writes:

> Plural marriage is one issue that divides African-American Muslims as much among themselves as from the rest of American society. African-American Muslims are unprepared for the prescriptive marriage systems of Arab-Muslim countries. They may favor these practices ideologically as revivals of the social forms lost during the Middle Passage or as statements of national identity but still cannot compensate for the absence of the traditional authority necessary to make such systems operate efficiently from one generation to the next. Consequently, the institution of Muslim marriage has been a source of confusion in the U.S.[9]

According to many within the African American Muslim community, one example of polygyny becoming abuse is when a husband forces polygyny upon his wife for reasons that appear more selfish than representative of Qur'anic teachings.

> This was definitely not my idea," began Sister B, a 50-year-old real estate broker from the Midwest. "My husband came home one day and told me that ours was to become a polygynous household. We had been married for 15 years. Our children are adults. We work together. Nothing was missing in our relationship, yet he goes and gets a woman who was not a Muslim but who lived in a polygynous environment. She had no children so this wasn't an example of him helping out a single mother. He didn't ask my opinion. He said the Qur'an says he can take another wife and he wants to whether I like it or not. I'm trying to decide what to do. Sometimes I have to use an electric heater because he hasn't paid the utility bills, but I'm not in position to move just yet.[10]

Witnessing the less than positive experiences of other sisters, caused one female to be very

cautious when her current husband first approached her during an early morning telephone call more than eight years ago about becoming his second wife. Perhaps the rationale behind her reticence explains why Sister N, the 52-year-old mother of five in Lexington, KY; her husband, and her co-wife share one of the rare "positive" relationships: She said:

> It totally shocked me…I told him I would pray on it. He told me that he had discussed it with [first wife of 15 years]. I told him had he asked me that question like two years or three years ago, the answer would have been 'No,' without giving it a second thought because of what I had seen two other sisters [a first and second wife] go through… the pain for both of them. I never wanted to come into anybody's life and bring that type of pain. I didn't want to have anything to do with the institution [of polygyny] really, and it is basically because of that one example that I had seen.[11]

For African American Muslims, the question remains not *whether* polygyny is currently practiced here or globally, but does the Qur'an *advocate* for and/or merely *permit* its practice today and, if so, under what circumstances?

Imam Mohammed, who himself officiated over at least one *nikkah* of a husband taking a second wife, acknowledged that mistakes continue to be made when Muslim women and men enter into or accept polygyny based on faulty interpretations and/or plain arrogance. To him, *Al Nisa* 3 clearly supports the permissibility of polygyny, thought it does not advocate for the practice. He lays out at least *nine* qualifications to ensure justice. That is, for a polygynous marriage to be legitimate from his perspective:

1. *A husband must have taqwah* (God-consciousness).[12]
2. *A husband must avoid discrimination*.[13]
3. *A husband must provide individual living quarters*.[14]
4. *A husband must first inform his present wife or wives,* but her/their permission <u>is not</u> required."[15]
5. *A husband must seriously consider obtaining a marriage license.*
6. *The marriage ceremony must be public*.[16]
7. *The marriage must not contradict any contract or accepted circumstance* previously entered into by the husband and his present wife (wives).
8. *The marriage must not be used as a means of preventing divorce or adultery*.[17]
9. *An "important reason" must exist. One example could be a wife unable to bear children.*

Obviously we have only begun to consider the practice of polygyny, particularly among African American Muslims. With the book, I make two claims. First, that African American Muslims who uphold polygyny do so in adherence to (1) a *specific* reading of the Qur'an that for them translates *permissibility with qualifications* to clear, universal, and timeless Qur'anic *approval*, (2) in agreement with communal interpretations that have been moved to the level of codification from the realm of tradition and/or culture, (3) in response to the consequences of what they define as domestic

terrorism, or "war" in a racist society, or (4) any combination of the above.

In addition to defending the freedom of choice for mature, consenting individuals, as does the ACLU, we must be intentional and more visible in promoting education about healthy partnering whatever the form. We must advocate for communal resources close to and/or a part of our religious communities to which those in trouble can go to for help. We must challenge and address the ways in which we buy into religious texts and/or interpretations of them that destroy us rather than progress us. We must also enable women and other marginalized groups to problematize the "scripts" they write and ingest. We must enter into partnerships that represent justice and self-love.

Black religion can and should be a positive instrument in this regard. The high rate of divorce, the prominence of single family households, headed by women and men who prefer to be married, the anger, guilt, and resentment that sabotages us, and the unhealthy decisions we make because we believe or are told that our religions demand this, suggest that we in the academy, the mosque, the church, the temple, and other environments of meaning-making have much work to do to ensure that constructions of maleness and femaleness, of family, and of African American religiosity that constitutes healthy families for the 21st century.

►You will not be able to be equitable between your wives, be you ever so eager; yet do not be altogether partial so that you leave her, as it were, suspended. Sourat Al-Nissa 4:129

Notes

[1]Estimates provided by Tapestry Against Polygamy. See website http://www.polygamy.org/media.shtml Also see Andrea Moore Emmett, *God's Brothel: The Extortion of Sex for Salvation in Contemporary Mormon and Christian Fundamentalist Polygamy and the Stories of 18 Women Who Escaped* (San Francisco: Pince-Nez Press, 2004).

[2]As Jamal Badawi and others persuasively argue, associating polygyny with Islam continues to be a feature of the Western mythology of the religion and practice of Muslims. See Jamal Badawi, *Gender Equity in Islam: Basic Principles* (Indianapolis, IN: American Trust Publications, 1995).

[3]The other, less commonly practiced form of plural marriage is polyandry a marriage of one *wife* to multiple husbands.

[4]Understandably, some men came to Islam with more than the prescribed number of wives. In such cases, these men were required to divorce them.

[5]Natural parallels exist between oppressed Muslim women in seventh century Arabia and African American Muslim women in twentieth century North America, like Amina Wadud, who routinely face marginalization because of their race, gender, and religion. Wadud is the only female scholar included in *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an*. See Asma Barlas, "Amina Wadud's hermeneutics of the Qur'an: women rereading sacred texts," in *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an*, ed. Suha Taji-Farouki (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 98.

[6]Huston Smith. *The Illustrated World's Religions: A Guide to Our Wisdom Traditions* (NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 166.

[7]The predominant view of marriage among Muslim is framed in terms of a heterosexual relationship.

[8]Conversations with author, summer 2003. Author's emphasis is an attempt to convey in print the oral insistence of subject.

[9]Robert Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage To Islam* (Oxford: University Press, 2002), 218-219.

[10]Telephone and email conversations with author, November 2002 – April 2003

[11]Telephone interview with author, February 25, 2004.

[12]Imam Qasim Ahmed, tape-recorded interview with author, St. Petersburg, FL, July 11, 2004.

[13]Imam W. Deen Mohammed, "Excerpts from Imam Mohammed's talk to Sisters only meeting in Detroit in 1995," in Imam Ronald Shaheed, email message to author, December 1, 2002.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Imam W. Deen Mohammed, "Speeches to the Men and Women of the American Society of Muslims: Sisters Meeting, March 8, 2003," Chicago, IL.

[16]"Speeches to the Men and Women of the American Society of Muslims: Brothers only meeting, May 17, 2003," Atlanta, GA. Transcript provided to author. Mohammed stops short of declaring that polygyny is a choice for all parties involved, but does infer that polygyny is not the Qur'anic ideal. He would not, however agree with Muhammad Abduh that "polygyny is in contrast to the original nature of marriage." See Muhammad Abduh, *tafsir al-manar* vols I-XI. (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr, no date), as quoted in Sofie Roald, *Women in Islam: The Western Experience* (London: Routledge, 2001), 202.

[17]"Speeches to the Men and Women of the American Society of Muslims: Sisters Meeting, June 7, 2003," San Francisco, CA. Transcript provided to author.

LESSONS FROM THE PAST THAT MIGHT SPEAK TO US TODAY

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Lessons from Black Abolitionism

As I worked on the first draft of my first book, *Black Abolitionism, A Quest for Human Dignity*, in the summer of 2002, I was delighted by my discovery that the topic of black abolitionism was a well deep enough to provide a treasure of continued exploration, meaningful reflections, and useful connections to which I could return for the rest of my scholarly life. So it gives me pleasure to draw from that well once again for *this* presentation.

Figures from the black abolitionist movement – the *first* American civil rights movement – offer a stream of wisdom and a caliber of witness regarding the relationship between faith and life, theory and praxis, theology and ethics, which could inform us in our struggle for justice. They have taught me not only about the early fight for freedom from the toxic impact of white supremacy, but also about the nature of prophetic witness in the context of cultural exile, the importance of political power in the fight for equality, and the value of education as a tool against oppression.

African Americans and non-African Americans, Christians and non-Christians alike, can be blessed by a meaningful reflection upon the ways in which the experiences of unjust suffering of these freedom fighters was transformed into an occasion in which God could be encountered. While they knew existentially, "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen," they also learned to sing with conviction, "Wouldn't take nothing for my journey."

For Black Abolitionists, there was no chasm or false dichotomy between religion and politics. They understood and collectively articulated that their fight for justice in America was a religious *and* political issue, as were the injustice of slavery and the malevolence of white supremacy. They found that their faith affirmed and *con*firmed that their fight against slavery and white supremacy was fueled by the conviction that the battle was not only a justifiable one, but a religious *duty* and a theological *necessity*.

Three Crucial Insights That Remain Timely

Although several common themes shape the writings and speeches of black abolitionists, I will only highlight three of those themes in my comments here. The first is recognition of the dignity of African Americans as an *integral* part of abolitionism. The second is resistance to slavery was justified on Christian grounds. The third is the importance of education for racial uplift. I will say a brief word about the first two themes, and a little more about the third one.

Theme 1: The Fight was Grounded in an Affirmation of Human Dignity

A key insight for me – the main thesis of my book, *Black Abolitionism, A Quest for Human Dignity* – was that for blacks, abolition of slavery entailed more than mere emancipation.

Black abolitionists knew that while emancipation was a necessary step, it was insufficient for the flourishing of African Americans**.** For them, abolitionism included full equality in order to participate in all levels of American society. It meant not only the end of slavery, but also the end of white supremacy and all the indignities that went with it. Generally, whites involved in the abolitionist movement tended to limit their support to bringing an end to slavery. They were not necessarily convinced of the full equality of blacks in relation to whites. This limited conception of abolitionism was one of the important distinctions between white and black abolitionists. For blacks, the quest for the recognition of their dignity as full human beings was central to the abolitionist cause.

However, it was certainly not the case that without that recognition, blacks believed they lacked human dignity. Blacks were quick to affirm that they were fully human beings by virtue of their having been created in the image of God. They had an innate sense of their humanness, despite the degradation of slavery or the condition of quasi-freedom. Their appropriation of the Christian gospel affirmed this intuitive sense. They understood that human dignity was bestowed by God and, therefore, could not be taken away, (although it could be assaulted or obscured.) Their faith also sustained them as they faced those assaults; and reminded them of their value and worth. But African Americans also knew, intuitively, that there is a social dimension of human dignity – that is, there is a human need to have one's dignity recognized and respected by others. And they understood that the struggle for abolitionism included the struggle to have that social dimension honored.

Corollary: we are our brother's keeper

The black abolitionist notion of personhood had a corollary. The mutual regard for the social dimension of human dignity, shaped by the belief that all humans have been created in the image of God, meant that we, therefore, are one another's keeper. Those who had been born free, or who had been able to purchase their freedom, or who had escaped slavery as fugitives, knew that their well-being was tied to the welfare of the enslaved. For black abolitionists, "success" – however that might be defined – could not be completely enjoyed on a personal level, unless *all* blacks were free. There was no tolerance for a "crabs in the barrel" mentality. And they saw no need to rob their enemies of *their* personhood in the struggle for justice.

Theme 2: The Inescapable Political Dimension of Christian Ministry

A second key insight that I will briefly touch on is the notion that black abolitionists were aware that there was an inescapable political dimension to Christian ministry.

For black slaves and free blacks who embraced the form of Christianity, deeply shaped by the winds of evangelicalism, which swept through the United States in the late 18th and early to mid-19th centuries, as a result of the Great Awakenings, affirmation of Christianity meant conversion of sinners, extension of church membership, and reformation of society – a notion which Albert Raboteau reminds us in his work. As African Americans struggled with the incongruity of the message of the gospel of freedom and the proclamation of that same gospel by slave holders, blacks who embraced Christianity were able to find meaning and value for their lives and maintain their confidence that the Christian God did not condone their enslavement.

Evangelized blacks whose faith aroused resistance to slavery were disturbing prophetic witnesses. These witnesses pricked the conscience of white Americans as they rebuked not only the political hypocrisy of slavery in the land of the free, but the religious hypocrisy of a slaveholding nation shaped by the Judeo-Christian principle of the sacredness of human life made in the image of God. Black abolitionists constantly raised the specter of this double hypocrisy; thereby, troubling the waters of both American religion *and* politics. A sizable number of blacks influenced by some form of evangelical Christianity, who fought slavery, colonization attempts, and the moral depravity inherent in a slavocracy, operated under the unassailable conviction that faithful discipleship and an answered call to ministry necessarily included the work of abolitionism. In fact, abolitionists such as James Pennington, Henry Highland Garnet, and Samuel Ringgold Ward could not conceive of a Christian ministry that did *not* involve participation in the abolitionist movement. Their Christian witness had a decisively prophetic element to it which empowered them to embrace the call to: challenge America to repent from slavery, abandon "negro-hate," and live up to the ideals promulgated in the founding documents of this nation.

Theme Three: The Power of Education in the Fight for Justice

One of the surprising discoveries I made in my initial study of black abolitionism was how education was viewed as crucial to the struggle for black justice. Black abolitionism has left us a tremendous legacy, which I'm not sure as a people we have taken seriously enough. Literacy, a classical education, and the hunger for knowledge that could transform existence were viewed as powerful tools in the fight for justice!

As we know full well, one of the major prohibitions which afflicted black slaves was the prohibition against their being taught to read and write. White slaveholders viewed literacy and the knowledge one can acquire from it as subversive and dangerous in the hands of blacks. Slaves who tried to learn to read and whites who tried to teach them were punished. Howard Thurman often related the story about his grandmother, a former slave, who talked about the impression she had as a youth that being able to read and write must be something extraordinarily powerful if whites felt the need to punish blacks who sought literacy. And as a youth she purposed in her heart that her children and their children would acquire that power.

Black Abolitionists understood that power. Some such as David Walker were self-taught. Walker read extensively and spent long hours studying and writing. The publication of his *Appeal* in 1829 was one of three events that contributed to the radicalization of the abolitionist movement in the 1830s, (the other two were the publication of William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* and the Nat Turner Rebellion of 1831). The *Appeal* was not only a passionate jeremiad, but also an eloquent and erudite treatise against slavery. Walker viewed not only religion, but also education as key to the restoration of black dignity in America. So did James Pennington.

Pennington, who had been born a slave, but escaped to freedom as a young adult, was educated by a Quaker family. He became a minister of the gospel who saw abolitionism as an important dimension of his vocation. This is what he had to say about the impact of slavery on his own life:

There is one sin that slavery committed against me, which I never can forgive. It robbed me of my education;' the injury is irreparable; I feel the embarrassment more seriously now than I ever did before. It cost me two years' hard labour, after I fled, to unshackle my mind; it was three years before I had purged my language of slavery's idioms; it was four years before I had thrown off the crouching aspect of slavery; and now the evil that besets me is a great lack of general information, the foundation of which is most effectually laid in that part of life which I served as a slave. When I consider how much now, more than ever, depends upon sound and thorough education among coloured men, I am grievously overwhelmed with a sense of my deficiency, and more especially as I can never hope now to make it up.

The lost years under slavery would haunt Pennington the rest of his life. He viewed that loss as the greatest robbery he had suffered from the system and he went to great lengths to mitigate that loss. He was so motivated to receive an advanced education that he endured the indignity of listening to class lectures in the *hallway*, because racial prejudice prohibited him from being able to sit in the same classroom with the white students at Yale Divinity School.

Henry Highland Garnet, also a fugitive slave from Maryland, escaped and eventually attended a high school in New York, and an academy sponsored by the local antislavery society in New Hampshire. There, as a youth, he delivered his first formal speech before an abolitionist assembly. It raised a stir in the town and he and the other students were terrorized. At that time he vowed that *once his education* was completed he would go South and engage in the abolitionist struggle. (By the way, as a minister and abolitionist, Garnet led the first transportation strike in New York City – a hundred years before the Montgomery Bus Boycott led by the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Like Pennington and Garnet, Samuel Ringgold Ward also escaped with his family from slavery in Maryland. He attended a public school in New York and at one point he received instruction from a Quaker. He so deeply valued education that before becoming an ordained minister, he had been a teacher, succeeding James Pennington at a school for black children in New York. Ward also taught in New Jersey.

Not only did men expend tremendous effort to educate themselves as part of the process of reversing the effects of slavery, but there was an army of black female abolitionists who were dedicated to teaching black children when the larger society denied them access to an education. Maria Stewart, deprived of an education as a child, attended school as an adult, while she worked as a servant. She went on to teach black children in New York, Baltimore, and Washington. Sarah Mapps Douglass, daughter of renowned abolitionists Robert Douglass and Grace Bustill Douglass, operated a successful private school for black women, so that they could receive a high school education. Susan Paul**,** a primary school teacher and abolitionist viewed teaching as part of her activist mission. Mary Miles Bibb, wife of former slave Henry Bibb, taught in Boston, Albany, and Cincinnati before she and her husband fled to Canada, and founded an antislavery newspaper, after the passage of the infamous Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Mary Ann Shadd Cary**,** educated by Quakers in Pennsylvania, founded a school in Windsor, Ontario – a region where many blacks fled

because of the Fugitive Slave Act. Eventually, Cary returned to the United States and taught in Wilmington, Delaware, and Washington, DC, before she earned her law degree in 1882.

These women and men understood the power of education. They used their literacy to articulate their plight in the form of prophetic witness. For them education was *essential* to the success of the *entire* black community, not simply a talented few. There was no perverse pride in how little they knew. They did not view the acquisition of knowledge, as by definition, capitulation to "whiteness." There was no absence of intellectual curiosity; or an attitude that if learning failed to entertain them, then education was not worth pursuing. And there was no passive *acceptance* of inferior educational opportunities for black children.

As black abolitionists fought not only for the liberation of African American slaves, but also the recognition of their dignity, they called upon the Christian Church of America to repent of its captivity to an economic system of human bondage and an institutionalized ideology of white supremacy; and they gave this call for repentance in the manner of the prophets of old. They were voices of yesterday who saw the deep political implications of black religion on American politics of the day, and exercised fearless leadership in the face of the seemingly intractable enemies of slavery and white supremacy.

In his famous *Appeal*, David Walker was bold enough to say:

> *Can any thing be a greater mockery of religion than the way in which it is conducted by the Americans?…Will the Lord suffer this people to go on much longer, taking his holy name in vain? Will he not stop them, PREACHERS and all? O Americans! Americans!! I call God – I call angels – I call men, to witness, that your DESTRUCTION is at hand, and will be speedily consummated unless you REPENT.*

(By the way, nearly one hundred and eighty years later, in *his* sermons, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright would exercise that same kind of boldness.)

I have come to see that Black Abolitionists as a whole tended to possess: 1) an enduring faith which affirmed them as they were *in the eyes of God*; 2) an abiding belief that God's claim on them necessitated service that would challenge and subvert the powers that be; and 3) an unshakeable conviction that education was an indispensable vehicle for helping them to fulfill their prophetic vocation. We could profit from some of these ideas as we assess our present and lay the foundation for a better future.

WISE ANCESTRAL COUNSEL:
THE FAITH OF W.E.B. DUBOIS*

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Introduction

I bring you greetings from that great and storied institution, Howard University School of Divinity, a bellwether of African American and Diasporic theological education and a laboratory for religious thought and leadership among African peoples. A university-based divinity school, we are located on twenty-two acres in the northeast quadrant of Washington, DC, approximately five miles from the main campus, with an explicit mission to "educate, form and empower" future generations of academic and religious leaders. A graduate school of the academy and a professional school of the ecclesia, our scholarly enterprise at the School of Divinity is grounded in a sacred calling, to always remember and to never forget that there is something infinitely worthy about the experience of African peoples, that there is something that continuously yields the clue and testifies to the fact that the earliest visitations of the spirit to our ancestors in this and every land are far from over. The vision of the School of Divinity is multi-faceted and one, to enhance our efflorescence as African people in a common world and transgress the inheritance of the European Enlightenment – that there is an inherent contradiction between faith and reason, religion and science, head and heart, body and spirit, theory and practice, research and action, objectivity and passion, humankind and nature, the individual and community, the self and the other, intellect and intimacy, secular and sacred, this life and the next.

Entrusted with the faith of our people here in the heart of the nation's capital, the School of Divinity is building on a magnificent legacy and embarking on a new day begun. There has never been a better time to be in the District of Columbia than the present, to advocate for the life of the mind and the life of the spirit, in what is arguably the epicenter of black public intellectual discourse and epistemic life. In a time of formidable global change, President Barak Obama and First Lady Michele Robinson Obama have emerged, striving to model creative agency and ethical ambition for our nation and the world through their expansive re-orientation and revalorization of human value and contingency. Their very public recognition of the District as a seldom-told tale of two distinct cities, two parallel universes, two disparate worlds linked by a meta-narrative of dominance and denigration, urban redevelopment and human displacement, Machiavellian privilege and misanthropic neglect, is a discomforting case in point for some and has disruptive implications for grassroots activism and people yearning to breathe free everywhere.

I have learned much in my short time here in Washington, where the newsmakers and the not-so-news-worthy, the political elite and the locals who have no representation, the well-heeled and the ill-clad, the haves and the have nots, the first and the last coexist in a rather nefarious, hierarchical, hegemonic dance. The pattern of movements in the capital city is a snapshot of urban America. We move to the neighborhood. They move to the suburbs. We move to the suburbs. They move to the exurbs. We integrate. They disinvest. They return to the neighborhood. We are displaced. They gentrify. We resist. The two worlds vie for social and epistemic space. Sometimes they collide.

They do not mingle gladly. This is an opportune time for the Society for the Study of Black Religion to meet here in caramel city (now home to the black, the brown, and the white), if it is not quite the chocolate city of old. It is most certainly the time for my work together with the community of scholars at Howard University School of Divinity. The interrogation of normative purviews, the insurrection of subjugated knowledge, the formulation of public policy, the association of all peoples, the celebration of the human spirit, the transformation of human community, the replenishment of Gaia earth is a massive undertaking that requires us all; our people need us. With accomplished colleagues like our Academic Dean Rosetta Ross and Professors Delores Carpenter, Cheryl Sanders, Harold Dean Trulear and Kenyatta Gilbert, all of whom have participated today, I am honored and proud to be here.

The Faith of DuBois

My assignment as I understand it this evening is to speak for the next few minutes to the Society's theme for this year, "The Voices of Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: Black Religion, Black Leadership, and American Politics." I begin with a simple but necessary truth: Black religion, in whatever form and by whatever name, whatever else it does, must advocate for the moral, social, economic, political and cultural transformation of communities of African descent. To do otherwise is fraudulent. It is a waste of our time. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., stated:, "Any religion that professes to be concerned with the souls of men (and women) and is not concerned with the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social conditions that cripple them is a dry-as-dust religion."[1]

Martin Luther King's critique of religion, scathing and sweeping as it is, was directed at the Black churches and Black clergy of his era. Less well known is the fact that his analysis mirrored the very crisis in Black religious leadership W.E.B. DuBois had warned about in *The Negro Church* sixty years earlier. For the next few minutes, I will digress from the DuBois of conventional wisdom and focus on DuBois the believer, sociologist, scholar of religion, and social activist in all his penetrating brilliance and occasional contradiction. In the twenty-first century, in a complex and contradicting world, the wisdom of the ages and an arresting and expansive faith is needed to inform us as never before. My primary resource for our thinking together this evening is DuBois's pioneering and unsung study *The Negro Church*.

Efforts by contemporary scholars to understand the breadth of DuBois's religious views, both personal and academic, have tended to be piecemeal and incomplete.[2] They have also come primarily from non-religion scholars. DuBois's views on religion are critical, controversial, complementary, challenging, creative, and complex – reflecting an overt set of commitments and internal recognitions that many researchers still find perplexing and contradictory – but views which are in fact utterly and dialectically consistent. Over the course of his ninety-five years DuBois defied easy either/or religious labels, all the while making his way from an early and stanch belief in the orthodox tenets of New England Puritanism to a fervent and unremitting faith in the "spiritual strivings" of Black folk. From DuBois's own recollections, we know that as a young man growing up in the town of Great Barrington, Massachusetts, during the 1870's he knew intimately the Protestant ethic of hard work, frugality, morality, and respectability. In the last of his three autobiographies, he writes that he and his mother, Mary Silvina Burghardt DuBois, a respected and devout Christian, worshipped on occa-

sion at the new African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church, which in his youthful inexperience seemed to him a curiously "segregated institution." However, due mainly to reasons of proximity and white beneficence, they faithfully attended the First Congregational Church where they were "the only colored communicants."[3] DuBois recognized early on that modest class distinctions existed between Great Barrington's local protestant and catholic churches, but given the town's small black population, he had no real experience with the intrigues and trials of race until he went south at the age of seventeen to attend Fisk University in September 1885.

DuBois's collegiate experience fundamentally shaped his life. All the teachers at Fisk were white – commonplace at the time for northern missionary-founded schools in the south – but many of his most transformative experiences came from the southern black world around him. His strict moral and religious upbringing found reinforcement in the classroom context but was berated by some of his classmates, many of whom were older, more urbane, and certainly more experienced in the ways of the world. Like other black collegians of the time, the small cadre of students at Fisk was typically confident and poised to assume their communal responsibility as the vanguard of scholars, activists, and propagandists for the race. Writes DuBois: "At Fisk the problem of race was faced openly and essential racial equality asserted and natural inferiority strenuously denied."[4] All the social, intellectual, and religious dimensions of his southern experience began to congeal in the summers of 1886 and 1887. It was in the east Tennessee backcountry, where DuBois was serving as an elementary schoolteacher, that he first experienced the radical contingency of the religion of the oppressed in the form of the Southern Negro revival:

> And so most striking to me, as I approached the village and the little plain church perched aloft, was the air of intense excitement that possessed that mass of black folk. A sort of suppressed terror hung in the air and seemed to seize them – a pythian madness, a demoniac possession, that lent terrible reality to song and word. The black and massive form of the preacher swayed and quivered as the words crowded to his lips and flew at us in singular eloquence. The people moaned and fluttered and then, and then the gaunt-cheeked brown woman beside me suddenly leaped straight into the air and shrieked like a lost soul, while round about came wail and groan and outcry, and a scene of human passion such as I had never conceived before.[5]

Here in the heart of Alexandria, Tennessee's black community, DuBois experienced something of the heart of the essence of black religious life. In the simple wood framed tabernacles and unadorned houses of worship of rural southern black folk he encountered depths of spirituality unknown to him; a spirituality which he found all the more powerful and unpretentious for being so unfamiliar. The nature of his response was not confined merely to the rational or categorical, but clearly reflected the inherent paradox of the experience and also the stark contrast of his own New England Puritan past. Still loyal to his Calvinistic upbringing, yet increasingly alienated from the church of his youth, DuBois was determined to make sense of the religious datum that emanated deep from within America's communities of African descent and integrate it into his own still embryonic worldview. The summer months of 1886 and 1887 provided him with an intimate introduction to his people as a race and a dawning awareness that here also was an opportunity to engage in objective social analysis that would culminate in his formal work as a sociologist from 1897 to 1906.

By DuBois's senior year, the president of Fisk was enamored enough with the young man's talents to try and persuade him to accept a scholarship to attend Hartford Seminary. As his autobiographical writings attest, his social outlook had undergone dramatic transformation. In matters of personal morality, however, he remained stoically and steadfastly Puritan:

> I believed too little in Christian dogma to become a minister. I was not without faith: I never stole material nor spiritual things; I not only never lied, but blurted out my conception of truth on the most untoward occasions; I drank no alcohol and knew nothing of women, physically or psychically, to the incredulous amusement of my more experienced fellows: I above all believed in work –systematic and tireless.[6]

DuBois was a devout believer in the Protestant ethic and its implied power to instill the cultural values needed for black social and political progress. Upon joining the faculty of Wilberforce University in 1894, the flagship institution of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church, he had a chance encounter with a group of students who were engaged in informal worship. The acerbic young professor soon found himself embroiled in a campus-wide controversy after he refused to lead the students in prayer. After joining the Atlanta University faculty in 1897 he caused consternation once again by refusing to participate in religious services. Eventually, he agreed to read Collects from the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer and finally began to write his own prayers.[7] His prayer glorifying the work ethic is illustrative:

> God teach us to work. Herein alone do we approach our Creator when we stretch our arms with toil, and strain with eye and ear and brain to catch the thought and do the deed and create the things that make life worth living. Let us learn quickly in our youth, O Father, that in the very doing, the honest humble determined striving, lies the realness of things, the great glory of life. Of all things there is fear and fading – beauty pales and hope disappoints; but blessed is the worker – his are the kingdoms of earth – Amen.[8]

Without a doubt, the burgeoning worldview of DuBois was also deeply transformed by the deteriorating state of race relations across the nation. The young scholar was coming to maturity during some of the longest and most bitter years of the black American struggle for freedom. The fledgling hope to which late nineteenth century Emancipation and Reconstruction had given rise shattered against the racism rife across the land. In the South and Border States anti-Negro hate groups maimed, murdered, raped, burned and rioted in bigoted fury. Between 1885 and 1894 more than 1700 lynchings of black men and women were recorded in America.[9] The Supreme Court handed down the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision in 1896, making the ideology of "separate but equal" sacrosanct for the next sixty years. Social and political deconstruction, in the North and South, denied black people the vote, and offered them educational opportunities that were inferior at best; the courts dispensed their own brand of civil injustice, and discrimination barred blacks from decent housing; those who could find jobs often had to withstand subhuman working conditions. White American society as a whole saw black children, women, and men as lazy, insolent, libidinous, ignorant, irresponsible, uncultured, criminal, irredeemable, and in the final analysis, somewhat less than human. The scientific community generally concurred: Social Darwinists and other racialists proclaimed the culture of the Negro deficient and their inferiority natural and innate, that those who were of darker hue were unfit for full and equitable participation in the modern competitive world.

DuBois was more than content to remain an outsider where certain aspects of the black religious experience were concerned. His strict Puritan sensibilities were disturbed by the excessive emotionalism of black worship and the ineptitude and immorality of rank and file clergy. At the same time, on spiritual as well as on intellectual grounds, he understood his humanity and destiny to be altogether bound up with the black masses. DuBois was only just beginning to make a strong claim for a holistic definition of black spirituality, one that embraced the transcendent worth, intrinsic value and distinctive gifts of African descended people. He demonstrated a near numinous faith in the values and virtues of his people, especially when rhapsodizing on the resilient black rural southern (as opposed to the more prosaic black urban northern) proletariat. However, his faith in the wherewithal of the institutional black church to champion black American social progress was not nearly so transcendent or sublime. In an 1891 paper delivered before the National Colored League of Boston he sternly admonished the church, stating "a religion that won't stand the application of reason and common sense is not fit for an intelligent dog."[10] Much to the dismay of Dubois and such other well-known black public figures and intellectuals as Anna Julia Cooper, Reverend Francis J. Grimké, and Reverend Alexander Crummell, the black church was overly steeped in emotionalism and failing in its mission to translate sacred imperatives into social activism. This having been said, DuBois's critique where the black church is concerned was mild in comparison to his withering condemnation of the white church, a point that would take us too far afield this evening and which I suspect is already familiar.[11]

The Negro Church

As a passionate observer of the national condition and sensitive interpreter of black life, DuBois was keenly aware of the psychological subversions of late nineteenth and early twentieth century white racism. In The Souls of Black Folk, he would write famously about this contingency and the critical hermeneutic adopted by black America, artfully and exquisitely stated in a trio of metaphors: "twoness," "double consciousness," and most often, "the Veil." In *The Negro Church*, DuBois expresses the same dialectic in different ways, primarily scientifically. His intention was to do sociology from the standpoint of the oppressed, to establish prima facie evidence for social change through objective scientific analysis. A meticulous scholar, DuBois approached his work early on with the supreme confidence that empirical sociology would be a formidable ally in the black struggle for equality and a counter to white supremacist pathologies. However, his hope in the redemptive power of an impartial scientific truth would soon be shattered on the rocks of white racial intransigence and the politics of knowledge.

The Negro Church would be DuBois's most systematic account of black religion. He emphasized its unparalleled role in the social, organizational, and spiritual life of black people. Participant-observation studies were conducted by six teams of researchers across the country. The work also drew heavily on U.S. government census data and the difficult to access records of black denominational bodies. However, the book itself begins with an analysis of religion and culture in West African indigenous societies. While not extensively emphasizing the role of African retentions, early in his career, DuBois was already committed to the notion that a vital understanding of African religious antecedents was imperative to making sense of black religiosity in the Caribbean and the Americas. In the process, he became the first scholar to positively identify the African origins of the black church throughout the African Diaspora, which church was never exclusively Christian in any case, calling it "the sole surviving social institution of the African fatherland."[12]

At the same time, some of DuBois's cultural observations on African indigenous society can only be described as pejorative, paternalistic and otherwise incongruous with his efforts to combat social Darwinism in the United States.[13] That much of his incipient Pan-Africanism is intellectually flawed is hardly surprising considering that his doctrine of Kulture (culture) was itself heavily indebted to European theory. That he staked his entire discussion of the cultural significance of Africa for the African Diaspora on non-indigenous sources (principally the Encyclopedia Britannica and the work of German ethnographer Friedrich Ratzel), points to the real limitations of his knowledge about Africa circa 1903. Twenty-one years would pass before DuBois experienced the African context, in 1924, when he traveled to Liberia at the age of fifty-six. In the interim, his knowledge about the culture and politics of Africa grew exponentially and he would make amends through later writings for his early porous scholarship.

The Negro Church was thus the pinnacle of DuBois's progressive sociological search for truth about the significance of institutional Christianity for black social and religious life. He characterized the "African church" as the "oldest Negro organization, dating in part from Africa itself, and here Negroes have had the most liberty and experience."[14] Due to the suppressive nature of white American society the black church was called upon to blend together family and ritual functions in an all-encompassing way. The functions of the church were far-reaching, so much so that it "became the center of amusements, of what little spontaneous economic activity remained, of education, and of all social intercourse."[15] As a result, the church was more often than not "a social institution first, and religious afterwards, but nevertheless, its religious activity is wide and sincere."[16] For DuBois, the true strength and genius of the black church was found in its dedication to preserving and upholding the humanity of black folk and in its liberating vision of Christianity without caste distinctions.

Yet there was never DuBois without critique. As a rule, his praise of the black church was measured and reserved and, with rare exception, fleeting and faint. In *The Negro Church*, DuBois is disarmingly cautious in his estimates of black religious life. He is careful to differentiate between religion as moral precept and religion as emotive outlet. He indicates that the church as a social institution was too little concerned with issues of social empowerment. Taking a cue from the legacy of radical antebellum preacher Nat Turner (whom DuBois admired greatly and studied extensively while at Harvard), DuBois stated that early twentieth century black America required an uncompromising political protest, an idea that did not find widespread reception among black clergy. Not only that, the leadership of the church had yet to advance the race in matters of personal and cultural formation: "In direct moral teaching nd setting standards for the people … the church is timid, and naturally so, for its constitution is democracy tempered by custom."[17] He chided the churches further for what he saw as the distractions of extravagance, missed opportunity and internal dissension, which spoiled their greater purpose. Last but not least, the church suffered from a dearth of well-educated leadership. As a result, the well-being of local congregations and the broader community was destined to suffer as well.

For DuBois, the moments of tension between his spiritual (African cultural) and puritanical (European cultural) values were constant and pedestrian, and sometimes episodic; so too were his efforts to reconcile sacred and social processes. His achievement of a dialectical unity of opposites, his synthesis of African and Hegelian ideals, the ability to consider the part and the whole, while alien to white cultured despisers was of one piece to him. As Manning Marable explains, "the

central motif in his ideological biography" is "the ability to create sound political programs on the quicksand of racist violence and segregation." [18] So it was that DuBois could affirm the ideal of the Church universal and strongly criticize black churches for their naive acceptance and uncritical embrace of white Christian doctrine. DuBois reserved the right to criticize white Christianity later on, as evidenced by a torrid stream of articles and addresses over the years. Here however, he offers but modest words, along with principal co-analysts Mary Church Terrell and Kelly Miller, as a challenge to white America:

> Religious precepts would rob the white man of his prejudices and cause him to recognize the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Christianity is contrary to the spirit of caste – spiritual kinship transcends all other relations. The race problem will be solved when Christianity gains control of the innate wickedness of the human heart, and men learn to apply in dealing with their fellows the simple principles of the Golden Rule and the Sermon on the Mount.[19]

Mary Church Terrell, one of the study's co-investigators, is another pioneering scholar seldom referenced in social-science literature. Terrell was an author, educator, lecturer and leading figure in the black women's club movement. Like her contemporaries Ida B. Wells, Fannie Williams, and Anna Julia Cooper, she undertook social analysis from the standpoint of black women. Like her male colleagues DuBois and Miller, Terrell's social standing and moral standpoint compelled her to work to empower the black dispossessed.[20] The so-called black elite of the time, women and men, recognized that gender and class differences in the black community were largely irrelevant to the white world. At the same time, the most silenced voices of the era belonged to black women who were the bedrock of everyday church life and activity. Slavery had violated black women, desecrated black children, brutalized black men and virtually decimated every social institution except the black church. At the beginning of the twentieth century, therefore, it was widely agreed in the black community that a reverent and moral faith was needed to meet the severe challenges facing the race. Regrettably, little in the way of gendered and class analysis was given to this important subject in *The Negro Church*. Nevertheless, for Terrell, Miller and DuBois, what is abundantly clear is that black women represented (and represent still) the best hope of black people: "Upon the women of no race have the truths of the gospel taken a firmer and deeper hold than upon the colored women of the United States. For her protection and by her help a religious rebirth is needed."[21]

The Negro Church marks both an end and a beginning in the religious scholarship of DuBois. Despite his well chronicled dislike for religious dogma, over the next six decades he continued to write frequently on religion, the black church, and the social, moral and political responsibility of religious institutions. As a mature scholar and activist, he remained faithful to the God of black resistance and liberation, even as his life's work assumed a myriad of political and ideological forms. Not only were God and Jesus black for him, but Christ was extolled as "the greatest of religious rebels" and an emancipator of the world's colored and exploited masses.[22] For DuBois, the greatest gift of black faith was its radical reinterpretation of Christianity for an oppressive and prejudicial social order. Thus, to the white world, he expressed agnosticism; but his principled spiritual commitment was to the black world. DuBois held to a multifaceted faith in the religion of black people, a faith that was commonly but not only Christian, and in the utter righteousness of their cause.[23] One of his

final essays, written in 1962, was the introduction to a photographic study of storefront churches in inner-city Buffalo, New York. [24]

The Black Church in the United States since DuBois

In the century since DuBois published *The Negro Church*, black religion in the United States has undergone momentous and labyrinthine change. The period between the First and Second World Wars witnessed what Gayraud Wilmore famously called the "deradicalization of the black church" as even the most modest forms of social critique gave way to a near exclusive emphasis on individual care and transformation in the midst of the white American maelstrom.[25] Much of the more radical hope of black religion operated outside of the traditional churches, as African Americans raised troubling new questions about the spiritual malaise of the black church and its seeming preoccupation with white Christian values.

DuBois, who had long since distanced himself from the contagion of the institutional black church, still saw its prophetic possibilities. Speaking before an audience at Wilberforce University he offered these prescient words: "Our religion, with all its dogma, demagoguery, and showmanship, can be a center to teach character, right conduct and sacrifice. There lies here a career for a Negro Gandhi and a host of earnest followers."[26] DuBois was right, of course. Just over the horizon loomed the profoundly sacramental and black-led struggle for the transformation of the nation – in civil rights, black consciousness and womanist activity – and enabling new paradigms for the church. In the half century since, black socio-political objectives and spiritual imperatives have been joined in intermittent fashion, at times spectacularly so but more often not, as black communions still struggle to embrace the call to resistance, liberation and social change as part of their divine mandate.

One cannot know for certain what DuBois would have to say about black religion in America today (in my mind's eye he would hardly be surprised but deeply disappointed and chagrined), but some contemporary sociological observations are in order nonetheless. In a recent study of black faith-based institutions that I conducted in Atlanta, Georgia, I found that a significant number of churches and mosques uncritically equated their social service provisions, while widespread and certainly important, with social justice involvement, an infrequent and even more visionary undertaking.[27] Other studies of the megachurch phenomenon suggest that many of these congregations have established an even lower threshold for liberative activity in the wider community, their unique positioning and significant institutional capacity notwithstanding.[28] Here and there congregations have decided, largely independent of one another, that intermediate entrepreneurial solutions to achieving economic capacity – ranging from job training programs, small business incubators, investment projects, and public-private collaborations to credit unions – are the best means to effect change and intervention in an uncertain economic and political environment.

The more constructive efforts of black faith-based institutions to promote economic and social equality are themselves often confounded by problems of religious isolation and division. Although individual congregations are making important, and even significant, contributions to the broader community, they rarely try to establish alliances with other congregations or leading neighborhood development and nonprofit agencies. By and large, progressive black communions have yet to seriously consider that tackling the root problems of the black community will require a far

more organized and intentional structural witness than is currently the case. As well, congregations must take the next courageous step and become immersed in public policy advocacy and formation, engaging the complex underlying structural and systemic forces that work against community building. The negative distribution of goods and services in black communities is but one major social policy trend in need of a communal response from black religious communions. The wholesale shift of economic activity away from the urban center, with its tragic consequences for the poor and marginalized, is another. Finally, it is important to ascertain and respond to what causes so many black religious institutions – whether marginalized, mainstream, multicultural, or megachurch – to focus with such passion on their own entrepreneurial interests to the neglect of the surrounding community. The problems facing black communities everywhere serve as a sobering reminder that DuBois's call one hundred years ago for a prophetic moral agency is still as urgent as ever.

In the end, the work of personal transformation and community empowerment requires far more than what the institutional forms of black religion alone can hope to accomplish. For all his harsh criticism of the church, the incredible breadth of DuBois's Atlanta University studies illustrates how well he understood this truth, perhaps more than many of us do today. We now have a broad array of organizations and enterprises in the black community that have to be called upon to be accountable to the whole. Still, this does not in the least relieve black churches of their moral and social responsibility. Tragically, for many churches the recognition that there was a shift in the political terrain after the 1950's and 1960's, that the struggle for freedom moved from the steps of the courthouse and city hall and into the hallowed chambers of legislative assemblies, corporate boards and executive suites, appears never to have really occurred.[29] Now as never before a learned, strong and resourceful ministry and laity must be joined with the best that the black religious scholarly tradition has to offer.[30] In the first decade of the twenty-first century, as the racial lessons of the past continue to fade *ipso facto* from the collective memory – a reflection of the powerful and prolonged processes which now and again stall the African American freedom movement – pressing questions remain: How (and how well) will the black faithful respond? What spiritual and religious sensibilities will be involved in the affairs of everyday life? What theological and ethical resources will be brought to bear in light of current social struggles? These issues and more are at the center of the contemporary study of black religion in public life.

Notes

* Address delivered at the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Black Religion, Washington, DC, March 27, 2009.

[1]Martin Luther King, Jr. *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 36.

[2]Herbert Aptheker, "W.E.B. DuBois and Religion: A Brief Reassessment," *The Journal of Religious Thought* 39 (Spring/Summer), p. 8; Vincent Harding, "W.E.B. DuBois and the Black Messianic Vision," in *Black Titan: W.E.B. DuBois*, John Henrik Clarke, et al, eds., (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), pp. 52-68; Manning Marable, "The Black Faith of W.E.B. DuBois: Sociocultural and Political Dimensions of Black Religion," The Southern Quarterly 23 (Spring 1985): 15-33; Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Barbara Dianne Savage, "W.E.B. DuBois and "The Negro Church,"" *The*

Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 568 (March 2000): 235-49. See also the tribute by Martin Luther King, Jr., "Honoring Dr. DuBois," preface to *Dusk of Dawn* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968). For general biographical information on DuBois see the Pulitzer-prize winning volumes by David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993) and *W.E.B. DuBois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000).

[3]W.E.B. DuBois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. DuBois* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), p. 88, 90.

[4]Joe M. Richardson, *A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1980), p. 48.

[5]DuBois, Autobiography, p. 120; The Souls of Black Folk (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, [1903] 1963), p. 140.

[6]DuBois, Autobiography, p. 124.

[7]Ibid., 285. Most of DuBois's extended family in New England was Episcopalian rather than Congregationalist. For a period of time, DuBois also conducted evening devotions at Atlanta University.

[8]W.E.B. DuBois, *Prayers for Dark People*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), p. 62.

[9]DuBois, *Autobiography*, p. 124.

[10]Cited in Marable, "The Black Faith of W.E.B. DuBois," p. 21.

[11]For an extensive treatment of DuBois's views on the white church, see Moses, Afrotopia, pp. 136-68.

[12]DuBois, *The Negro Church*, p. 5.

[13]The following statement is a prime example: "But the central fact of African life, political, social and religious, is its failure to integrate – to unite and systematize itself in some conquering whole which should dominate the wayward parts." As some of my African and African Diasporan students have correctly and vehemently noted, were it not for the historicity of the text and the later maturity of DuBois, this sentence alone would virtually negate the broader merits of the book. Ibid., 3.

[14]Ibid.,154.

[15]Ibid., 5.

[16]Ibid., 110.

[17]DuBois, Negro Church, p. 110.

[18]Manning, "The Black Faith of W.E.B. DuBois," p. 31.

[19]DuBois, Negro Church, p. 208.

[20]For *further biographical information see Mary Church Terrell, A Colored Woman in a White World (Boston: G.*K. Hall, [1940] 1996). Hers is the first full length published autobiography by an African American woman. Howard University sociologist Kelly Miller published such well known works as Radicals and Conservatives and other Essays on the Negro in America (New York: Schocken Books, [1908] 1968) and Out of the House of Bondage (New York: Schocken, [1914] 1971).

[21]DuBois, Negro Church, p. 207.

[22]W.E.B. DuBois, "Postscript," Crisis 35 (June 1928): 203-4; and "Shall We Fight for Freedom?" Chicago Defender, 13 April 1946.

[23]Marable and Aptheker develop aspects of these contrasting themes in their respective works. See "The Black Faith of W.E.B. DuBois" and "W.E.B. DuBois and Religion."

[24]W.E.B. DuBois, Introduction to “Store Front Churches” by Milton Rogovin. Aperture 10:2 (1962): 64, 68, 77, 84.

[25]See especially the introduction to the second edition of Gayraud Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983).

[26]Cited in Aptheker, “W.E.B. DuBois and Religion,” p. 11.

[27]Alton B. Pollard, III, “Black Churches, Black Empowerment, and Atlanta’s Civil Rights Legacy,” in Black Churches and Local Politics, R. Drew Smith and Frederick C. Harris, eds., Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), pp.3-22.

[28]R. Drew Smith and Tamelyn Tucker-Worgs define the minimum threshold for megachurches as two thousand persons in weekly attendance. In Atlanta, as in many communities, it has become commonplace for congregations to hold two or more worship services. See their “Megachurches: African American Churches in Social and Political Context,” The State of Black America 2000 (National Urban League, 2000), 171-197.

[29]Compelling analysis of the socio-political and economic difficulties confronting contemporary black churches is presented in recent studies by Frederick C. Harris, Something Within: Religion in African American Political Activism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Omar M. McRoberts, Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003); R. Drew Smith, New Day Begun: African American Churches and Civic Culture in Post-Civil Rights America (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), and Long March Ahead: African American Churches and Public Policy in Post-Civil Rights America (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Michael Leo Owens, God and Government in the Ghetto: The Politics of Church-State Collaboration in Black America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); and Barbara Dianne Savage, Your Spirits Walk Beside Us: The Politics of Black Religion (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008), among others.

[30] The case for a better educated and more resourceful black clergy is made convincingly by C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya in The Black Church in the African American Experience (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), pp. 399-400.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

JOB POSTINGS

The following announcements have been shared with members of the Society between August 2009 and October 2009:

BROWN UNIVERSITY

Brown University's Department of Religious Studies invites applications for a tenure-track, Assistant Professor position in the area of our curriculum known as Religion and Critical Thought.

Brown's Religion and Critical Thought program is distinctive for its integration of three subfields: philosophy of religion (the intersection of philosophy and religion); theory of religion (explanatory and interpretive approaches in the study of religion); and religious ethics (the intersection of religion, ethics, and politics). While the occupant of this position may have expertise in any one of these three fields, familiarity with the other two is desirable. Ph.D. and excellence in teaching and scholarship are expected.

Candidates should include in their application to the search committee a letter of interest, a curriculum vitae, three letters of recommendation, and no more than two representative writing samples/scholarly publications. Review of applications will begin on October 15, 2009.

Please send applications to:

Professor Mark Cladis, Chair, RCT Search Committee, Department of Religious Studies, Box 1927, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912-1927;

Send general inquires to Gail Tetreault, Office Manager (Gail_Tetreault@brown.edu).

Brown University is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer.

WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

Wesleyan University invites applications for a tenure-track position at the assistant professor level starting July 2010, from scholars specializing in Gender and Islam. The successful candidate will hold a joint appointment in the Religion Department and in the Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program. Applicants should have expertise in one or more of the following: Islamic tradition and practice; Islamic law, rights, and gender; theories of gender and Muslim identity; social movements among Muslims. Those pursuing sexuality studies and/or comparative analysis from a transnational perspective will be favorably considered. We seek a scholar with geographic specialization in Africa, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, or, especially, the Middle East. The candidate must have a Ph.D. in Religion, Women's Studies, Middle Eastern Studies or a related field by the time of appointment, or be very close to completion. The candidate should be able to teach a course on Feminist Theory and a colloquium on theory and method in Religion.

Please send cover letter outlining research interests, a teaching statement, CV, writing sample, and three letters of recommendation to Lori Gruen, Chair of Gender and Islam Search Committee, FGSS, Wesleyan University, 222 Church Street, Middletown, CT 06459.

Applications received by October 13, 2009 are assured full consideration.

Wesleyan is an equal opportunity and affirmative action employer and welcomes applications from women and members of historically under-represented minority groups.

NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Professor of Worship, Preaching, and the Arts (full-time, tenure track)

The Professor of Worship, Preaching, and the Arts is called to teach in the academic fields of preaching and worship with constant attention to the role of the arts in deepening the worship life of God's people; to coordinate a team of part-time faculty persons who will share in this teaching, and who further represent the diversity of the Seminary's student body in terms of church traditions, race, ethnicity, culture, and gender; to serve as part-time "Dean of the Chapel," with responsibility to oversee the organization and quality of the Seminary's worship, again with attention to the role of the arts; and to share in the larger work of the faculty.

The qualified candidate will have an advanced theological degree (D.Min.., Th.D. or Ph.D.) with academic preparation in the fields of preaching and worship. Additionally, the candidate will have: 1) significant, formal experience in preaching and worship with congregations; 2) a passion for the arts and the ability to prepare others to include the arts in the preaching and worship of the church; 3) the ability to develop a vision for the teaching of preaching, worship and the arts that is responsive of the diversity of the student body (age, race, culture, experience, church tradition, etc.); 4) the skill to coordinate a diverse team of part-time faculty members to share in this teaching; and, 5) the ability to provide leadership for the Seminary's chapel program-defining its purposes, organizing and implementing the program in cooperation with appropriate faculty and student committee(s).

For a full position description, cut and paste this address in your web browser:
http://www.nbts.edu/attachments/facdescpwa.pdf

Dr. Warren L. Dennis
Dirk Romeyn Professor
Metro-Urban Ministry
New Brunswick Theological Seminary
732-322-1339 cell

EPISCOPAL DIVINITY SCHOOL

Episcopal Divinity School invites applications and nominations for two full-time, tenure-track positions at the rank of Assistant Professor with demonstrated interdisciplinary teaching experience in one or more of the following areas:

Religion and Society, including new religious and social movements

Church History, including development of doctrine and liturgy

Pastoral Theology, utilizing contemporary contextual analysis and the social sciences

We are particularly interested in candidates who can creatively combine two or more of these areas. Successful candidates will be committed to our pedagogical and institutional priorities and practices of anti-racism and anti-oppression work, domestically and internationally. We seek candidates who can work collegially in a progressive seminary environment of adult learners, sensitive to the multicultural, ecumenical, and interfaith perspectives essential in the formation of contemporary religious leaders. As a small faculty diverse in race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual identity, national origin, denominations, and faiths, we are looking for two junior colleagues to join us in addressing changing churches and societies in the 21st century.

Candidates should hold a completed Ph.D. degree or its equivalent at the time of appointment. They should be able to teach a broad range of students at the M.Div., M.A.T.S., and D.Min. levels, including those preparing for ordination in the Episcopal Church, as well as ministry in other Christian denominations. Experience in the use of educational technologies in teaching, and/or commitment to acquiring such skills is required.

Letters of application should include a curriculum vitae and the names of three references. Also required is a 500 word essay critically reflecting on the candidate's pedagogical practice in teaching from his/her anti-racist, multicultural commitments in his/her areas of expertise. These should be sent to the Academic Dean, Dr. Angela Bauer-Levesque, Episcopal Divinity School, 99 Brattle St., Cambridge, MA 02138. Inquiries or nominations to abauer-levesque@eds.edu. For further information about the school, visit our website at www.eds.edu.

Deadline for completed applications to be considered for interviews at AAR is October 15th; for interviews at SBL it is November 1st.

THE AVERY RESEARCH CENTER FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

The Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, a historic site at the College of Charleston, is seeking a director. Through its research facilities, museum exhibits, archival collections and numerous outreach programs, Avery tells the rich story of the lives and contributions of Africans and African Americans in South Carolina with special emphasis on the Low Country. The director is responsible for: implementing plans for acquiring and developing archival collections and ongoing exhibits, planning and program assessment, preparing and monitoring an annual budget,

supervision and evaluation of staff, fund raising, grant writing, and coordination with a community advisory board.

The Avery Research Center is the prime repository for archival and material culture documenting the African American experience in Charleston and South Carolina and includes 900 lin. ft of archives with more than 150 distinct collections and a small specialized collection of monographs. The Director leads a staff of 6, manages a budget of almost half a million dollars, and reports to the dean of libraries at the College of Charleston.

The College of Charleston is a nationally recognized, public liberal arts and sciences university located in the city's historic downtown district. With nearly 10,000 undergraduates and more than 1,700 graduate students it offers a variety of majors, minors and programs that directly relate to the Avery mission. Some examples are: African Studies and African American Studies, Latin American / Caribbean Studies, Arts Management and the Carolina Lowcountry and Atlantic World Program.

Minimum Qualifications: Master's degree in an appropriate discipline required, doctorate preferred; this position brings the possibility of a faculty appointment. The successful candidate must also demonstrate significant archival or museum experience.

Salary and Benefits: Highly competitive salary. Benefits include Retirement (401a) Plans, Deferred Compensation Plans (401k, 457, and Roth 401k), Health Insurance, Dental Insurance, Life Insurance, Dependent Life Insurance, Long Term Disability Insurance, and Long Term Care Insurance. The College also offers 10 hours of vacation leave and 10 hours of sick leave per month as well as 13 paid holidays per year. Information on all of the benefits offered by the College of Charleston can be found at http://www.cofc.edu/hr/Benefits/index.htm. Twelve month appointment.

Procedure For Candidacy: For fullest consideration, a professional dossier including a cover letter, curriculum vita, transcripts and three letters of recommendation should be submitted by October 15, 2009 to:

Claire Fund, Avery Director Search Coordinator
College of Charleston
Addlestone Library
66 George Street
Charleston, SC 29424

The College is committed to providing leadership in the attainment of equal opportunity for all persons, regardless of race, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability or other legally protected classifications. The College is AA/EEO. Minorities and women are encouraged to apply.

TUFTS UNIVERSITY
Tufts University, Department of Religion, invites applications from distinguished scholars for a senior faculty position at the rank of associate or full professor. The field is open. The successful candidate will be expected to playa leadership role in the department, including service as department chair. The person hired will join a group of colleagues committed to both scholarship and teaching. Tufts University emphasizes interdisciplinarity, and there are ample opportunities for cross-department collaborations

in the School of Arts and Sciences. The anticipated start date of the appointment is September 1,2010.

Qualifications: We are looking for an accomplished scholar with an outstanding research and publishing record. While the field is open, applicants should have a broad understanding of the academic study of religion across fields of specialization.

Candidates must have a demonstrated commitment to excellent teaching and advising.

Preference will be given to applicants who have a track record of achievement in departmental leadership, as well as the ability to reach across departmental boundaries to forge interdisciplinary bonds.

To apply: Please send a letter of application and a current CV to:

Kevin Dunn
Chair, Department of Religion
302 Eaton Hall, 5 The Green,
Tufts University
Medford, MA 02155.

Short-listed candidates will be contacted for scholarly materials and the names of three references. Review of applications will be ongoing and will continue until the position is filled. We anticipate conducting on-campus interviews in the Spring semester of 2010.

Tufts University is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity employer. We are committed to increasing the diversity of our faculty. Members of underrepresented groups are strongly encouraged to apply.

TEL: 617.627.6528 / FAX: 617.627.6615

CALL FOR PAPERS

In honor of the 40th anniversary of the Society for the Study of Black Religion, the program planning committee invites paper proposals for a session of the March 18-21, 2010 annual meeting of the SSBR.

The theme for the meeting is: “Sankofa: Looking Back Over 40 Years, Looking Forward to the Next 40 Years.”

Priority will be given to paper proposals that focus on mega-churches, the future of Black religious studies, and the impact of Black religious studies on the academy.

Proposals should be no longer than 250 words and should include: Title of the paper and

an abstract.

Proposals must be received by December 1, 2009. Please send your proposal, in electronic form, to:

Lee Butler	Anthony Pinn
(LHButlerJr@cs.com)	(pinn@rice.edu)