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**THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN RECONSTRUCTION TEXAS:
READJUSTMENTS IN RELIGION AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE
NEGRO CHURCH**

by James Smallwood

Reconstruction inspired the development of significant socioeconomic and political trends within the black community in the South as Negroes emerged from slavery to freedom. Emancipation itself sped the development of pre-existing trends, one of the most pronounced of which was a drive to sever connections with white churches. Such separation took place in all southern states during Reconstruction, but if the process is examined in only an individual state, Texas for example, the ramifications of new religious freedom for the black community may be gauged.

During the antebellum period in Texas, most slaves had acquired strong religious convictions and had demonstrated a desire to control their own services. Some slaveholders, motivated by humanitarianism or by the baser desire to mold obedient, docile servants, allowed chattels to attend segregated services or paid white circuit riders to deliver periodic sermons to slave congregations. Other owners permitted black preachers to administer to rural gatherings and occasionally allowed Negro congregations to join white religious associations, if accepted. Fearing that it would encourage restlessness, most owners refused to allow slaves to observe religious rites unless Anglos supervised all gatherings. Still others allowed bondsmen no exposure to religion.¹

Slaveholders did not entirely succeed in their attempts to supervise or suppress black religion. Negroes refused to give up their services, one of the only means of self-expression available to them. Often on weekend nights, even if their masters allowed them to attend white churches or to hold supervised gatherings, bondsmen slipped away from their quarters to the nearest woods and held meetings.² During slave times, then, Negroes tried to assert control over their religious practices; emancipation allowed the fruition of that goal.

Rapidly after emancipation black Texans withdrew from native white churches to escape Anglo domination and prejudice. Together with ex-slaves who had never been allowed to hold religious meetings, they joined the "northern wing" of established Anglo congregations or, more commonly, organized their own churches which became the first institution blacks themselves actually owned and controlled. Although they usually left white churches voluntarily—without overt pressure—prejudice and segregations within the churches, constant reminders of the supposed inferiority of Negroes, influenced the freedmen's decision to withdraw. Yet Negroes would have formed their own churches in any case because separation represented as much an assertion of freedom as the practice of leaving the old plantation.

A majority of freedmen became either Baptists or Methodists because they enjoyed the evangelical style of those denominations. By 1868 the African Methodist Episcopal Church claimed 3,000 members in Texas. Six years later 7,000 members attended that denomination's fifty-four churches in the state. The black Texas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, organized in 1871, had 7,934 members and fifty ministers by that time. The autonomy granted to local congregations influenced blacks to join the Baptist Church. By 1869,

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with the great majority of freedmen attending separate services, black membership in the Baptist Church had outstripped that in the Methodist, a fact white Methodists took into consideration when by the next year they allowed the formation of new Negro congregations under the auspices of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church.³

Of inestimable value, the church became the central institution of the Negro community, serving the religious, social, education, and even economic needs of the new freedmen. Many aid societies for the relief of destitutes, widows, and orphans developed out of the church. Additionally, the church often acted as an employment center, as a place where members could gain information about the local job market. The church also set moral guidelines for the community, impressing on blacks the importance of sobriety, hard work, and marital fidelity. It acted as a psychological safety valve, wherein freedmen could release pent-up frustrations. It allowed Negroes to escape temporarily the prejudice and discrimination of the white world. In church freedmen could discard the Sambo image, regain their pride and self-respect, and "be Mr. Somebody" instead of just another "nigger." For preachers and laymen the church also provided opportunity to develop leadership potential. It would not be an overstatement to say that the church was the grassroots institution from which black leadership emerged. Moreover, in the Negro church, black individuals gained a voice in the decision-making process, a voice they never had in the white church.⁴

Apparently, the black community did not lack ministers during Reconstruction. Although the established churches ordained only a few freedmen, lay preachers abounded. Regarding it as only logical that the most stable, most respected, and perhaps the most dynamic member of the community should lead their religious services, black congregations ordained their own preachers when need arose. Most often, freedmen turned to those, like Caesar Berry and Matt Gaines, who had been slave preachers. Anderson Edwards of Rusk County started preaching to fellow slaves even before he had learned to read or write and, although he lacked formal training, continued to administer to freedmen after the war. Isaac Wright, Alexander Gillam, George Brooks, and Meshack Roberts—Methodist pastors in Austin, Columbus, Millican, and Marshall—became early black religious leaders. Usually urban pastors tended to be better educated than those in rural areas. To satisfy community needs for educated leaders, northern churches and their benevolent agencies such as the American Missionary Association also supplied ministers, both blacks and whites, and army posts where Negro soldiers served sometimes furnished lay preachers.⁵

Various critics charged black ministers with ignorance, immorality, or both. At an early meeting of Houston's African Methodist Episcopal Church, the pastor delivered a sermon on morality only to be interrupted by a member of the congregation who told him to practice what he preached. Fisticuffs resulted. Two days later, during a sermon on a similar topic, another fight occurred.⁶ Occasionally, black ministers faced more serious complaints. In 1875 a black deacon of the Corpus Christi Congregational Church, George Guilmenot, accused his wife and Pastor George Swann of adultery. Vociferously denying the charge, Swann faced a church jury that could have removed him as preacher and expelled him from the church. The court found Swann innocent, however, in a ruling which suggested that after an examination of "the facts" black ministers probably had a greater sense of responsibility than their critics maintained.⁷ Further, the many complaints about Negro pastors by whites must be evaluated skeptically since such charges were usually coupled with condemnations of blacks because they would no longer accept white leadership and domination.⁸

Although not universally popular with their congregations or with the Anglo community, preachers often became the most influential leaders in the Negro community, a fact recognized by the white press as early as 1865, when various editors asked ministers to dispell rumors of land redistribution. Using their pulpits as public forums, pastors not only molded the religious sentiments and morals of their congregations, they also encouraged educational programs, often doubled as teachers, acted as social directors, and gave political instruction to the community.⁹

In their religious observance most blacks preferred active, emotional rather than passive roles. They enjoyed the evangelical style as is evidenced by the popularity of the Baptist and Methodist churches. Like most whites, freedmen tended to attach a very literal meaning to the concepts of heaven and hell. Additionally, some blacks continued to fuse Christianity with African religious concepts, believing in ghosts, incantations, other superstitions, and mysterious causation of events. Frequently, white observers criticized the unrestrained singing, the dancing, the chanting and the "vociferous" behavior in Negro churches. What critics labeled as ignorant, "extreme" religious practices could not, however, be mistaken for lack of conviction. One witness, General E.M. Gregory, attested to the strong religious sentiments of the freedmen after conducting a 700-mile tour through East Texas in 1865. The Negro spirituals, most dating back to slave times, represented even stronger evidence of black faith. Indeed, some church members became so pious that they joined temperance and benevolent societies and attended services as many as four times a week, albeit for social and political as well as for religious reasons.¹⁰

Camp meetings won great popularity among freedmen. Held during the warm spring or summer, the meetings usually lasted from one to three weeks. At these gatherings, held in the countryside, people slept in tents or other makeshift shelters, cooked on an open fire, periodically heard sermons, and passed free time socializing or engaging in sports. Baseball games probably represented the most popular recreation and spectator sport. Even more than regular church meetings, revivals offered ministers the opportunity to win and baptize converts and to moralize on the evils of drinking, gambling, and sexual immorality.¹¹

Church records reflected the degree of piety or sin exhibited by the new freedmen and demonstrated that in matters of religion and morality the behavior of blacks compared favorably with that of whites. After the Civil War, the Union Baptist Church in Nacogdoches allowed Negro members free choice on the question of separation. Most left, but some remained. Church leaders found those who stayed to be as religious, as moral, as "good," and sometimes as "bad," as Anglo members. The congregation expelled two unrepentant black sinners, a woman for adultery and a man for drinking, but it disciplined whites, too.¹²

Organizing a stable, independent religious community proved to be difficult. The ex-slaves lacked funds, could secure physical facilities in only a limited number of areas, and had difficulty acquiring appropriate religious materials. Nevertheless, an overwhelming majority of blacks had created or joined separate congregations and in many instances separate denominations by the early 1870s. Utilizing the aid of any agency that offered help—the American Missionary Association, other representatives of northern churches, the Freedmen's Bureau, benevolent native whites—but basically relying on their own strength, freedmen withdrew from southern churches. In Galveston, Negro minister I.S. Campbell, an agent of the Ohio Consolidated Baptist Convention, founded the Freedman's Baptist Church in 1865. Quickly after emancipation black Methodists in Galveston and Houston secured buildings for temporary use

and began holding services as well as regular school classes. By February 1866 the Houston Methodists had collected \$600 to make a down-payment on a \$1,200 lot for a permanent church.¹³ Before the end of the year two other black congregations in Houston erected buildings for worship. The city's Negro community in 1870 included seven congregations with a total membership of 650 people. Five of the churches owned their own buildings and supported their own pastors.¹⁴ In Austin during 1866 the First Methodist Church lost its Negro members, "with few if any exceptions," when they withdrew to join the newly established Austin Methodist Episcopal Church (North). In the city, even before the end of the war, blacks established the First Baptist Church (Colored). By the mid-1870s the Ebenezer Baptist, Sweet Home Baptist, and African Methodist churches were also founded.¹⁵

Negroes in smaller Texas towns and in the rural countryside also withdrew from Anglo churches. Led by two freedmen who had been ordained during the slave period, Negro Baptists in Waco separated from white services in June 1866, founded the New Hope Baptist Church, and used an abandoned foundry as their first home. By that time freedmen in Millican also had withdrawn and had collected \$100 to help finance the reconstruction of a church-schoolhouse.¹⁶ In 1867 Tyler blacks who had belonged to the white Baptist Church began their own services and secured the leadership of two ordained ministers and two licensed preachers. Their pastors also administered to "out-stations" around the countryside. Blacks around Meridian secured the services of Peter Robinson, who had been a preacher during slave times and had organized the Colored Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the first Negro church in Bosque County. Typically, freedmen in other areas turned to those who had conducted secret meetings during the slave days and beseeched them to secure religious materials and organize services.¹⁷ Largely through their own efforts, Limestone County blacks by 1870 had established at least nine African Methodist and at least six Primitive Baptist Churches.¹⁸

Because of an almost universal lack of funds in the post war drive to found independent churches, freedmen of one denomination frequently cooperated with those of another. It was not unusual for the black community to collect a common fund and to erect a structure or to rent one building to be used by the entire community. Millican blacks solicited one such common fund. The first combination church-school-meeting houses built by freedmen in Columbia and Brazoria represented multi-denominational community projects.¹⁹ In 1867 black Methodists and Baptists in Waco united to build a small frame church which they used on alternate Sundays. Six years later the two sects parted amicably, after tearing down the original structure, dividing the building materials, and constructing separate churches. In most areas of Travis County Methodists and Baptists used a common building, one sect for morning services and the other, afternoons. Freedmen in the Brenham suburb of Watrousville, a segregated shanty town, built a community center that met the religious needs of all denominations and also served as the headquarters of the Loyal League.²⁰ Although blacks sometimes had doctrinal differences and also occasionally struggled for control of the secular schools which were often held in churches, they tried to secure one building and use it on some type of rotation basis until individual sects could erect separate edifices. Further, when black congregations could not acquire any type of meeting house, members volunteered their homes for services. The Sweet Home Baptist congregation of Austin originally held services in the home of Mary Smith until they secured a permanent church in 1882. Founded in the mid-1870s, the Austin A.M.E. Church rotated its meetings, holding services in the homes of various members.²¹

In addition to cooperative self-help programs, the Negro community received aid in its religious endeavors from the Freedmen's Bureau and the American Missionary Association. Believing in a close relationship between secular and religious education, bureau teachers, most of whom belonged to the association, conducted Sunday schools and church services in addition to regular schools. As early as September 1865, C.S. Tambling proudly reported that he had the largest Sabbath school in Galveston, with fifty pupils already reading the *Bible*. By 1869, 161 missionaries and native blacks operated seventy-four Sabbath schools in Texas for the bureau and administered to a total of 4,328 people. Before the bureau withdrew from the state in 1870, 211 instructors conducted eighty-two Sunday services for 4,338 seekers.²²

In addition to supplying the bureau with teachers who also acted as religious leaders, the American Missionary Association and other benevolent societies furnished much needed reading materials to black congregations. Northern missionaries and native black leaders constantly requested *Bibles*, hymn collections, and other books. Although they never supplied the entire demand, the association, the American Bible Society, and the Freedmen's Aid Society periodically filled book orders and tried to insure that freedmen at least had *Bibles* if not other materials. Yet religious "tools" remained hopelessly inadequate. As late as 1869 blacks continued to beg bureau agents for religious materials. Sometimes freedmen asked for just one *Bible* not for a family but for an entire congregation.²³ Despite shortages of materials, missionaries who remained at their posts after the bureau left the state continued to place equal stress on secular and religious instruction. Reports from Galveston, Houston, and Corpus Christi divulged that underpaid, overworked teachers refused to cancel Sunday services and continued to work a seven-day week.²⁴

Cooperating with the American Missionary Association and the black community, the bureau not only encouraged interest in religion with Sabbath day programs, it also provided funds, on a limited basis, for the building of community houses which served both as school buildings and churches. Officials could allocate no funds for "construction," but they could make grants for the "repair" of existing structures, "however crude." To qualify for grants, the black community had to secure title to a lot, erect some type of structure, and deed the property to a group of Negro trustees. The bureau then granted from \$100 to \$500, ostensibly for repair but in reality for construction. The average grant of \$200, however, only partially met costs. Nevertheless, by 1870 black trustees held title to forty-three meeting houses which the bureau had helped them finance. In its building-use policy the bureau allowed no discrimination among different sects. Missionary workers or native blacks held meetings in common for all sects or in regular rotation by common agreement.²⁵ Black churches appeared remarkably similar, physically. Usually of frame construction with twin towers in front and with steps of logwood, most averaged thirty by sixty feet in floor space and had only a small seating capacity. Crude furnishings included slabwood benches and a pulpit. The earliest structures usually had dirt floors. Construction costs ranged from only a few hundred dollars to \$3,000.²⁶

Sometimes native Anglos, acting out of humanitarian concern, aided blacks in their attempts to organize separate churches. In 1866 a group of white Austinites joined freedmen in contributing donations for a church. A year later planters at Chances' Prairie gave the Negro community a church formerly used by whites. Some Anglos in Columbia subscribed funds for a freedman's school which produced a surplus that was applied to construction of a church. At Onion Creek, in Travis County, a landowner donated a lot and a building for a black

church. Even when whites did not aid freedmen with gifts of land or money, they sometimes helped the ex-slaves by organizing Sunday services for them.²⁷

Once established, the black church demonstrated interest in all phases of Negro progress. Particularly, it gave immeasurable aid to educational programs for freedmen. Both before and after the Freedmen's Bureau left the state, churches offered their facilities for classrooms. One of the first bureau schools in Galveston, opened by September 1865, used the black Methodist Church. Two additional Negro schools in the city, opened by 1867, also used church facilities. In Houston African Methodists allowed schools to use their facilities and supplied at least one teacher.²⁸ In 1869 the freedmen of Corpus Christi still used one of their churches for regular classes because the Negro community could not raise funds to build a separate schoolhouse. At Savert House, near Hallettsville, a black preacher organized a class of thirty-five children and promised regular attendance if the bureau would send a teacher.²⁹

Of course, in some areas the church could do little to advance education. The African Methodists of Jefferson allotted space for classrooms, but in 1869 a bureau official reported that attendance had dropped because of the poor condition of the church. Nevertheless, churches continued to be used so frequently for classrooms that the first state superintendent for education in Texas, Jacob DeGress, extended them aid after the legislature created a public school system in 1871.³⁰

Despite their poverty, the churches did not ignore higher education. In 1872 circuit riders for the African Methodists established Paul Quinn College in Austin, later moving it to Waco. The next year the Methodist Episcopal Church founded Wiley College in Marshall. In 1876 the Congregational Church, acting through the American Missionary Association, founded Tillotson College in Austin.³¹

While offering facilities to schools and establishing institutions of higher learning, church leaders aided education in yet another way. Preachers often served as school teachers. D.C. Lacy, an African Methodist minister, conducted one of the three freedmen's schools in Limestone County while a black Baptist pastor in Austin conducted one of the Travis County schools. In addition to his work as a barber and as a supervisor of an employment bureau for Negroes, Nace Duval of San Antonio served as an instructor and a preacher for local freedmen.³²

Black churches also became centers for the social activities of the freedmen's community. Sunday services and church-sponsored events represented some of the few recreational outlets available to blacks. Ministers, in addition to their other duties, became social directors. The Negro churches in Houston sponsored frequent picnics and dances as well as fairs for the dual purposes of entertainment and fund raising. Festivities abounded, especially in May and June, and culminated in elaborate Juneteenth celebrations—on June 19, emancipation for black Texans—which included picnics, baseball tournaments, and a gala ball that night. In 1872 religious leaders in Houston also led a fund raising campaign that resulted in the purchase of "Emancipation Park," a ten-acre plot that provided a permanent outdoor social center for the community and a playground for children.³³

Although black churches usually united to affect progress, sometimes doctrinal differences and local jealousies led to a breakdown in cooperation. The Negro minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church (North) in Columbia secured funds for construction of a school and church and then appealed to the local bureau agent for enough aid to finish the project. But the agent expressed reservations because he feared that the preacher would discriminate against

members of other congregations in his policy decisions. If any bureau funds were to be used, the agent insisted that all the sects in the community exercise equal policy-making power. A short time later, he could only report that arguments among the different black denominations made it impossible to establish a bureau school in Columbia for the fall term in 1867.³⁴ Another bureau official held that cooperation often became competition as different sects tried to control churches which had been established for the use of all the Negro congregations in the community and tried to control schools as well, if they were held in the churches.³⁵

Not all whites approved of black separation. Many religious associations, guided by paternalistic leaders, urged Negroes to remain in white churches. Some feared that freedmen might succumb to "Romanist" influence. Others, convinced that the "Ethiopian eunuch" lacked the mental ability to conduct his own affairs, urged their churches to limit the separationist tendency by refusing to ordain black ministers.³⁶

Still other Anglos stressed the political ramifications of separationism. They argued that Negroes would fall under the influence of northern radicals who did not understand the "realities of Southern facts."³⁷ Some bemoaned the fact that in newly organized black congregations, like the African Methodist Church in Galveston, either northern wife or Negro preachers taught that Yankee soldiers were their great benefactors.³⁸ Later, during congressional Reconstruction, much to the disgust of many native Anglos, ministers of independent Negro congregations placed devotion to the Republican Party next to devotion to God. Most black churches—particularly the Methodist Episcopal (North) and A.M.E.—served as Loyal League meeting halls. One bureau representative charged that Negro pastors frequently preached politics instead of religion. They made political announcements from the pulpit, a practice also engaged in by their conservative white counterparts. Black pastors also welcomed speeches made by Loyal League organizers and sometimes led prayers for radical Republican political victories. As late as 1874 one white missionary, a Congregationalist who held a certain bias against Methodists and Baptists, complained that "ignorant" black ministers inflamed the emotions of the flocks and "excited" them against the Anglo community.³⁹

Guided either by a humanitarian drive to help uplift what they believed to be an "inferior" people or by the desire to continue to use religion to control blacks, many whites "allowed" or actually encouraged freedmen to remain in Anglo churches. The Longview Christian Church, which had slave members before the war, continued to administer to the black community in segregated services and even continued to allow them to bury their dead in segregated areas of the church grave-yard. Similarly, the Liberty-Sylvania Church of Christ in Ellis County continued to accept Negro members on a segregated basis. The minister of the white Presbyterian Church in Houston organized for freedmen special services which commenced on Sunday after Anglos had concluded their worship. At Jamestown, in Smith County, a Baptist minister encouraged blacks to remain in his church, but to please his white congregation he isolated freedmen by giving them separate services. Insulted, most Negroes quickly withdrew and formed their own church.⁴⁰

Even after separation some white churches extended limited aid to blacks. Through 1867 the Church of Christ in Circleville allowed a Negro congregation to use its facilities. The African Methodists in Houston used in Methodist Episcopal Church (South), until they could purchase a separate meeting house. From 1867 to 1869 Anglo minister R. A. Eddleman administered to freedmen in Weatherford who had established their own Colored Methodist Episcopal

Church. Then he influenced the Methodist conference to ordain a deacon of the black congregation who could take over the church.⁴¹ Like Eddleman, some ministers of the Presbyterian Church also continued to help blacks. One preacher at Green Hill held evangelistic meetings through the 1870s, serving Anglos and Negroes alike. The East Texas Presbytery commended S.F. Tenney's work with freedmen around Crockett and urged others to follow his example. Pursuing this advice, Robert McCoy began services for blacks in Palestine and Crockett. Other Presbyterians contributed to a fund that sent freedmen Alexander Turner of Paris to Tuscaloosa Seminary in Alabama. As late as 1876 a white Methodist still visited a black church in Corpus Christi twice a month to deliver sermons.⁴²

The majority of Anglos, however, gave no aid to Negro churches nor did they encourage blacks to remain in white congregations. Rather, they demanded the withdrawal of freedmen because they feared that blacks would dominate integrated churches. Certainly, most Anglos knew that they could no longer control blacks as they had before emancipation. Worse, whites believed that continued fellowship might encourage unservile behavior on the part of blacks and lead to dreaded social equality.⁴³ In the Anglo mind, experiences similar to that of the First Methodists in Austin justified this fear. In 1865 not only did freedmen withdraw from the congregation there, but they continued to hold school in the basement. When white trustees demanded the removal of the school, "uppity" freedmen demanded a \$600 payment for labor which they had expended in helping erect the church. After a bureau agent intervened, trustees ultimately made a \$200 compromise settlement to be rid of the freedmen.⁴⁴ Rather than face continuing "problems" with blacks which might include the question of integrated services, rights to use church space, or other controversial issues, many Anglos urged severance of all ties with former slave members.

Most white ministers in Texas also encouraged separation, by implication if not by expression. Episcopalian Bishop Alexander Gregg, an ex-slaveholder, piously announced that he favored a unified service, but he acknowledged that "realities" such as inadequate facilities necessitated separation.⁴⁵ No doubt, the "realities" also included basic white prejudice against freedmen. More extreme than Gregg, other Anglo ministers and church leaders believed that "separation ought to take place in every department of life."⁴⁶ Through the Reconstruction era and beyond, some white "Christians" even argued that integrated services would "antagonize God's ordained order of human society."⁴⁷ In 1869 James McCleery, superintendent of education for northwestern Louisiana, toured Northeast Texas, an area then included in his jurisdiction, and asked white preachers to help him establish schools and religious services for blacks. Their replies reflected the existing range of attitudes. A few agreed to help McCleery; most ignored him; and some promised to tar and feather him if they ever saw him again.⁴⁸

Some white congregations became so determined to force blacks out of their churches that they took action counter to what previously had been church policy. Although the fathers of the Liberty-Sylvania congregation allowed freedmen into their church, some Anglo laymen objected. Faced with this hostility, most Negroes withdrew by late 1865, but one ex-slave who had joined the congregation in 1858 continued to attend services. Finally, he too withdrew after a group of terrorists confronted him, saying that he must either stay away or die. In 1868 freedmen around Fort Brown began worshipping with whites at the First Congregational Church, but Anglo prejudice forced a separation by 1870. Similarly, throughout the state most white congregations practiced such

discrimination that those blacks who did not voluntarily withdraw were soon forced out.⁴⁹

Ironically, a part of the same element that drove blacks out of white churches sometimes attacked Negro gatherings for no apparent reason other than to force black subordination. In 1866 a mob of whites in Anderson County disbursed a Negro congregation and warned their minister not to preach again. In 1869 after a black service at Hopewell Methodist Church in Smith County, a group of "chivalry" rode up and indiscriminately shot into the congregation, apparently just for "fun." One freedman suffered a mortal wound, and others were robbed. Black churches in widely scattered areas reported similar terrorist attacks.⁵⁰

Often, preachers, blacks and whites alike, faced verbal if not violent attacks because they held services for Negroes. In the Congregationalist Church at Corpus Christi, where as late as 1871 Northern missionary Aaron Rowe made "no distinction . . . because of color," some whites complained that "if Parson Rowe would keep his Neggars out of his Church he would have a larger congregation."⁵¹ In many areas white prejudice forced pastors like Rowe to stop ministering to blacks, even in separate services. In Paris Anglos used economic pressure and social ostracism to force two white Baptist preachers and a white Congregationalist pastor to stop attending freedmen. Ultimately they forced the Congregationalist, a Northerner, to stop preaching altogether.⁵²

Sometimes, whites threatened physical violence against ministers who continued to conduct services for blacks. Responding to the request of blacks in Ellis County, Anglo Methodist leader B.D. Austin administered to freedmen as well as to whites. On his third trip to meet with the Negroes, a group of local whites accosted him and threatened hanging if he continued to aid the blacks. Fearing for his life, he immediately severed his connections with the Negro congregation. Continued Anglo hostility eventually forced Austin to leave the county. In 1867 at Palestine whites stoned a Negro church, forced its congregation and its Anglo minister into the street, and warned the preacher that if he wanted to speak to freedmen again he could give his next sermon in hell.⁵³

Frequently, attacks against black congregations, their preachers, and other supporters of the churches had obvious political explanations. As part of the general violence that developed in Reconstruction Texas, Anglos tried to intimidate and suppress the religious community and its leadership. In 1869 near Austin, a group of whites murdered George Porter because as a minister and teacher he gave leadership to fellow Negroes, counseled them on their rights, and sometimes complained to authorities about the ill-treatment meted out to under-aged black apprentices. Earlier a mob of whites in Boston threatened to shoot bureau agent William Kirkman's head off if he continued to support the freedmen's Sabbath school.⁵⁴ At Columbia a group of Anglos invaded a Negro church, called the black minister a "d. ____ son of a b. ____ h," and told him to stop preaching. When one of the party drew a gun, a layman tried to protect the pastor, but an Anglo told the layman to "go to h____l" and shot him dead. The white terrorists believed that they were attacking a political ally of the noted black politician G.T. Ruby.⁵⁵ In an 1871 incident the editor of the *Brenham Banner* warned "Old Charley" Childs, another black pastor who had become involved in politics, that he should take care of his own affairs and that he "had no right to dabble in politics."⁵⁶ In yet another instance whites in Grayson County murdered a black preacher in 1876 because they wanted to eliminate the leaders of the county's Negro community and thus control it politically and economically.⁵⁷

In retrospect, the withdrawal of blacks from white churches represented one of the first and most important forms of racial separation. On one hand, the "gap" between the races became even wider, as common meetings which could have inspired understanding, cooperation, and brotherhood ceased to exist. On the other hand, from separation Negroes gained control over a central community institution, control they could not even share in the Anglo church. In many instances freedmen withdrew from white churches voluntarily; but often racism and, in fewer cases, violence influenced their choice.

When they made the decision to withdraw, the various black religious denominations demonstrated remarkable resilience. Despite lack of funds, materials, and building space, Negro congregations—a majority being Baptist and Methodist—rapidly formed, with separation being virtually complete by 1870. With their own collections and with the help of the Freedmen's Bureau, the American Missionary Association, other benevolent societies, and a few native whites, freedmen secured whatever religious materials they could, recruited their own pastors, and quickly built their own churches, with different denominations sometimes sharing facilities when it became necessary. Although separation represented an unfortunate break in the channels of communications between the races, withdrawal undoubtedly benefited the black community because "just another nigger" could be a "Mr. Somebody" for brief periods each week.

NOTES

¹For a brief overview of slave patterns in Texas see James Smallwood, "Black Texans During Reconstruction, 1865-1874" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Texas Tech University, 1974), 40-85.

²*Ibid.*

³John Lee Eighmy, "The Baptist and Slavery: An Examination of the Origins and Benefits of Segregation," *Southwestern Social Sciences Quarterly*, XLIX (December, 1968), 666-673; DuBose Murphy, *A Short History of the Protestant Episcopal Church of Texas* (Dallas, 1935), 74; H.T. Kealing, *History of African Methodism in Texas* (Waco, 1885), *passim*; also see Lawrence L. Brown, *The Episcopal Church in Texas, 1838-1874* (Austin, 1963), and Macum Phelam, *A History of Early Methodism in Texas, 1817-1866* (Dallas, 1924).

⁴Eighmy, "The Baptist and Slavery," 673; Alexander Doubleday to James Kirkman, Monthly Report, April 1, 1867, Letters Sent, vol. 93, Sub-Assistant Commissioner, Galveston, Texas, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives, Washington, D.C., hereafter abbreviated BRFAL, RG 105, NA; Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph W. Nicholson, *The Negro's Church* (New York, 1933), 2-3, 279-281.

⁵Botkin (ed.), *Lay My Burden Down*, 26, 78; Prentis W. Chunn, Jr., "Education and Politics, A Study of the Negro in Reconstruction Texas" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Southwest Texas State Teachers College, 1957), 172-175; John J. Linn, *Reminiscences of Fifty Years in Texas* (New York, 1883), 358; Loud, "Methodism and the Negroes," 94; J.H. Beadle, *Western Wilds and the Man who Redeem Them* (Detroit, 1877), 417.

⁶William Evans to Aaron Rowe, October 15, 1873, American Missionary Association Archives, Armistad Research Center, Dillard University, New Orleans, Louisiana, hereafter abbreviated AMA Archives; *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, October 2, 4, 1865.

⁷George Guilmenot to Michael Strieby, December 30, 1875, George W. Swann to Strieby, January 24, 1876, Mitchell Thompson to Strieby, March 3, 1876, AMA Archives.

⁸J.W. Dawson, "Missions and Missionaries," 342-343.

⁹*Harrison Flag* (Marshall), November 22, 1865; John Mason Brewer, *Negro Legislators of Texas and Their Descendants* (1935; reprint, Austin, 1970), 116.

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