
BLACK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND THE INFLUENCE OF ELLEN G. WHITE

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Introduction

The story of the African-American sojourn in the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church is dramatic, eventful, and full of unexpected turns. The scenes shift from danger and disappointment to confrontation and conflict to breakthrough and eventual progress. Throughout the account, however, there are two constants—the *providential leading* of God and the reality of *prophetic guidance*, both of which are articulated in the ministry of Ellen White. As surely as God had led the Israelites out of Egypt, she noted, so had He led the Black race out of slavery. Ellen White added that “He designed to work still further for them” and lead them into a knowledge of His truth.¹

Many SDAs remain unaware of this element of SDA history and its impact on the denomination at large, and what is known is sometimes sketchy and incomplete. But to understand the contemporary Black work, one must view it in a historical context. The beginning 50 years of the Black work are especially important because they provide the foundation for all succeeding progress. This account will attempt to fill in the gaps and expand our understanding of the larger picture.

The story begins more than 130 years ago, at the end of slavery, when a major challenge faced the fledgling SDA movement—the solemn task of taking the gospel to 5 million newly freed Blacks, who, along with their forebears, had suffered centuries of brutality and deprivation. The challenge was clear, the need overwhelming. Yet powers of resistance conspired to halt any effort to improve life for these people, so long deprived of the most basic rights.

In spite of obstacles, the work among Blacks moved forward through periods of encouragement, discouragement, momentum, inertia, breakthrough, and progress. It is this history and the effect on it of the ministry of Ellen White that this chapter will address. We shall do so by first examining her general philosophy and attitude toward slavery and the social conditions of society during her earlier ministry, and then by referencing two specific chronological periods of history in the early development of Black Adventism.

The first period, the beginning years, involves the years before 1891. This period, covering approximately three decades, represents the gloomy years of the Black work.

The church struggled with the dilemma of the race question, wrestling with philosophical and logistical questions dealing with the *who*, *what*, and *why* of the Black work. Caught up in organizational paroxysms brought on by denominational uncertainty and the quagmire of social unrest, the church made little progress among Blacks during this period. However, throughout these years we see Ellen White prompting the church to address the urgent need to develop a substantive presence among Blacks in the South.

The second period of time, the expansion years, covers 1891-1910. During this 20-year span the Black work grew rapidly, flourishing and spreading throughout the country. These were years of danger, but also years of advancement and success. The counsels of Ellen White and the efforts of Edson White and other supporters of the Black work were finally having an effect. The church had begun to move ahead, with immediate results. This period of activity provided the ideological and organizational basis for subsequent progress.

Race remains a sensitive and controversial issue in society and the church. However, the story of the Black work in the United States offers a poignant reminder of God’s providence and shows how He has blessed this movement in spite of challenges. We can be profitably instructed and guided by our past. In this account some may be drawn to what might have been had the church moved more quickly and aggressively; others might be drawn to the progress without noting the tremendous sacrifices that Whites and Blacks contributed to the work. These views notwithstanding, the most important focus is the constancy of divine providence.

As background, an overview of how Ellen White addressed the second-class status of Blacks in her day is in order.

Ellen White and the Status of Black People

Before the early 1870s SDAs confined their efforts primarily to North America. When the church began to consider a broader perspective for outreach effort, it turned its attention to Europe. In 1874 John N. Andrews went to Switzerland as the first SDA missionary.

At that time, however, the primary social question for the church was whether it would be willing to follow the gospel commission and assist another part of the human

family, the Black race in America, just out of slavery. The message of Christ emphasizes unity, equality, and love for all people—especially the needy and unfortunate close at hand. The SDA Church was to model Christ’s gospel of love and inclusion—in practice. It was in this context that Ellen White repeatedly told church leaders that they were not fulfilling their mission if they neglected their disadvantaged Black brothers and sisters in their own country—they must reach out and diversify.

The Church and Diversity

In 1895 Ellen White highlighted a blatant inconsistency in the church’s missionary thrust relative to equitable evangelism: “We should take into consideration the fact that efforts are being made at great expense to send the gospel to the darkened regions of the world . . . to bring instruction to the ignorant and idolatrous; yet here in the very midst of us are millions of people . . . who have souls to save or to lose, and yet they are set aside and passed by as was the wounded man by the priest and the Levite.”² Again Ellen White, stressing the theme of diversity, emphasized that the church was to evangelize all ethnic groups—and especially the disadvantaged group close at hand. She left the church little room to excuse its lack of evangelistic inclusiveness.

Ellen White, in her support and advocacy of the Black work, personified the words of Christ in Luke 4:18, 19: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

No person had greater impact on the inclusion and status of Black people in the SDA Church than Ellen White. It is impossible to talk about Black SDA history without constantly referring to her contributions. Pioneer Black workers invariably pointed to either Ellen White or her writings as the source of their inspiration and guidance. The Black work would have had little momentum had Ellen White not championed the cause.

Family Contributions

Every member of the White family made contributions to the development of the Black work. James White was the General Conference president who issued a call for volunteers to work in the South. Edson White gave at least a decade of his life to building the Black work along the Mississippi River. William White, as his mother’s assistant, actively endorsed her teachings on equality, fairness, and inclusion during her life and after her death.

Ellen White unequivocally opposed slavery in all forms. Based on the principle outlined in Deuteronomy 23:15, she

advocated that SDAs violate the fugitive slave laws, which demanded the return of a runaway slave. In 1859 she wrote: “The law of our land requiring us to deliver a slave to his master, we are not to obey; and we must abide the consequences of violating this law.”³

Later, in 1861, she received the historic vision at Roosevelt, New York, that revealed the horrible curse and degradation of slavery. She declared that God was bringing judgment against America for “the high crime of slavery,” and that God “will punish the South for the sin of slavery and the North for so long suffering its overreaching and overbearing influence”⁴

Leaders in the Black work used Ellen White’s writings as a guide in the building up of the work. Primary among such resources were *The Southern Work* (published in 1898 and about 1901 aboard the *Morning Star*) and *Testimonies for the Church*, volumes 7 (1902) and 9 (1909). Though these books contained statements that can be problematic when read out of context, they showed that the Black work was a priority with Ellen White. Church periodicals such as the *Gospel Herald*, *Review and Herald*, *Signs of the Times*, and other papers also contained a wealth of material by Ellen White and other church leaders offering counsel on the Black work.

James White, as editor of the *Review and Herald*, spoke out strongly against slavery as unbiblical. He cited evidence that the beast in the book of Revelation 13 was the United States in that it looks like a lamb, but speaks like a dragon. Other leaders who had much to do with the development of the Black SDA work during this historic period were John Byington (later the first General Conference president) and John P. Kellogg (father of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg), both of whom are believed to have operated stations of the Underground Railroad from their farms in New York and Michigan. These early leaders typified the strong moral consciousness and antislavery activism among early SDAs. Uriah Smith, another prominent SDA leader and *Review and Herald* editor, also spoke out against slavery and went so far as to denounce Abraham Lincoln prior to the announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation for not acting immediately to free the slaves.

Ellen White’s extensive counsel reveals at least seven principles upon which she based her advocacy of the Black work.

1. *The biblical principle.* God had commissioned the Adventist Church to take the gospel to *all the world*, including the Black people of the South.

2. *The moral principle.* Adventists were obliged to do what was morally right. To go to foreign countries and ignore the Black race was not morally right.

3. *The humanitarian principle.* All decent people, Ellen White reasoned, who saw the suffering of people just out of

slavery should follow the example of Christ and provide help.

4. *The empathetic principle.* The White race was challenged to empathize with those who were deprived of education and civil freedoms, exposed to abuse, and treated as nonpersons.

5. *The restitution principle.* Ellen White felt that the entire country had benefited from the life, energy, and labor of Black people, and it was time to restore something to them for the decades of loss and injury they had suffered.

6. *The societal principle.* Ellen White reasoned that if one part of society was weak, the whole society would be weakened. If the Black race could be strengthened, then the entire society would be strengthened.

7. *The eschatological principle.* If Adventists ignored the Black race and did nothing to ameliorate the deplorable conditions in which they existed, they would answer for it in the judgment.

The Beginning Years: 1860-1890

The years 1860-1890 were characterized by hesitation, awkwardness, and neglect. With each passing year of delay after the conclusion of the Civil War in 1865, the SDA Church lost ground. SDAs were outmissionaried by Protestant and Catholic organizations. It was a regrettable period. In 1865 the United States faced the proverbial “winter of discontent.” A melancholy air hung over the nation. In many quarters people seemed seized with feelings of malaise and hopelessness. While the union had been preserved and the slaves freed, the cost had been astronomical. More than 600,000 Americans had died in the war—more than in all the country’s subsequent conflicts combined. Large areas of the South were ruined physically and economically.

On the other hand, it was a time for change and adjustment. The status of the newly freed slaves pressed for attention. The Thirteenth Amendment, ratified by the states in late 1865, officially ended slavery in the U.S. However, that was only the first step. The controversial period known as Reconstruction (1865-1877) followed, during which the government sought to protect the rights of freed slaves and help them start new lives.

Unfortunately, Reconstruction provided “too little for not long enough.” The nation’s racial problems soon continued, with segregation, discrimination, lynching, sharecropping, and the draconian Black Codes becoming a way of life in the South.

At the beginning of the 1890s Ellen White began a stream of articles, letters, and messages concerning the Black work, including a letter from Australia addressed to “my brethren in responsible positions in America”: “The colored people might have been helped with much better prospects of success years ago than now. The work is now tenfold harder than it would have been then. . . . After the

war, if the Northern people had made the South a real missionary field, if they had not left the Negroes to ruin through poverty and ignorance, thousands of souls would have been brought to Christ. But it was an unpromising field, and the Catholics have been more active in it than any other class.”⁵

In another letter, addressed “to the board of managers of the Review and Herald Office,” she characterized the lack of involvement shown by the church toward the Black race: “The Lord is grieved at the indifference manifested by His professed followers toward the ignorant and oppressed colored people. *If our people had taken up this work at the close of the Civil War, their faithful labor would have done much to prevent the present condition of suffering and sin.*”⁶

Multicultural Roots

From the beginning of the SDA Church in the New England states, the general trend of evangelism was westward, not southward. As a result, Black people living in the South had little knowledge of SDA teachings. However, there were a few Black SDA believers in Northern churches even from the beginning years of the SDA movement. While there was some integration in SDA churches in the North, Blacks associated with these churches according to the social patterns of the region.

Blacks in the Millerite movement played a significant part in the preaching of the soon coming of Christ. William Still, Charles Bowles, and John Lewis, recognized Black ministers, were coworkers with William Miller, Joshua V. Himes, and other Millerite leaders. William Ellis Foy (1818-1893) was a Black minister who received four visions prior to those received by Hazen Foss and Ellen White. Frederick Douglass was acquainted with the Second Coming and other Advent teachings. The message of Christ’s soon Advent and the abolitionist views of prominent Millerite leaders helped to make the Advent movement appealing to Black people. Records indicate that several of the meeting places used by abolitionists were also used by Millerites to preach the Advent of Christ.

The Appeal of SDA Teachings

In 1860 the SDA Church adopted its name, and in 1863 the church officially organized, thus positioning itself to fulfill the mission of sharing the gospel and the liberating teachings of Christ with Black people. Unfortunately, the church did not begin any initiative to address the needs of the Black race from an evangelistic or humanitarian standpoint for more than a quarter of a century. The church essentially avoided the issue in spite of Ellen White’s appeals for action.

How ironic that when the Black race was in need of a complete system of truth that could improve the total person—mentally, spiritually, and physically—the SDA

Church, in possession of just such a system, failed to actively share that truth to the Black race. Each of the SDA teachings was uniquely suited to address the needs of the people so recently freed from bondage.

Ellen White eloquently described the situation in which Black people found themselves: “God cares no less for the souls of the African race that might be won to serve Him than He cared for Israel. He requires far more of His people than they have given Him in missionary work among the people of the South of all classes, and especially among the colored race. Are we not under even greater obligation to labor for the colored people than for those who have been more highly favored? Who is it that held these people in servitude? Who kept them in ignorance, and pursued a course to debase and brutalize them, forcing them to disregard the law of marriage, breaking up the family relation, tearing wife from husband, and husband from wife? If the race is degraded, if they are repulsive in habits and manners, who made them so? Is there not much due to them from the white people? After so great a wrong has been done them, should not an earnest effort be made to lift them up? The truth must be carried to them. They have souls to save as well as we.”⁷

Christianity offered general help for the recently freed slave, but SDA teachings had the specific system of truth needed. In every particular, Adventism offered Black people the essentials to successfully make it through this life to eternity to come. Specific appeals of the SDA system of truth to the freed slaves included:

1. Slavery destroyed self-esteem—the Scriptures offered hope and direction.
2. Slavery separated families—Christ as Saviour provided a Friend and security.
3. Slavery exploited ungodly desires—salvation offered reformation and eternal life.
4. Slavery encouraged abuse—stewardship nurtured health and wholeness.
5. Slavery discouraged positive values—standards taught a positive lifestyle.
6. Slavery bred hateful revenge—the sanctuary encouraged trust in God’s judgment.
7. Slavery forced continual labor—the Sabbath facilitated physical and spiritual rest.
8. Slavery ridiculed faith—the Spirit of Prophecy focused on providence and protection.
9. Slavery fostered spiritualism—the state-of-the-dead teaching pointed to the resurrection.
10. Slavery cultivated hopelessness—the Second Coming promised deliverance.

The period following 1865 was characterized by sporadic and individual efforts from lay missionaries and ministers of Southern origin. During this period SDAs made

little, if any, effort to evangelize Black people. Rather, White ministers conducted evangelistic meetings for Whites in various Southern cities, and Black people attended these meetings uninvited. They often stood outside or sat in the back of the meeting place.

The Segregation Question

Non-Adventist authors Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, in their controversial book on Adventism, *Seeking a Sanctuary*, argue that Adventist pioneers, at least after they became Seventh-day Adventists, had very little personal contact with Black people and were hesitant to associate with them. They posit that even when Adventists began evangelization in the South in the 1870s, it was not on behalf of Blacks: “Blacks . . . found the church after turning up at Adventist meetings without being directly invited.”⁸

Bull and Lockhart maintain that Adventists were generally passive and accommodating in regard to racial issues. They concede that while Adventists may not have endorsed segregation, they did accept it as part of life in the South. They argue that racial segregation in the SDA Church was initiated and perpetuated “first by expediency, and then by choice”⁹ There is, however, another perspective.

The SDA Church leaders *did address* the issue of segregation during the pre-1891 period. SDA ministers in the South encountered a perplexing dilemma when Blacks attended their evangelistic meetings and churches. The important question was What should we do?

A. W. Spalding, in his unpublished manuscript “Lights and Shades in the Black Belt,” suggests that integrating churches would have hindered the work in the South: “The matter [of segregation] did not come prominently to the attention of the denomination, because it was in only two or three places that the difficulties were acute, and the cause in the South was not extensive enough in those years to take over much of the time of the annual conferences.”¹⁰

The segregation issue did not appear in the records of the church until 1887. Entries in the *General Conference Bulletin* cite that the delegates had engaged in animated discussion on a resolution that the church recognize no color line. The discussion resulted in an amended resolution that stressed that “no distinction whatever” should be “made between the two races in church relations.”¹¹

In addition, the session established a three-person committee to “consider the matter carefully, and recommend proper action to the conference.” A week later the committee reported that they saw “no occasion for this conference to legislate upon the subject, and would, therefore, recommend that no action be taken.”¹² This left the question of segregation and race relations to the discretion of individual ministers and teachers. After the 1887 segre-

gation discussion, items concerning the South and the Black work receded into the background.

Landmark Progress

As the work developed throughout the South, Black congregations sprang up. In 1886 Edgefield Junction, Tennessee, became the location of the first Black SDA church. The pastor was Harry Lowe, formerly a Baptist minister. The second Black SDA congregation was established in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1890, with A. Barry as its pastor. The third Black SDA church was started in Bowling Green, Kentucky, in 1891, followed by churches in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1892 (started by Charles Kinney), and Nashville, Tennessee, in 1894. The Edgefield Junction, Louisville, Bowling Green, and Nashville churches are located in what is now the South Central Conference, and the New Orleans church is located in what is now the Southwest Region Conference.

Oakwood Industrial School, renamed Oakwood College in 1943, was established in 1896 with four buildings, four teachers, and 16 students (eight women and eight men). The institution, with a property value of about \$10,000, began in response to the appeals of Ellen White to develop a training center in the South for Black leaders. General Conference leaders purchased a 360-acre farm (the property later included 1,000 acres) about five miles north of Huntsville, Alabama. Ellen White identified this as a place that God had selected and would richly bless.

Ellen White visited the campus in 1904, and through the remaining years of her life she constantly promoted and supported the school. On numerous occasions she spoke of having received “divine instruction” in regard to Oakwood College. It has been estimated that 85 percent of the Black leaders of the church have spent some time at Oakwood College during their educational experience.

The Expansion Period: 1891-1910

After more than 30 years of relative inactivity on the part of SDAs in the South, the tide began to turn during the 1890s. The SDA Church’s outreach to African-Americans prospered because certain individuals accepted the challenge to champion a moral cause. This phenomenon illustrates the dynamics of an organization struggling with racial inclusiveness. The triumph of this chapter in SDA Church history illustrates the providence of God in bringing the Black work into being in spite of seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

The years 1891-1910 commenced with an event that proved to be a turning point in the history of the Black work: the presentation by Ellen White of the historic message “Our Duty to the Colored People.” The message was delivered to the delegates of the twenty-ninth General Conference session, held in Battle Creek, Michigan. During

her presentation Ellen White insisted that after years of neglect the church could not go on ignoring its duty to the Black race without incurring God’s displeasure.

Fully aware of the confrontational content of her message, she conceded: “I know that that which I now speak will bring me into conflict. This I do not covet, for the conflict has seemed to be continuous of late years; but I do not mean to live a coward or die a coward, leaving my work undone. I must follow in my Master’s footsteps.”¹³

With words of authority, she declared that God had shown her many things regarding the Black race and that “sin rests upon us as a church because we have not made great effort for the salvation of souls among the colored people.”¹⁴ Ellen White enunciated many of her foundational positions on the issues of Black people, the Black work, equality, and race. In it she appealed to church leaders to begin the work and seek to make up for lost time. This presentation contained principles that she would continue to elaborate on for the next 20 years.

Change Agents

Perhaps these years are best characterized by the efforts of scores of dedicated people who gave themselves unreservedly to building the Black work. Examples of some early-but-lesser-known workers were Will Palmer (Edson White’s associate), R. M. Kilgore, H. S. Shaw, and Dr. J. E. Caldwell. However, three people—Ellen White, Edson White, and Charles Kinney—were the major change agents and architects of the Black work.

Ellen White

Ellen White (1827-1915) can be called the initiator of the Black work. Her influence was constantly in favor of equality and the inclusion of Black people in the church. In addition to the emphases already enunciated, Ellen White’s influence was also felt in the ongoing guidance she provided her son Edson during the time he worked in the South and in the institutions he established to build and strengthen the work among Black people in the South.

Edson White

The dedication and far-reaching contributions of Edson White (1849-1928) during close to two decades of service were invaluable to the progress of the Black work. Edson White’s ship, *Morning Star*, and the varied ministries carried on from that venue were among the primary catalysts for assertive efforts on behalf of Black people. Sensing the need to coordinate all the efforts in the South on behalf of Blacks, Edson White established the Southern Missionary Society in 1895. This self-supporting organization was established in Vicksburg, Mississippi, aboard the *Morning Star* and remained independent until it was merged with the

Southern Union Conference in 1901. Staffed with a group of missionary-minded volunteers, for more than two decades its groundbreaking work promoted education, health, evangelism, and general self-betterment among Black people. Its programs included education, community assistance, training in self-supporting work, industrial education, and basic principles of thrift, business, and health.

In a December 1899 editorial in the *Gospel Herald*, Edson White emphasized Ellen White's molding influence on his work: "We have ever regarded instruction coming from this source [his mother's writings] as the very highest authority. These instructions have been plain and explicit, and when followed, success has ever attended this work" (italics supplied). With Ellen White's counsel and financial and moral support, Edson White created a lasting model for the Black work in the South.

Another major contribution was the *Gospel Herald* (1898-1903), the predecessor to *Message* magazine, which was first printed aboard the *Morning Star*, with Edson White as its first editor. The *Gospel Herald* had as its objective the "reporting and promoting [of] the work among the colored people in the South." Edson White targeted Black and White SDAs as primary readers and used the magazine as an evangelistic and fund-raising tool.

The success of the Black work under Edson White can be summarized in a simple four-step model: (1) Ellen White would convey a general principle or recommendation to Edson; (2) Edson, via the Southern Missionary Society, would adapt and implement the counsel; (3) the efforts would be examined and refined in the context of the Southern work; and (4) Black and White Adventist workers would participate in the implementation of the counsel.

Though other Adventist ministers, including E. B. Lane, D. M. Canright, and R. M. Kilgore, preached and worked in the South before Edson White went there in 1894, it was Edson White's work aboard the *Morning Star* that comprised the first successful effort by SDAs on behalf of Black people. The steamboat ministry forever changed the character of the Southern work. Its success is measured in the establishment of schools and churches along with successful initiatives in publishing, health, and missionary outreach.

Charles Kinney

Charles M. Kinney (1855-1951) can rightly be called the father of Black Adventism. A slave from birth, Kinney was born in Richmond, Virginia. Moving west after the Civil War, Kinney settled in Reno, Nevada, where he attended evangelistic meetings held by J. N. Loughborough. Won to the truth through the preaching of Loughborough and Ellen White, Kinney held dear his acquaintance with them.

Kinney became the first to articulate the concerns of Black Adventists in the areas of race, church polity, and or-

ganizational equity. For two decades he labored throughout the South for Blacks, preaching to any person who would listen to his message. Kinney believed that Black people needed to grow in three areas to reach their potential: education, experience, and economic development. He was an avid proponent of the view that SDA doctrine could provide for the spiritual needs of disadvantaged Black people; therefore, he did everything in his power to see that his people received a knowledge of the truth and that the church did everything possible to advance the Black work.

Kinney, believed to have been the first Black ordained minister (1889), had a deep burden for his people. In an 1885 issue of the *Review and Herald*, he appealed to the readers who wanted to see the gospel go to all people to pray for him so that "I may have strength, physical, mental, and spiritual, to do what I can for the colored people."¹⁵

The concept of Black conferences was first suggested by Kinney when he was confronted by efforts to segregate him and his members at camp meeting on the day of his ordination. He advocated Black conferences as a way to work more effectively among Blacks and help ease racial tensions in the church. By the time of his death (1951), he saw the Black membership in North America dramatically increase to more than 26,000.

Throughout his long and fruitful ministry, Kinney continued to establish congregations and build churches, until his retirement in 1911. Charles Kinney's story is one of struggle, faith, persistence, and eventual triumph. It is another biography that deserves to be told in detail.

Organizational Inclusion

With a Black SDA membership of approximately 1,000 after a decade of general outreach to African-Americans, church leaders felt that a new form of organization was needed to coordinate the burgeoning work. So in 1909 the General Conference Committee officially voted that the North American Negro Department be established. This development signaled a significant and symbolic phase in the progress of the Black work. Before this the Black work was not structurally recognized at the higher levels of the organization. But since then the Black work has become an integral part of every level of the SDA administrative structure.

Implications for Today

The development of the Black work during these early years is a clear manifestation of God's providence. The Bible indicates that God's church is to be inclusive of all kindreds, tongues, and peoples. The historical timing of the freeing of the slaves and the organization of the SDA Church created an opportunity for SDAs to fulfill the gospel commission. Therefore, this charge to evangelize Black people was as much a challenge to the denominational atti-

tude toward race relations as it was in fulfilling its ongoing evangelistic mission.

So from a careful study of denominational history, it is clear that it was God's plan for Black people to be an integral part of the SDA movement. Providence, borne out by the messages given by Ellen White, marked each step of progress. The evolution of the Black work does not represent the efforts of one race to paternalistically help another; rather it is the outworking of God's plan that His church be multicultural (Rev. 14:6) and that it deal with the needs of the oppressed and excluded. The Scriptures came through the Hebrew nation to the other nations of the world (John 4:22). All groups received a knowledge of the gospel, even as Blacks did. All groups are recipients of the gospel and grafted into the body of Christ.

The story of African-Americans in the SDA Church is a story of drama and perspective. The people and events of this period gave meaning and momentum to the Black work today. As a result of the work, sacrifice, and labor of the pioneers, the African-American church has prospered throughout the United States and has become a source of inspiration for Adventists in America and around the world.

As the church today faces new problems of ethnicity and diversity, the history of the Black work highlights four lessons that may prove instructive even today: (1) Ellen White's continuing influence as a change agent in the SDA organization; (2) the positive ways the church addressed itself to the sensitive issues of race and inclusiveness in past years; (3) the organizational techniques the church employed in the difficult Southern states; and (4) the methods adopted by the church in starting and supporting work in a new and undeveloped field.

The progress we see today is the result of the combined efforts of the entire church under the blessing of God.

Records show that in the 1890s there were only 50 Black members. However, by 1918 there were more than 3,500 Black members! Similar dramatic increases occurred in tithes returned, mission schools, workers, and churches. Today membership in Black conferences is approaching 250,000, and tithe is more than \$90 million!

We have hope in the future because we have seen what God has done in the past. The story of the Black work continues, and it is with renewed confidence that we move forward. God has led and guided through His providence and the prophetic gift He has granted. He *will* continue to lead in the future. "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."¹⁶

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1966), p. 42.

² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³ ———, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 1, p. 202.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), vol. 4, pp. 2, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 195. Italics supplied.

⁷ White, *The Southern Work*, pp. 14, 15.

⁸ Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), p. 194.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹⁰ Arthur W. Spalding, "Lights and Shades in the Black Belt," in Ellen G. White Estate Document File 376, p. 138.

¹¹ *General Conference Bulletin*, Nov. 14, 1887, p. 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, Nov. 21, 1887, pp. 2, 3.

¹³ White, *The Southern Work*, p. 10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁵ Charles Kinney, "Labor Among the Colored People of Topeka, Kansas," *Review and Herald*, Oct. 27, 1885.

¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1915), p. 196.

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