

Race

WITHIN AMERICAN ADVENTISM, almost all major ethnic groups are now well represented. But the fact that the demographic profile of Adventism broadly reflects that of American society is also a measure of the church's distance from the standard patterns of American denominationalism. The United States may be a melting pot, but its churches are not. In many cases, ethnic identity and religious affiliation are closely linked. The English and Scots are still dominant among the Episcopalians and Presbyterians; Germans and Scandinavians among the Lutherans, and so on. Evangelically orientated groups like Baptists, Methodists, and Pentecostals have made headway in attracting converts from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, but perhaps no American denomination can match Adventism's degree of inclusivity. Its members can claim ancestry in almost all the countries from which the American population is drawn, with only Poles, Italians, and East Europeans being significantly underrepresented.¹

The major difference between Adventism and American society is that there are fewer whites and more blacks than in the general population. For this reason, Adventism is also exceptionally integrated. Many religious traditions have distinct black and white denominations, so most Protestants, both black and white, are members of congregations whose members are exclusively of their own racial group, whereas 69 percent of Adventists are not—a higher proportion than any substantial religious organization save the Jehovah's Witnesses.² However, within Adventist history, inclusiveness and integration have often been in tension, and the representative ethnic character of the church has led to conflict both between and within racial groups.

In origin, Adventism is a white, Anglophone faith, as the names of Adventism's

forerunners and earliest leaders—Miller, Bates, White, Andrews, Smith—testify. But this ethnic homogeneity did not last long. Immigration from other parts of Northern Europe increased rapidly from mid-century onward, and the Adventist church was quick to benefit. By 1877 about 13 percent of the membership was composed of non-English-speaking immigrants.³ These new recruits were mainly of Scandinavian and German origin, farmers who had gone straight from their homelands to the Midwest. The first Norwegian church was established in Wisconsin in 1861, and the first Danish one was founded by John Matteson in Minnesota in 1868.⁴ Evangelism among the Germans developed in the 1870s and was later led by L. R. Conradi, who was especially successful among Russian Germans with a Mennonite background in Kansas and the Dakotas.⁵

Although the Adventist German and Scandinavian populations grew at a similar rate for many decades, and both played a leading part in Adventism's move into the Pacific states, there were differences between the groups. Adventist penetration of the smaller Scandinavian population was much higher, and to judge from tithe receipts, the Swedes in particular may have been wealthier than the Germans—and indeed, than most other Adventists.⁶ Scandinavians appear to have played a positive role in the leadership of the church at large, beginning with O. A. Olsen, who became president of the General Conference in 1888. In contrast, German Adventists were sometimes associated with schism. Conradi rejected the 1888 message and eventually separated from the church, while the German Adventist population in North Dakota showed some sympathy with both the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement in Germany and the prophetic claims of Margaret Rowen at home.⁷ A son of German immigrants, R. R. Figuhr, was president of the General Conference at the time of the publication of the contentious *Questions on Doctrine*.⁸

In the U.S. census of 1906, close to one in ten American Adventists attended a church where a foreign language was used for all or some of the services, and a decade later, one in eight did.⁹ This figure, which does not include those immigrants who now worshipped exclusively in English, represented the highest proportion of foreign-language members in any originally Anglophone church. The multiethnic character of Adventism in America was already a fact, and some of the institutional structures designed to accommodate this diversity were now in place. The Foreign Department of the General Conference was set up in 1905 to oversee work in other languages, and later plans were made to establish educational institutions for each major language group.¹⁰

Broadview Swedish Seminary was founded in 1909; Clinton German Seminary in Missouri, in 1910; and the Danish-Norwegian Seminary at Hutchinson, Minnesota, in 1911, with M. L. Andreasen, himself a Danish immigrant, as principal.¹¹ These institutions were not designed to segregate their respective ethnic groups or to accelerate their assimilation into English-speaking America, but rather to mediate between the language groups and the wider society so that a

person's integration might take place through Adventism at a pace that did not leave his compatriots behind. There was already a Scandinavian division at Union College in Nebraska, but as the calendar of the Swedish seminary noted, "those who have attended the college have taken up studies in English almost exclusively, and the result has been that they have drifted into the English work."¹²

Because the seminaries were designed to keep pace with assimilation rather than prevent it, they had soon served their purpose, and in the 1920s all were closed or merged. In 1926 the proportion of foreign language members was still as high as ever, but a decade later officials of the Bureau of Home Missions (as the Foreign Department was now called) noted the high death rate among the Swedish membership and the fact that half or more of those with German and Scandinavian heritage were now worshipping in English churches.¹³ These people were not being replaced, for by this time immigration from Northern Europe had diminished. In the 1930s, immigration overall slowed to its lowest point, so the church made a conscious attempt to look elsewhere for new members.¹⁴

Some of this attention focused on America's native peoples. The first converts were a Chippewa couple in Minnesota who joined the denomination back in 1893.¹⁵ Contact was subsequently made with the Navajos in Arizona, but there was very little momentum until the 1930s and 40s, when converts were won from the Maricopa, Yaqui, and Mohave-Apache tribes in Arizona; the Sioux in South Dakota; the Cherokees in Oklahoma, who were to yield the largest number of recruits; and the Onondagas in New York State.¹⁶ In 1946 there was a baptized Native American membership of 200, a figure that increased to 4,500 by 2003, a rate that was about half that of the Native American growth in the country.¹⁷ However, it was for the nation's Jews that greater efforts were made. Believing that they "will receive our literature more favorably because it comes from Sabbath-keeping, non-pork eating Christians," Adventists approached them with high hopes.¹⁸ But Adventist feelings of affinity with Judaism were unreciprocated, and apart from the establishment of a Jewish church of 25 members in New York in 1949, these endeavors met with little success.¹⁹ Nonetheless, a few later Jewish converts, such as the writer Clifford Goldstein, were to become leading lights in the denomination.²⁰

More receptive to the Adventist message was the growing Hispanic population, whose conversion rate exceeded that of the Swedes for the first time in the early 1930s.²¹ The Hispanic work in the United States had begun in 1899 in Sánchez, Arizona, where enough members of the Sánchez family joined the church to establish a congregation. By the following year there were 41 Hispanic members in the area.²² However, the Spanish work progressed slowly thereafter, and in 1920 there were still only 470 Hispanic Adventists. In that year a Spanish-American Training School was established in Phoenix, Arizona, but it suffered from inadequate funding and closed in 1933. Other short-lived educational initiatives followed, but, as with the schools for Northern Europeans,

there were simply not enough unassimilated Hispanics to make them viable.²³ The Spanish-speaking membership grew to 1,400 in 1930, and stood at more than 3,000 in 1950, but compared with the rapid early growth achieved by other ethnic groups, this was a slow rate of increase.²⁴ One factor in this is that Hispanic immigration was slight, and some Hispanics in the southwestern United States were not immigrants at all, but rather descendants of earlier Spanish-speaking settlers.²⁵

Immigration from all countries remained low throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century, and by the early 1960s the number of foreign language members had dwindled to a mere one in thirty.²⁶ But thereafter immigration increased once more, and with it Adventism's non-Anglophone membership. In 1980 it stood at about one in fifteen, and by the 1990s it was back up to its historic level of one in eight.²⁷ The increase was overwhelmingly due to the influx of Spanish-speakers, whose numbers trebled during the 1980s alone. However, whereas immigrants in the general population were overwhelmingly from Mexico, the Adventist proportion of Mexican Hispanics was much lower, only about 40 percent. About 30 percent of Hispanic Adventists come from Puerto Rico, Cuba, or the Dominican Republic, and 20 percent from Central America.²⁸

Hispanics were not the only group to benefit from the late-twentieth-century wave of immigration. Adventist work among Asian Americans had started with the baptism of a Japanese American in 1892. Further Japanese converts were made in the early years of the century, mostly in the San Francisco area, but by 1941 the baptized membership was still only 40.²⁹ Numbers increased after the Second World War, but it is among new Asian and South Pacific immigrants, rather than the established Japanese and Chinese communities of California, that Adventism has enjoyed its greatest success. Statistics collected by the Multilingual Ministries Department (as the Bureau of Home Missions is now named) showed that by the 1990s Koreans constituted by far the largest Asian group within Adventism, followed by Filipinos.³⁰ Koreans are also the only Asians with sufficient resources to develop their own evangelistic and institutional structures beyond the level of the local congregation.³¹ The predominance of Koreans in Asian American Adventism is not unusual, for they have proved to be the Asian community most receptive to Christianity, both within and without the United States, and Korean Christians were among the earliest immigrants.³²

One thing that Adventist immigrant groups have had in common is the existence of religious factors in their country of origin that might predispose them to accept the Adventist faith once in the United States. Swedes may have had memories of the Advent awakening in Sweden, and the German Mennonites from Russia brought with them a separatist, eschatological tradition.³³ For later generations of immigrants, Adventism was not necessarily encountered for the first time in the United States. Adventism's worldwide growth has meant that

the church has achieved higher levels of penetration in other parts of the world than it has in its country of origin. Immigrants are therefore often more likely to have some prior awareness of the church than members of the indigenous population, and for them, Adventism may be a relatively familiar denomination in a strange land (rather than a strange one in a familiar country). This does not necessarily mean that immigrant Adventists were church members before they arrived—75 percent of first generation Hispanic immigrants are baptized in the United States rather than in their home countries.³⁴ But it does suggest one reason why, in the late twentieth century, Adventism was so successful among new immigrants while struggling to attract native-born converts.

This hypothesis is supported by recent studies of Hispanic Adventism, which have suggested that the church may function as a *pueblo*, giving immigrants to the anonymous and threatening cities of the United States the sense of a supportive community they took for granted in their countries of origin.³⁵ As a respondent in one study put it: “For me the church, in a sense, is like a small refuge—a refuge in the sense that the community (our people), the same as the individual, is going through the same process . . . there is some kind of . . . interaction that serves as a free ground, because it allows me to give total freedom to my expression of feelings and the like. These things you cannot express in front of Anglo Saxons.”³⁶ However, the church is not a place of retreat, for it also provides the motivation and social support networks needed to succeed in American society. Although articulated in terms of Hispanic culture, this experience may be common to Adventist immigrants from many countries. If converts are seeking a refuge from American society, the church will become more attractive insofar as it reminds them of home.

This link is particularly relevant to immigrants of West Indian origin, for the Caribbean is the region of Adventism’s greatest success. According to the GSS, almost 10 percent of Adventists in the United States are of Caribbean origin (including Puerto Ricans), making them by far the most overrepresented geographical or ethnic group within the church’s membership.³⁷ Detailed studies of urban congregations in the 1990s revealed that almost two-thirds of Adventists in metropolitan New York came from the Caribbean (not counting the Puerto Ricans), and that even in Los Angeles, one established black congregation was found to be 22 percent West Indian.³⁸ The Caribbean includes a large number of islands, each with a distinct ethnic and linguistic heritage. The countries in which Adventism is strongest are former British colonies, and most Caribbean immigrants are English-speakers; however, there are also a large number of Francophone Haitians in New York, and in the wider Adventist population, Hispanics of Caribbean origin are overrepresented. Caribbean Adventism is therefore a diverse but powerful presence in the church in America, and a disproportionate number of both Black and Hispanic leaders are of, respectively, West Indian or Puerto Rican origin.

In part, these figures reflect the steady increase in immigration from the Caribbean since the 1960s, but the story of West Indian involvement in the American church goes back a long way, as it does in America in general.³⁹ Because Adventist missionary work in the West Indies progressed more rapidly than that among African Americans, it became the training ground for black evangelism in America, and from the early twentieth century onward, West Indians have played a significant role in black Adventist affairs. One of them, G. E. Peters, from Antigua, became the second person of African descent to head the General Conference's Negro Department in 1929; another, Hyveth Williams, who came from Jamaica, was American Adventism's first black woman pastor in the 1980s.⁴⁰

Racial intermingling was somewhat more fluid in the Caribbean, and when, in the early days, West Indians arrived in America "immaculately dressed like British statesmen," they often neither expected nor received the same hostility and discrimination as African Americans—something that could cause resentment.⁴¹ In consequence, some Caribbeans found their way into traditionally white Adventist churches. If anything, those that joined the almost exclusively black churches where African American Adventists worshipped encountered more problems. Adventism's extraordinary openness to immigrants has not been matched by its reception of America's black population, and many African Americans considered that the West Indian newcomers catered "to whites in America to obtain favors which are never given to native blacks."⁴² Immigrants from Africa have also quickly made their mark on American Adventism. A traditionalist like Samuel Koranteng-Pipim was embraced by white conservatives after he arrived from Ghana in the 1980s and subsequently became one of the church's most articulate critics of liberal Adventism.⁴³ Thirty percent or more of Adventists may be black, but that figure disguises fundamental differences in the experience and trajectory of black immigrants (from the West Indies and Africa) and African Americans.

Unlike most immigrant groups, which have constituted a separate entity within Adventism for a few decades after the heaviest influx of converts, African Americans have remained a distinct group for over a century. Partly as a result, the church has found their presence in Adventism far more difficult to cope with than that of other races; and despite drawing a disproportionately high number into their ranks, which on the face of it suggests the church is unusually hospitable to America's blacks, the denomination has often displayed the same prejudice toward them as has the country at large.

The white Adventist pioneers first encountered African Americans in significant numbers in the 1870s when their evangelistic endeavors brought them into the South. They did not, however, set out to evangelize these communities. Rather, it was African Americans who found the church after turning up at Adventist meetings without being directly invited. At these gatherings, Adventist ministers discovered a pattern of segregation existing in the South to which,

as northerners, they had never really been exposed. They had had some previous contact with African Americans. The famous ex-slave known as Sojourner Truth mixed freely among them after she moved to the Battle Creek area in the late 1850s.⁴⁴ But the blacks who now came to Adventist assemblies sat in a separate partition or outside the meeting halls. Elbert B. Lane, the first Adventist minister in the South, reported holding gatherings in a Tennessee depot building with “white people occupying one room, and the colored the other.”⁴⁵

This self-segregation apparently took some Adventist workers by surprise. In 1876 Dudley M. Canright described a meeting he held near Dallas, Texas. People “came from every direction,” he wrote in the *Review*, “afoot, on horseback . . . with wagons, men, women and children both white and black.” But then he saw “something new—the whites all seated inside the house and the colored people all outside—an invariable custom through the South.”⁴⁶ There is no indication at this stage that Adventists endorsed these practices, although they did accept them as part of life in the region. The reports of Lane and Canright do show, however, that Adventists first saw blacks in the movement separated from whites or on the back seats outside the church. It was an appropriate beginning to the association of whites and African Americans in Adventism, for from that time to the present day, Adventists have never relinquished the idea that good relations between the two are best served by some kind of segregationist policy.

It was initially felt that blacks could not be reached without alienating whites unless mission work was divided along color lines. Canright was one of the first to advocate this. He argued in 1876 that evangelism among the freedmen had to be a distinct mission. “A man cannot labor for them and for the whites too, as the white would not associate with him if he did,” he wrote in the *Review*. “There is no objection to laboring for them and teaching them, but it must be separately.”⁴⁷ This policy was adopted by other Adventist workers, including Edson White, the son of Ellen White, who sailed down the Mississippi River in the 1890s in the riverboat *The Morning Star*. He went specifically to evangelize the black communities and took great care not to antagonize whites in doing so.⁴⁸

Prejudiced attitudes thus dictated the Adventist approach to African Americans. But soon Adventism itself began to reflect the black-white divide in America. In 1886 the first African American Adventist church was established in Edgefield, Tennessee. It was followed by another in Louisville, Kentucky, founded by Charles M. Kinney, the first ordained black minister. Not all Adventists agreed with this separatism. Kinney himself was in favor of integration until such time as black Adventists were sufficiently numerous to form conferences of their own.⁴⁹ The liberal John Harvey Kellogg did not subscribe to the principle of the color line and supported other Adventists who defied it. Kellogg’s stand upset Edson White, who in 1899 wrote to his mother about the doctor’s attitude. White felt that Kellogg and others who wanted to defy segregation would “close up the field” if their ideas gained any credence.⁵⁰

His mother, however, had more ambivalent feelings. In the 1890s she urged the integration of the Adventist church and told white Adventists they had no right to exclude blacks from their places of worship.⁵¹ She argued that men who believed the separation of the races to be the best way of meeting the prejudice of white people “have not had the spirit of Christ.”⁵² But in 1908, in a pamphlet called *Proclaiming the Truth Where There Is Race Antagonism*, Ellen White bowed to the white racism she had earlier tried to resist. “Among the white people in many places, there exists a strong prejudice against the colored race. We may desire to ignore this prejudice, but we cannot do it. If we were to act as if this prejudice did not exist, we could not get the light before the white people,” she wrote. The prophetess argued for separate white and black churches “in order that the work for the white people may be carried on without serious hindrance.”⁵³

The lower priority given to black evangelism in the nineteenth century is striking. By the 1890s Adventism had already established missions overseas with several thousand members, and the church had overcome the language barrier to convert almost as many Scandinavians and Germans within the United States. But color was a greater obstacle than either geography or language, and by 1894 there were only 50 African American members out of a black population of 8 million.⁵⁴ That this was not due to a lack of receptivity is apparent from the speed with which the African American membership grew once efforts were made to accommodate it. By 1906 there were 562 black Adventists.⁵⁵ Following the example of the North American Foreign Department established in 1905, a Negro Department was established in 1909. But whereas the Foreign Department had given responsibility for German and Scandinavians to members of their respective ethnic groups, it was not until 1918, when there were 3,500 black Adventists, that an African American was considered suitable to lead people of his own race.⁵⁶

As more blacks came into the church, the pattern of separate institutional development became more entrenched. Oakwood College, originally an industrial training school, had been established for blacks in Huntsville, Alabama, in 1896.⁵⁷ Periodicals for blacks were also set up: the *Gospel Herald*, first published in Mississippi by Edson White, followed in 1934 by *Message*, which remains the voice of black Adventism.⁵⁸ In 1927 a Scots woman, Nellie Druillard, established Riverside Sanitarium in Tennessee specifically for blacks.⁵⁹ In every case, however, these institutions were run by whites. This situation was not confined to the rural South, for the demographics of the black Adventist community quickly turned into a much more northern and urban phenomenon than the African American population at large. By 1906, more than half the black membership lived north of the Mason-Dixon line.⁶⁰ In 1916, over 30 percent of the community was to be found in New York, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. Men made up only a quarter of the total, and this marked gender im-

balance may have been an additional factor in both the slow development of an African American leadership and the relative prominence of West Indian immigrants, who tended to settle in places like New York.⁶¹

By 1944, the black Adventist population stood at nearly 18,000. At about 9 percent of the Adventist membership in America at that time, it had almost caught up with the proportion of blacks in the country, which was just under 10 percent in 1950.⁶² But African Americans were still virtually unrepresented in the administration and institutions of the church. A Committee for the Advancement of Worldwide Work Among Colored Seventh-day Adventists, set up by leading black Adventists the previous year, submitted to the General Conference a document that revealed the extent to which black Adventists lacked control over their own affairs and encountered discrimination at white Adventist institutions.⁶³ One such incident gained lasting notoriety. In 1944 the Adventist Washington Sanitarium refused to treat a black woman after she had fallen ill while visiting the capital. Lucy Byard, an Adventist from New York, was then rushed to the Howard University Hospital instead. But the delay was fatal, and she died of pneumonia before she could be properly treated. Ironically, at Howard she was attended by a black Adventist doctor, who would not have been allowed to work at the Washington Sanitarium either.⁶⁴

From the outside, and to those with a Caribbean heritage, the church could seem more welcoming. At around this time, a young Malcolm X attended a white Seventh-day Adventist church with his West Indian mother in Michigan, and the members he met there, he concluded, were “the friendliest white people” he ever came across.⁶⁵ But inside the denomination, the committee for the advancement of the colored work had to struggle for the integration of Adventist medical, educational, and administrative institutions. One demand, a black editor for *Message*, was quickly met by the appointment of Louis B. Reynolds in 1945, but the others were not. What the General Conference offered instead was the creation of conference structures solely for the black churches. This was better than nothing, and, save on the West Coast (where there were few blacks and the practice of segregation was less entrenched), black Adventists accepted the plan. The regional conferences, although administered by blacks for blacks, bore the same relationship to the union administration as other Adventist conferences, and nine have since been formed around the country. In this context, at least, African Americans could experience something of the sense of autonomous community, which immigrant groups had long enjoyed in virtue of their linguistic separation.⁶⁶

However, regional conferences did little to address the problem of institutional segregation. The policy of not treating blacks in the church’s hospitals was only one aspect of Adventist discrimination. Blacks were barred from some Adventist schools and segregated in others. Even the head of the Negro Department faced discrimination. Calvin E. Moseley, who became the fourth black to

head the department in 1953, recalled the situation when he arrived: "It was very uncomfortable from the very first. There were a number of Southern white people in high positions in the General Conference at the time and they brought their prejudices with them. I could not eat in the General Conference cafeteria with everyone else. Some whites would not even greet you when they saw you in the morning."⁶⁷

Such practices put black Adventists in a dilemma. Should they leave the church or remain and fight for racial justice within an organization they otherwise felt to be right? And what was the best way to achieve equality: integration or separatism? In both cases, the search for racial justice brought official disapproval. In 1903, Louis C. Sheafe was the pastor of the First Church of Seventh-day Adventists in Washington, D.C., a black minister leading a racially mixed congregation. But after the General Conference headquarters was transferred to the capital in that same year, it provided no support for his integrationist approach. Sheafe later transferred to another Adventist church in the area, known as the People's Church, which declared its independence of the General Conference administration in 1907. Sheafe continued to lead the congregation for many years, associating first with the Church of God, and then with the Seventh Day Baptists. He likened the experience of blacks and whites in Adventism to that of two sheep meeting on a precipitous mountain path: both could proceed safely on their way provided that one lay down and let the other walk over it.⁶⁸

Sheafe had been a minister of a Baptist church before becoming a Seventh-day Adventist, and like many African American preachers, he clearly viewed the pastor's bond with his congregation as something that transcended sectarian divisions. It is perhaps significant that another black pastor who fell out with the General Conference, the Jamaican J. K. Humphrey, was also a Baptist minister before becoming an Adventist in 1902. He was subsequently chosen to lead a newly formed black group in New York, and later founded the First Harlem Seventh-day Adventist Church, whose membership reached 600 in 1920. Everywhere he looked, he saw discrimination: in the church's schools, hospitals, sanitariums, and conferences. But finding there was as yet no General Conference support for the idea of separate black conferences, he started work on a secret communitarian project called Utopia Park. It would be situated just outside New York and would consist of an orphanage, an old people's home, a training school, an industrial area, and health care facilities. Humphrey emphasized that the park would not be just for Adventists but would be open to all blacks in the United States. When word of the plans leaked out, the denomination expelled Humphrey, and, when his congregation stood by him, disfellowshipped the church as well. Reformed under the name United Sabbath-Day Adventist Church, the congregation survived for many years, but the dream of Utopia Park quickly foundered on legal and financial difficulties.⁶⁹

No doubt Humphrey's vision was affected by the stirring events that were



Figure 30. Oakwood students: a group poses outside the school sign in 2001. Of all the early separate language and ethnic colleges that the denomination established in America, Oakwood is the only one that remains.

Photo courtesy Public Relations Office, Oakwood College.

then occurring on his doorstep. Marcus Garvey's black nationalist movement and Harlem's 1920s revival were in full swing at the time. Adventists in New York did not stand on the sidelines. A central figure in the Harlem Renaissance was Arna Bontemps, a graduate of Pacific Union College, who taught at the Adventist Harlem Academy from 1924 onward. He was already making a reputation as a poet, and while in Harlem established a lifelong friendship with the writer Langston Hughes. But when he transferred to Oakwood College in 1931, he was in for a shock. "This is perhaps the world's worst school," he wrote to the poet Countee Cullen. "No buildings, few teachers, no vision, and no learning."⁷⁰ Exaggeration was his style, but dissatisfaction with the college was widespread, and on October 8, 1931, the students went on strike. The students' leaders were expelled, but the strike ultimately led to the appointment of the college's first black principal, J. L. Moran.⁷¹ Under his leadership and that of subsequent African Americans, the school recovered, gradually acquiring a reputation for producing confident individuals (see figure 30).

The denomination's assumption that the black membership could not educate itself was more than a little odd in view of the outstanding achievements of black Adventists in this period. Bontemps, who published his first novel in 1931, was one example. He attributed the success of black Adventists to "the sheer reading and study that Adventism demands. This appeals to Negroes of limited opportunity and suppressed aspiration. . . . [and] the rigid discipline is attractive to ambitious Negroes hitherto accustomed to come-easy, go-easy attitudes."⁷² Another illustration of the black membership's educational advance was Eva B. Dyke's achievement in becoming the first black woman in America—and possibly in the world—to earn a Ph.D. When she completed her doctorate at Radcliffe in 1921, she was probably also the only Adventist with a Ph.D. from an elite school.⁷³ The pattern has continued. Recent surveys suggest that black Adventists are better educated than their white counterparts (though the differences may diminish with controls for age) and it is often African American Adventists, like the Johns Hopkins surgeon Ben Carson and Admiral Barry Black, appointed chief chaplain of the Navy and subsequently chaplain of the Senate, whose careers attract public notice.⁷⁴

But at the same time as Adventism encouraged education, it also discouraged putting it to any use that appeared to subvert the church. Bontemps was keenly aware of contemporary racial issues like the Scottsboro trials (of several black youths falsely accused of raping two white women), and after Langston Hughes came to visit him at Oakwood, he was suspected of being an agitator. Bontemps declined to follow the suggestion that he burn his books by radical black authors, but he kept quiet and continued to work for the church until 1938.⁷⁵ For other black Adventists too, racial and Adventist identities had to be compartmentalized. As E. E. Cleveland, the leading evangelist who marched with Martin Luther King, later observed: "I have marched against legal injustice with other concerned citizens. But I did so, not as a representative of my church, but as an individual citizen exercising my civil rights."⁷⁶

Rising aspirations of African Americans were of course felt in other American sects. The Jehovah's Witnesses, however, showed a markedly greater capacity for equality than did the Adventists.⁷⁷ The Mormons, on the other hand, unashamedly held to a doctrine of white supremacy, for many years barring blacks from the priesthood and avoiding contact with them.⁷⁸ It was Adventism that most closely followed national trends in that it accepted blacks into its community but adopted segregationist policies. What accounted for this approach? It was true that many Adventists simply imbibed the deep-seated attitudes of the times. But some specific characteristics of the church also perpetuated discrimination and prejudice when it was being challenged in wider society. It is quite likely that the desire to remain aloof from social problems caused the church to be rather insensitive to the expectations of its black constituency.⁷⁹ The policy on church and state also made Adventists of

all races reluctant to speak out on racial injustice. As the Adventist A. W. Spalding explained in an unpublished history of the black work: "Injustice and oppression are repugnant to the Christian; pride and disdain are foreign to his heart; but his Christian experience should not therefore lead him to start a crusade against customs which do not interfere with the Christian's duty."⁸⁰

As a result of this attitude, the church did not openly support the principle of black equality. During his mission down the Mississippi River, Edson White and his associate, F. R. Rogers, often met with hostile opposition from white groups. In Yazoo City, Mississippi, the editor of the city newspaper viciously attacked the Adventist workers for, among other things, teaching equality of the races.⁸¹ In a letter to the paper, Rogers wrote: "Understanding the reports that have been circulated about us and our work, I wish to state to the public, in order to right myself on these matters, that we DO NOT believe in social equality, neither do we teach or practice it."⁸² Ellen White, too, made similar statements. She advised that the mingling of whites and blacks in social equality was not to be encouraged.⁸³ "The colored people," she wrote, "should not urge that they be placed on an equality with white people."⁸⁴

Interracial marriage was also opposed. According to Ellen White, "no encouragement to marriages of this character should be given among our people," and no encouragement was.⁸⁵ John Ragland, a black student at Emmanuel Missionary College in 1908–1909, later recalled how he was almost driven to suicide when the principal told him he could not marry his white girlfriend.⁸⁶ As late as 1968, the North American Division drew up guidelines that advised against marriage where "there are different racial backgrounds."⁸⁷ When an interracial marriage did take place on the campus of Andrews University in this period, white southern students boycotted the institution.⁸⁸ Such ill-will was not lost on black leaders, some of whom also frowned upon intermarriage on the grounds that "in a white racist society, it is unwise, inconvenient, and unnecessary."⁸⁹

Much of the debate about interracial marriage took place against the tense backdrop of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. An incident that occurred at an Adventist church in Alabama dramatically portrayed the uneasy relationship that existed between white and African American members in the decade. The congregation, composed mostly of white Adventists, invited a group from Oakwood College to present a Sabbath program. Arriving at the church, the black group found a roped-off section for them to sit in. However, the section could not hold them all, so some of them attempted to find seats elsewhere in the church. As this was against the church's policies, the deacons tried, unsuccessfully, to usher the blacks out. In the midst of the confusion, an elder reportedly stood up, pulled out a gun, and declared: "I've got six bullets here and they all say nigger on them." The minister's wife started to cry. "We love you niggers," she said, "but we just don't want you to sit with us."⁹⁰

In other cases, white Adventists linked arms outside their churches to prevent

blacks from entering them.⁹¹ Similar battles were played out in the church's schools. When a black girl was refused admission to an Adventist academy, her parents publicly attacked the denomination for what they considered to be a clear example of racial prejudice. This incident prompted a large protest at the denomination's General Conference session in San Francisco in 1962. About a thousand black Seventh-day Adventists gathered in the city in a demonstration of defiance at the church's racial policies. The event attracted considerable attention in the local press.⁹²

Eventually, church leaders responded to the pressure for change. Typically, however, they distanced themselves from the campaigns inside and outside the denomination. In a 1965 editorial in the *Review*, F. D. Nichol implicitly criticized clergymen who took part in the freedom marches. He wrote that the Adventist church sympathized with "those underprivileged," but it did not feel that the answer lay in social protest. Revealing once again the priority given to the church's overriding mission, he stated, "We have ever felt that we can best reveal true Christianity and thus best advance the Advent cause, by taking the more quiet and perhaps indirect approach to problems that so often arouse human passions."⁹³

But throughout this period, major pillars of Adventist segregation were falling. In 1965 the *Review* carried actions of the General Conference that called for the ending of racial discrimination in the denomination's schools, hospitals, and churches.⁹⁴ The General Conference cafeteria had already been desegregated in the 1950s. But the integration of Adventist schools was a slow process. After a bitter struggle, Southern Missionary College in Tennessee, a bastion of white southern Adventism, admitted its first black students in 1968, five years after the last state university, Alabama, had integrated its campus.⁹⁵ The church also appointed more blacks in leadership positions. In 1962 Frank L. Peterson became the first of several African Americans to hold the position of general vice-president of the General Conference. In addition, Adventist publishing houses put out books and articles to educate the membership on these issues. Among the most significant were Ronald Graybill's *E. G. White and Church Race Relations* (1970), which presented the prophetess as a champion of racial equality, and a series of articles by Roy Branson that appeared in the same year.⁹⁶

Despite these moves toward integration, the black conferences remained. Indeed, the controversies of the 1960s convinced many black leaders that only through the creation of black unions, the next level of government in Adventism, could parity be reached with whites. The question, for E. E. Cleveland, was one of power. He believed that union presidents were decisive figures in church administration but that blacks had very little hope of reaching such positions. He thus supported black unions because it was "imperative that black men have someone at Union Conference level to speak for them."⁹⁷ For Calvin Rock, then the president of Oakwood, the issue was more one of community.

He argued for black unions on the grounds of the genuine cultural differences that exist between the races.⁹⁸

Rock was supported by the fact that the separation of the African American work had apparently led to a spectacular increase in the black membership. Between 1944 and 1970, the number of black Adventists rose from 18,000 to just under 74,000, or 18 percent of the total American membership, now far in excess of the proportion of blacks in the general population, which had stayed fairly static at 11 percent.⁹⁹ Men were also forming a rapidly expanding segment of the black Adventist community, which at this point was well on its way to becoming Adventism's most gender-balanced ethnic group. This may actually have had something to do with the increasing desire to create another tier of administrators. Like all Adventist males, black men found that the bureaucratic structures of the church were one of the few places in the denomination where they could act out masculine roles. At any rate, they pushed for black unions throughout the 1970s.¹⁰⁰ The proposal was rejected several times during the decade by the General Conference.¹⁰¹ But they did make progress in other ways. Walter E. Arties began the African American telecast *Breath of Life* in 1973, and another black Adventist, Charles Bradford, became president of the North American Division in 1979.¹⁰²

In addition to the calls for greater separation, African American leaders also raised the level of black consciousness in the 1970s. This was not dissimilar to the "black is beautiful" movement of the 1960s. The roots of this in Adventism, however, went back to 1934, when Frank L. Peterson published *The Hope of the Race*, which contained the traditional Adventist themes but differed from all Adventist books before it in the attention it paid to black history. Its pages were sprinkled with photographs of black heroes such as Booker T. Washington and the singer Roland Hayes. The book celebrated the black experience almost as much as the Adventist message. E. E. Cleveland wrote a similar book in 1970 called *Free at Last*. The inside cover contained a collage of famous black figures from Jesse Owens to George Washington Carver.¹⁰³

This is something that all Adventism's minorities tend to do, finding encouragement in the worldly achievements of non-Adventists who have the same ethnic background as themselves. When the Adventist administrator Manuel Vásquez wrote a history of Hispanic Adventism in 2000, he included a discussion of Hispanic American celebrities such as the actor Anthony Quinn, the TV personality Desi Arnaz, and the black, Cuban-born baseball player Adolfo Luque.¹⁰⁴ Even a history of the Scandinavian contribution to American Adventism published back in the 1940s fêted the renowned Norwegian explorers Bjarni Herjulfson and Leif Ericson.¹⁰⁵ Because they have thought it important to celebrate their ethnic identities as well as asserting their collective Adventist identity, the church's various racial groups have drawn inspiration from ethnic role models (who by the yardstick of the church's own standards might seem

otherwise unsuitable) from outside the Adventist community. It is a strategy that is exploited well beyond Adventism, of course, for all minority groups in the wider society have pointed up their own high achievers as a means of gaining recognition of their respective races in an historically dominant Anglophone culture.

Even so, despite facing initial prejudice, nearly every immigrant group has sought absorption into American society. In a famous study of race relations in 1944, Gunnar Myrdal made the same assumptions about African Americans. Indeed, he believed that not only did blacks want to be assimilated but that this was the only viable option.¹⁰⁶ With the early emergence of individuals such as W. E. B. Dubois, Marcus Garvey, and even Booker T. Washington, it is doubtful if black leaders, in contrast to their counterparts of other racial groups, would have seen integration as their only objective. But it was the black nationalist movement of the later 1960s that forced sociologists to recognize the separatist, as well as the integrationist, impulse in black history.¹⁰⁷

The paradox of African Americans in the United States, observed one writer, “is that black people have to get out of white society in order to get into it, and they have to get into it in order to get out. They have to get into the society to get a minimum of those palpable things that people need in order simply to survive—material goods, education, government, a minimum of justice. . . . Yet because white people are prejudiced and have the power to manifest their prejudices in a multitude of ways, they have to get out . . . to maintain a sense of worth and self-esteem.”¹⁰⁸ In an Adventist context, the paradox has a further resonance. Immigrants, including West Indians, who come from outside, have primarily been motivated by the desire to get into American society, yet they have been able to use the church as a refuge that also facilitates their assimilation. African Americans, who come from within and have often sought separation, have found it difficult to get sufficiently integrated within Adventism to use the church as a refuge from American society.

These complex dynamics suggest that it would be simplistic to interpret racial integration in Adventism as the result of increasing harmony between African Americans and their white counterparts. It may be partially accounted for by the presence of Caribbean Adventists in historically white churches, and Hispanic immigrants (some also from the Caribbean) in historically black churches. Nevertheless, the assimilation of immigrants on both sides of the color line may eventually create a situation that renders the existence of regional conferences superfluous. In metropolitan New York, for example, members in the regional conference are overwhelmingly of Caribbean origin, while those in the former “white” conference are mostly Hispanic or Caribbean as well. A division that was designed to facilitate the separate development of white and black Americans hardly seems relevant when few of either remain.

Yet at the same time as regional conferences were becoming an anachronism

on the East Coast, black Adventists on the West Coast finally felt powerful enough to demand a regional conference of their own, and the existing black conferences became sufficiently confident to pull out of the North American Division's general retirement plan, after complaining that it discriminated against its workers.¹⁰⁹ But there were also problems. In 2005 one regional conference was found to be misusing church funds and employing illegal immigrants, which resulted in the firings of half a dozen African American and Hispanic administrators and ministers.¹¹⁰

Such reverses for the ethnic minorities notwithstanding, there is every reason to suppose that they will become increasingly influential within the church and that the English, Scandinavians, and Germans, who have dominated Adventist history, will play only a marginal role in its future. Though the assimilation of the Northern European immigrants after the First World War and the overall decline in immigration in mid-century temporarily disguised the fact, Adventism has always been an immigrant church. With the upsurge of migrants from the Caribbean and Central America at the end of the last century, Caucasian Adventists finally disappeared from major cities. Along the entire Eastern seaboard, regional conferences now numerically dominate the unions of which they form a part. Non-Hispanic white Adventism will probably survive for many years in Northern California and its historic heartland around Walla Walla in the Pacific Northwest. But everywhere else in the United States its hegemony is almost over.

The changing face of Adventism will also have an impact on the life of the church. Some features of English Adventism, such as vegetarianism, have proved difficult to transmit to other ethnic groups. But immigrants, from M. L. Andreasen to Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, have also resisted attempts to move Adventist theology beyond its historic roots. And although there is evidence that second-generation Hispanic members, for example, are less conservative than their parents, since the 1970s black and Hispanic Adventists have proved relatively indifferent to white Anglophone attempts to liberalize the church's beliefs.¹¹¹ The changing ethnic balance within the church may be one of the factors that allows Adventism to keep its ideological distance from American society.