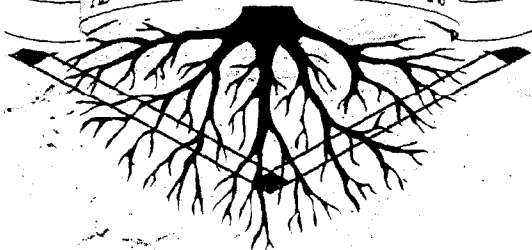


PART ONE
**IN SEARCH OF
 ROOTS**

ADVENTIST AFRICAN-AMERICANS



Exploring the History of Adventist African-Americans in the United States

BY DELBERT W. BAKER

This article begins our four-part series providing a perspective for understanding the development of the work among African-Americans in the early history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The next two articles provide a framework for understanding the progress of the Black work, including the pivotal role of Ellen White and other church leaders. The last article examines the unique challenges now facing more than 220,000 African-American Adventists in North America.

The story of African-Americans in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America is one of drama, confrontation, and danger. When slavery officially ended, there was major work to be done in the South. Yet evil powers conspired to stop the advance of any work that might have improved life for a people deprived of basic rights for so long. One of the most successful methods was the stirring up of racial antagonism.

But in spite of the obstacles, church work among Black people flourished. African-American Adventists now represent one of the fastest-growing segments in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Many Adventists have never had the

opportunity to become culturally literate about Black Adventist history. This series may help fill that need. The following vignettes provide a window of light on the significant developments in Black history. The themes that follow will help us put in proper perspective these vignettes.

Black History Vignettes

In 1891 Ellen White delivered a historic presentation entitled "Our Duty to the Colored People." This watershed message to the General Conference session in Battle Creek was the first major appeal to the SDA Church on behalf of developing a systematic work for Black people in the South. Her words were instrumental in influencing her son James Edson White to dedicate his efforts to the work among Black people in the South.

James Edson White and the *Morning Star* steamboat. This Mississippi River steamboat steamed up and down the Mississippi waterways for close to a decade. The boat was privately owned by Edson White and began operating in 1894. Initially the *Morning Star* served as the headquarters of the Southern Missionary Society (c. 1895), an organization established by Edson

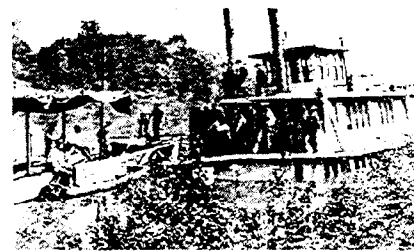
White for the development of church work among Blacks in the South. Leaders later accepted the society as a branch of the new Southern Union Conference. The *Morning Star* represents the first serious organized effort by Adventists for Black people.

The *Gospel Herald*, predecessor to *Message* magazine, was first printed aboard the *Morning Star*. Edited by Edson White, the *Gospel Herald* (1898-1923) chose as its objective the "reporting and promoting [of] the work among the Colored people in the South." This magazine now provides one of the most complete and reliable resources available on the early Adventist work among Blacks in the South.

Oakwood Industrial School (later Oakwood College, 1943) was established in 1896. This institution began in response to the appeals of Ellen White to develop a training center in the South for Black leaders. General Conference leadership purchased a 360-acre farm (the property later included 1,000 acres) about five miles north of Huntsville, Alabama. It was named Oakwood because of its 65 oaks.

Underground Railroad stations were run by early Adventist leaders. Church pioneers John Byington (later the first General Conference president) and John P. Kellogg (father of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg) are both believed to have operated stations for runaway slaves from their farms in New York and Michigan, respectively. They symbolize the strong antislavery activism of many early Adventists.

Sojourner Truth (Isabella Van Wagener), the famous abolitionist, was believed to be a Seventh-day Adventist—through the efforts of Uriah



The *Morning Star* riverboat was the center of church work for Blacks. Here it is (c. 1905) docked on the Yazoo River in Mississippi (from *Gospel Herald*, May 1905).



The Southern Missionary Society (logo shown) was the organizing body for the Black work until it merged with the Southern Union Conference in 1901.

Smith. Though her baptism by Smith is questioned by some historians, it is generally accepted that Sojourner Truth was acquainted with Advent teachings and accepted the Sabbath. She knew Ellen White, John Byington, Dr. J. H. Kellogg, and other prominent church leaders. She spoke at the Battle Creek Sanitarium and several other church gatherings. Her grave is in the Oak Hill Cemetery in Battle Creek, near the White family burial place.

William Ellis Foy, a Black minister, received visions prior to Hazen Foss and Ellen White. As a girl, Ellen White heard Foy speak in Portland, Maine, and later talked with him after receiving her first visions. She had a copy of Foy's four visions. She remarked, concerning his experience, "It was remarkable testimonies that he bore" (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 17, p. 96).

Foy had a prophetic ministry of approximately two years (1842-1844), which was primarily targeted to early Adventist believers.

Black people in the Millerite movement played a significant part in the preaching of the soon coming of Christ. Prominent ministers such as William Still, Charles Bowles, William Foy, and John Lewis were coworkers with Millerite leaders William Miller, Joshua V. Himes, and others. Other prominent Black persons, including Frederick Douglass, were also acquainted with the Second Coming and other Advent teachings.

Charles Kinney, sometimes referred to as the father of Black Adventism, is believed to have been the first Black ordained Seventh-day Adventist minister. In Reno, Nevada, Kinney accepted the Adventist truth as a result of the preaching of John Loughborough and Ellen White. A colporteur, then preacher and evangelist, Kinney was ordained in 1889.

Kinney had a deep burden for his people. In an 1885 issue of the *Review and Herald*, he wrote: "I earnestly ask the prayers of all who wish to see the truth brought 'before many peoples . . .,' that I may have strength, physical, mental, and spiritual, to do what I can for the Colored people."

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

Consistent growth of first Black churches. Edgefield Junction, Tennessee, became the location for the first Black Seventh-day Adventist church (1886), pastored by Harry Lowe, formerly a Baptist minister. The second Black Adventist congregation was established in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1890 with A. Barry as its first pastor. The third Black Adventist church was established in Bowling Green, Kentucky, in 1891. The fourth was established by C. M. Kinney in New Orleans in 1892. The fifth was organized in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1894. The first three and fifth churches were established in what is now the South Central Conference. The fourth church was established in what is now the Southwest Region Conference.

Ellen White stridently opposed slavery in all forms. Based on the principle of texts such as Deuteronomy 23:15, she advocated that Adventists violate the Fugitive Slave Law, 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" (*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 202). Later, in 1861, she received the his-

toric 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" (*ibid.*, p. 264).

Leaders developed resources to direct the Black work. Primary among the resources were and are *The Southern Work* (a book first published in 1898 and 1901 aboard the *Morning Star*, and reissued in 1966), by Edson White, and *Testimonies for the Church*, volumes 7 (1902) and 9 (1909), by Ellen White. While by no means exhaustive (Ellen White literally has hundreds of pages of not-in-print materials concerning the Black work), these books contain messages that helped shape the Black work. Though these publications may contain statements that can be problematic when read out of context, they clearly indicate that Black church work was a priority with Ellen White.

Black History Themes

These vignettes provide some of the building blocks for understanding African roots in the Adventist Church. Equally important is the need to view Black Adventist history in the context of general church history. Five themes run throughout the Black history narrative. An understanding of these themes can help us better understand the inherent dynamics of Black Adventist history and to conceptually grasp how it meshes with Adventist history as a whole.

1. The development of the Black work was the providential outwork-



Workers in the Southeastern Union Conference in 1924.



William Foy's grave is located in the Birch Tree Cemetery in East Sullivan, Maine. On his gravestone is inscribed an epitaph: "I have fought a good fight . . ." (2 Tim. 4:7, 8).

under a divine mandate to share the gospel with any and every person possible. It was an issue of spiritual duty and responsibility (Rev. 14:6). Ellen White repeatedly told church leaders that they were not fulfilling their mission if they didn't direct their efforts to the South. The profound needs of Blacks just out of slavery made the responsibility of sharing the gospel all the more urgent. In light of cultural selfishness and residual prejudices natural to the human heart, Adventists were challenged to see if the power of the gospel was able to stir up a love that would actively assist the oppressed and unfortunate.

2. From its beginning, God designed that the Seventh-day Adventist Church be multicultural and inclusive of all people.

This is evident from the very basis of the gospel commission and the three angels' messages, which are directed to all the world. God never considers one group of people to be superior to another. The message of Christ emphasizes unity and equality among all people. The Adventist Church was to model to the world not only the correct message but also the correct demonstration of that message.

3. Ellen White was the single most influential person in the Seventh-day Adventist Church to advocate the development of the Black work.

Ellen White can rightfully be called

ing of God's plan for Adventists to take the gospel to all the world.

Never should the evolution of Black church work be viewed as the efforts of one race to paternalistically help another. As followers of Christ, Adventists were

the initiator of the Black work. No person had a greater impact on the inclusion and status of Black people in the Adventist Church; it is impossible to talk about Black Adventist history without constantly referring to her contributions. All significant workers in the early Black work, either directly or indirectly, pointed to either Ellen White or her writings as the source of their inspiration and guidance. There would have been little hope for the Black work had Ellen White not championed the cause.



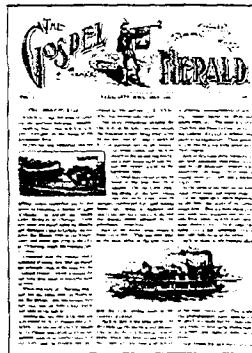
Ellen G. White (1827-1915) became the foremost advocate of work among Blacks in the South.

Further, every member of the James and Ellen White family made some contribution to the development of the Black work. James White was the first General Conference president to issue a call for volunteers to work in the South. Ellen White advocated freedom for slaves and pushed for Adventist work among Black people, and she gave money and resources to build the Black work. Edson

White gave at least a decade of his life to building the Black work. William White, as his mother's assistant, supported her efforts on behalf of Blacks.

4. The Black work was instrumental in helping the Adventist Church mature in its outlook on multiculturalism.

Prior to the early 1870s Adventists confined their efforts primarily to the northern part of North America. However, when they did begin to consider a broader perspective for outreach effort, it was to Europe that their attention was turned. In 1874 John N. Andrews went to Switzerland as the first missionary. In 1895 Ellen White highlighted an important inconsistency: "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



The first issue of the *Gospel Herald* was printed in 1898 aboard the *Morning Star*.

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" (*The Southern Work*, reprint ed., p. 20). Ellen White left the church little room to excuse its lack of effort in this area.

5. There is cause for celebration concerning the Black church work

because progress in this area was the result of the combined efforts of the entire church.

The White and Black Adventists who went South did so at great sacrifice. Slowly but surely the work among Blacks began to pick up momentum. Records indicate that in 1890 there were only 50 Black members. However, by 1910 there were more than 3,500 Black members! Similar increases were realized in tithe, mission schools, workers, and churches. In spite of the challenges faced by the Black work, God blessed with success!

The Seventh-day Adventist Church now has another opportunity to make good its mission in helping the suffering groups in society. The church is still challenged to demonstrate inclusive cultural diversity and concern for the oppressed and needy.

Next week: The Inactive Period—Setting the Stage for Growth

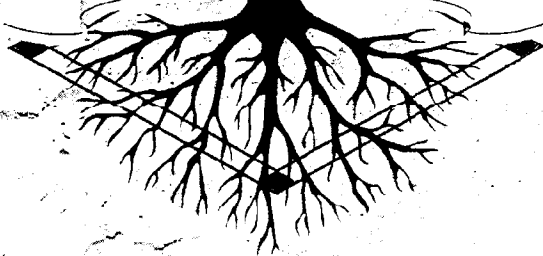


Delbert W. Baker, Ph.D., former editor of *Message*, is now special assistant to the president/director of diversity at Loma Linda University. He did his doctoral dissertation on the relationship of Ellen G. White's communications to the progress of African-Americans in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He is currently writing a book on Seventh-day Adventists and race relations.

PART TWO: THE TURNING POINT

IN SEARCH OF ROOTS

ADVENTIST AFRICAN-AMERICANS



*The year 1891 became a crucial year
in the church's work for African-Americans.*

BY DELBERT W. BAKER

At the end of the Civil War, the United States was faced with the proverbial winter of discontent. A melancholic air hung over the nation. In many quarters people seemed to be seized with an eerie feeling of malaise and hopelessness.

True enough, the Union had been preserved and the slaves freed, but at what cost? Optimists had predicted that the Civil War would be brief and limited. Instead, it proved to be the bloodiest conflict in the nation's history. More than 600,000 Americans died in the war—more than died in all the country's subsequent conflicts combined.

Large areas of the South were utterly ruined, physically and economically. The wounded and crippled would be commonplace in the North and South for years.

The Freedman Dilemma

On the other hand, though, it was a time for change and adjustment. Most pressing were the circumstances surrounding the Black race. Although Abraham Lincoln's original intent was not to free the slaves, on January 1, 1863, he issued the Emancipation

Proclamation, freeing all slaves in the Confederate states. The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, ratified by the states in late 1865, finally brought legalized slavery to an end. On April 9, 1865, Confederate general Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union commander in chief Ulysses S. Grant.

Eliminating slavery, however, was only the first step. Stunned by the assassination of their compassionate leader on April 14, 1865, the nation embarked on 12 rocky and controversial years known as Reconstruction (1865-1877). During this time the government sought to protect the rights of freed slaves and help them settle and start new lives.

Unfortunately, Reconstruction provided "too little for not long enough." Northerners made only a limited commitment to the objectives of Reconstruction. Before long, about the time of the Compromise of 1877, Northerners had returned most of the political power to Southern Whites. And they abandoned most of their efforts to assist emancipated slaves in achieving equality and self-sufficiency.

While the Civil War and Reconstruction provided Blacks with at least some level of liberty, it had not made

them fully free. The nation's racial problems continued with segregation, discrimination, lynching, sharecropping, and the draconian Black Codes, essentially a new form of slavery.

During this time the Seventh-day Adventist Church could have made a profound and historic impact on behalf of the Black race. Ellen White believed this period provided a unique window of opportunity to help a people who were at a nadir.

In 1895, writing from Australia, Ellen White observed in a letter addressed "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" (letter 5, 1895).

"If Our People Had . . ."

In the 1890s Edson White and the workers in the South were experiencing danger and vitriolic prejudice as they worked for Black people in the Mississippi delta. In this context Ellen White wrote a letter entitled "To Board of Managers of the Review and Herald Office," in which she characterized God's estimation of the Adventist Church relative to 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*" (letter 37a, 1900; italics supplied).

The decisive turning point in the history of the church's Black work was the year 1891, when Ellen White presented a historic message: "Our Duty to the Colored People." It was delivered to the delegates of the twenty-ninth General Conference session, held in Battle

Creek, Michigan. Ellen White insisted that after years of neglect, the church could not go on ignoring its charge to the Black race without encouraging God's increasing displeasure. Fully aware of the confrontational content of her message, she conceded, "I know 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."

With words of authority she spoke of how God had repeatedly shown her many things in regard to the Black race. She said that "sin rests upon us as a church because we have not made great effort for the salvation of souls among the Colored people" (*The Southern Work*, pp. 9-18).

In the 1891 message Ellen White enunciated many of her seminal 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 in embryonic form that she was to continue to develop and elaborate on for more than 20 years.

Early Black Adventist history, dating from the Great Disappointment to 1910, is divided by the year 1891. The period



When E. B. Lane preached at Edgefield Junction, Tennessee, in 1871, segregation kept African-Americans and Caucasians from even sitting together in the same room (notice the far left section of the drawing).

before 1891 can be called the "Inactive Period," when little work was done among Black people. The period after 1891 can be called the "Active Period," when increasing efforts were made among Black people in the South. (The Active Period will be covered in part 3

of this series.)

From the beginnings of the Adventist Church in New England and New York, the general trend of the work was westward, not southward. Before the church existed as a group or an organization, however, there were Black people who embraced the Advent teaching of the Second Coming under the preaching of William Miller. After the Great Disappointment there were Black Adventists in Northern congregations. While there was some integration, Black people associated with churches in the North according to social patterns of the region (*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, p. 1192).

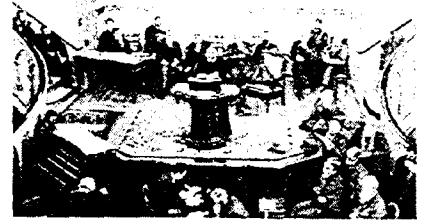
The Inactive Period

In spite of the fact that no other organization, religious or otherwise, was better prepared to deal with the needs of Black people than the Seventh-day Adventist Church, during this time the church established no Black work, nor did it begin any evangelistic initiatives in the South. Its message contained elements that held special attraction to Blacks—offering eternal life in the world to come, as well as a better temporal existence in the present world. And the Black race was in need of a system of truth that could improve the total person—mentally, spiritually, and physically.

The Seventh-day Adventist teachings, while challenging in their unorthodoxy, were simple and clear, suited to be understood by the masses and ideal for Black people searching for direction.

The belief concerning the soon appearing of Christ to rescue His people from pain, injustice, and oppression especially appealed to Black people, who were typically victims of oppression. The biblical teachings of a weekly Sabbath rest appealed to many who were often grossly overworked. Not to be overlooked were the then-evolving health and temperance teachings, which provided a dramatic key to help address the physical needs of the Black race. Black people brought with them a spiritual fervency and commitment. In turn, the Adventist Church offered a complete and reliable system of truth.

Unfortunately, Black people were not



Ellen White's speech at the General Conference Session of 1891 became the turning point in getting the Adventist Church to work for African-Americans.

to be introduced to Adventist teachings until almost a quarter century later. The period following 1865 was primarily characterized by sporadic and individual efforts of lay missionaries and ministers of primarily Southern origin. During this period Adventists made little, if any, effort to evangelize Black people. Rather, White ministers such as Elbert B. Lane (1840-1881), Sands H. Lane (1844-1906), Charles O. Taylor (1817-1905), Robert M. Kilgore (1839-1912), Dudley M. Canright (1840-1919), and John O. Corliss (1845-1923) conducted evangelistic meetings for Whites in various Southern cities.

Non-Adventist authors Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, in their controversial book on Adventism (1989), *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 first began evangelization in the South in the 1870s it was not on behalf of Blacks. According to Bull and Lockhart, "Blacks . . . found the church after turning up at Adventist meetings without being directly invited" (p. 194).

The Question of Segregation

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 a part of life in the South. They argue that racial segregation in the Adventist Church was initiated and perpetuated "first by expediency, and then by choice." There is

however, another perspective.


The Adventist Church *did address* the issue of segregation in this pre-1891 period. Adventist ministers in the South encountered a perplexing dilemma when Blacks attended their evangelistic meetings and churches. The burning question was "What should we do?" A. W. Spalding, in his unpublished manuscript "Lights and Shades in the Black Belt," avers that seeking to integrate churches would have hindered the work in the South. He goes on to say, "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" (p. 138).

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." 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." This left the question to the discretion of individual ministers and teachers.

After the 1887 segregation issue, items having to do with the South and the Black work receded into the background. It took Ellen White's 1891 message to cause the church to face its unavoidable responsibility relative to work among Black people.

There is a temptation for those who

look back in history to accuse, blame, or reside in the speculative realm of "what should have been" and "what could have been." *Perhaps the most important lesson is to learn from our past.* Today the church once again has windows of opportunity: in the United States, the former Soviet Union, Africa, South America, and numerous other places around the globe. The question is: How will we respond? 

Next week: Part 3—The Active Period.



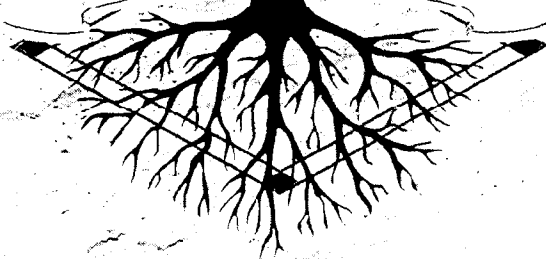
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doctoral dissertation on the relationship of Ellen G. White's communications to the progress of African-Americans in the Adventist Church.

PART THREE: THE MINISTRY BEGINS

IN SEARCH OF ROOTS

ADVENTIST AFRICAN-AMERICANS



A providential story showcases the power of people helping people.

BY DELBERT W. BAKER

This is the third in a four-part series examining the history of Adventist African-Americans in the United States.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's outreach to African-Americans prospered because certain individuals—change agents—accepted the challenge of a moral cause.

The cause addressed the needs of a people just released from more than 200 years of bondage. The cause showcased the power of people helping people. The cause illustrated the dynamics of an organization struggling with how its mission related to questions of racial inclusiveness.

The triumph of this story is that God providentially brought the Adventist Church's Black work into being in spite of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. As a result, untold thousands have been blessed with the liberating truth of the three angels' messages.

In this series we have followed Black Adventist history in the United States from the beginning of the movement to the year 1910. These years provide the basis for all the growth that followed. The Inactive Period extends to 1890,

when the church had no active work for the Black people in the South (see part 2 of this series). The Active Period (1891 to 1910) extends to the time of the thirty-seventh General Conference session, when the church voted to create the North American Negro Department of the General Conference.

The Active Period—Ministry Expands

With the Black Adventist membership exceeding 1,000 within a decade, church leaders felt that a new form of organization was needed to coordinate the burgeoning work. The GC Committee's 1909 vote was implemented officially by establishing the Negro Department in 1910.

This development signaled a significant and symbolic phase in the progress of the Black work. Heretofore the Black work was not structurally recognized at the highest levels of the organization. But beginning with 1910, and in spite of reorganization and adjustment, the Black work became—and remains—an integral part of every level of the administrative structure of the church.

The Active Period commenced with Ellen White's 1891 address to the General Conference. Her message, "Our Duty to the Colored People," outlined God's love for the Black race and the church's responsibility to work in the South, and it provided principles and a strategy for that work. Ellen White penned hundreds of pages of counsel concerning the Black work. Her counsel provides penetrating insights that seemed ahead of her times. Her messages reveal at least seven principles upon which she based her advocacy of the church's responsibility to the Black work.

First, *the biblical principle*. God had given a commission to the Adventist Church to take the gospel to *all the world*, including the Black people of the South.

Second, *the moral principle*. Adventists were obliged to do what was morally right. It was not morally right to go to the foreign countries of the world and ignore the Black race "in the very midst of us."

Third, *the humanitarian principle*. All decent people, Ellen White reasoned, who saw the suffering and need of a people just out of slavery would be compelled as compassionate human beings to follow the example of Christ and provide help.

Fourth, *the empathetic principle*. While the White race was not in the same state of need as the Black race, they should try to understand what it must be like to be in bondage and to be deprived of education and domestic and civil freedoms, to be abused and ignored, to be treated as "things," instead of "persons," for scores of years.

Fifth, *the restitution principle*. Mrs.

Edson White (front row, far left) and Ellen G. White (next to Edson) attend meetings in the South.





An old photo from the *Gospel Herald* portrays the staff of the *Morning Star* steamboat and the Southern Missionary Society.

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 as a race for decades of loss, damage, and injury.

Sixth, *the societal principle*. Mrs. White reasoned that if one part of society is weak or needy, then it weakens the whole society. If the Black race could be strengthened, then the entire society would be strengthened.

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

Adventist Change Agents

Perhaps the Active Period was best characterized by the efforts of scores of dedicated people who gave themselves unreservedly to the building of the Black work, including Will Palmer (Edson White's associate), Elders R. M. Kilgore and H. S. Shaw, and Dr. J. E. Caldwell. Three people, however, were the major architects of the Black work and wielded primary influence on its initial development.

First and foremost was Ellen White (1827-1915). She can be called the *initiator* of the Black work (see part 2 of this series). Her influence was constantly in favor of the equality and inclusion of Black people in the church. Ellen White articulated the Adventist position toward the fugitive slaves, the freedom of Black people, and God's judgments toward the U.S. in relation to slavery as demonstrated in the Civil War.

Beyond these emphases, it was Ellen White's messages that motivated and

inspired those who later worked in the South. Her recollections affirming William Foy's experience, her diary entry about her and her husband staying with a Black family, the finances she personally gave the Black work, the ongoing guidance she provided Edson and Emma White during the time they worked in the South, the hundreds of pages of articles, letters, and manuscripts she wrote concerning the Black SDA work—all speak to

Ellen White's initiating influence and personal interest and support.

Second in influence was James Edson White (1849-1928). Because of his dedication and lasting work during more than a decade of service, Edson can be called the *pioneer* of the Black work.

As Ron Graybill's *Mission to Black America* portrays, Edson White and his *Morning Star* steamboat ministry initiative were main 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 (SMS) in 1895.

Edson staffed the independent and self-supporting organization 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 program was elemental and included rudimentary education, community assistance, training in self-supporting work, industrial education, and basic principles in thrift, business, and health.

The reason for Edson White's success in the South was no secret. In a December 1899 editorial in the *Gospel Herald*, Edson White emphatically emphasized Ellen White's molding influence on his work: "We have ever regarded instruction coming from this source 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 South.

The success of the Black work under Edson 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 SMS, would *adapt and implement* the counsel; (3) the efforts were *examined and refined* in the context of the Adventist work in the South; and (4) Black and White Adventist workers would *participate* in the implementation of this counsel. The constant goal was to be efficient and self-supporting.

Finally, Charles M. Kinney (1855-1951) was the third major influence on the Black work. As the first Black person to be ordained as a Seventh-day Adventist minister, and the first Black church worker and spokesperson among Black people, Kinney can rightfully be called the *father* of the Black work. A slave from birth, Kinney was born in Richmond, Virginia. Moving West after the Civil War, Kinney ended up 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 ever held dear his acquaintance with them and the fact that he learned the Adventist truth from them.



Charles M. Kinney (front row, fourth from left) poses with others attending a Black ministerial conference in the South.

Independent in thought, Kinney became the first to articulate the concerns of Black Adventists in the areas of race, church polity, and organizational equity. For two decades Kinney labored throughout the South on behalf of Blacks, preaching to any person who would listen to his message. He believed that Black people needed to grow in three areas to reach their potential: education, experience, and eco-

Major Developments in the Black Work

BY DELBERT W. BAKER

1. Production and sale by Edson White of the *Gospel Primer*, the first educational text for Black mission schools (1893).
2. Building and launching of the *Morning Star* steamboat (1894).
3. Organization of the Southern Missionary Society (1895).
4. Mission schools and mentoring programs started across the South (1895).
5. Oakwood College founded (1896).
6. *Gospel Herald* journal begins publication (1898).
7. Business enterprises started in connection with the Black work (1898), such as the Dixie Health Food Company and Missionary Enterprises, an independent Adventist organization that provided creative ways to raise money for the Black work.
8. Medical missionary work in the South begins to receive special emphasis (1899).
9. Nashville becomes the center of the Southern work (1900).
10. Ellen White visited the Adventist work in the South in 1901 (she again visited the South and also Oakwood College in 1904). Visits provided encouragement and impetus to the Black work and provided Ellen White with firsthand knowledge.
11. Herald Publishing Company (1900), later Southern Publishing Association (1901), begins.
12. Southern Missionary Society merges into the Southern Union Conference (1901).
13. Nashville Colored Sanitarium founded (1901).
14. Black leaders and laypersons begin to migrate to all parts of the U.S. (circa 1902).
15. North American Negro Department of the General Conference created (1910).

nomic development.

An avid belief of his was that Seventh-day Adventist doctrine could provide for the spiritual needs of Black people or any disadvantaged people. Therefore, he did everything in his power to see that his people received a knowledge of the truth and that the Adventist Church did all it could to advance the Black work.

Throughout his long and fruitful ministry, Kinney continued to establish congregations and build churches until his retirement in 1911. Before his death he was blessed to see the Black work expand beyond his highest expectation. Charles Kinney's story is one of struggle, faith, persistence, and eventual triumph. It is another biography that deserves to be told.


Implications for Today

The story of African-American roots in the Adventist Church in the United States contains all the drama and pathos of the best narratives. And though this chapter of early Adventist history closes with 1910, the effects of its groundbreaking ministry are felt today. The

people and events of these early years give perspective to the succeeding chapters of Black work today—work that has grown throughout North America and around the world. And in light of the diversity and cultural dilemmas of our day, this period could be among the

most instructive in Adventist Church history. It highlights areas that provide helpful insights and lessons for today.

Areas that could yield profitable study include: (1) Ellen White's influence as a change agent in the Adventist organization; (2) ways the church addressed itself to the sensitive issues of race and inclusiveness in its early years; (3) organizational lessons the church today can learn from the Southern work; (4) how the church started and supported work in a new and developing field. The list could go on.

There is more that we can learn from how God directed affairs in the past. We thank God for what He has done. "We have nothing to fear . . . except as we shall forget . . ." 

Next week: Current Challenges Facing African-Americans.



Delbert W. Baker, Ph.D., former editor of Message magazine, is now special assistant to the president and director of diversity at Loma Linda University. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on the relationship of Ellen G. White's communications to the progress of Adventist African-Americans.

PART FOUR: THE TURNING POINT



Evangelism nurtures growth and challenges

BY DELBERT W. BAKER

This is the last in a four-part series on the growth and progress of Adventist African Americans in the United States.

From the beginnings of Adventist African-American history, the Black work has continued to progress through the twentieth century—sometimes slowly, sometimes hesitantly, but always steadily. The history of Adventist African-Americans reminds us that God wants His message to go to every nation, tongue, and people.

We now turn our attention to an overview of the development stages of the Black work in the United States. This gives us a perspective to understand some of the challenges that face Adventist African-Americans today.

From Then to Now

The **Denominational Inactivity** stage (1860s-1890) began when the Seventh-day Adventist Church was in its organizational phase. During this time the church had no organized plan for, nor were significant resources directed toward, work among Black

people in the South.

The **Denominational Activity** stage (1891-1910) witnessed increased synergy in the church toward the Black work. The acute need and neglect of Black people in the South led Ellen G. White to present a series of appeals and strategies for the Black work.

The **Independent Initiatives** stage (1894-1900) began when Edson White responded to Ellen White's 1891 appeal for the Black work and entered the South with the *Morning Star* steamboat and started the Southern Missionary Society (SMS). In response, the General Conference began to act to help the Black work and provided some coordination. The General Conference soon sensed the increasing difficulties of leaving this growing sector of the work under the jurisdiction of the SMS, an independent organization.

The **Progressive Maturation** stage (1901-1907) saw the SMS, in spite of obstacles and

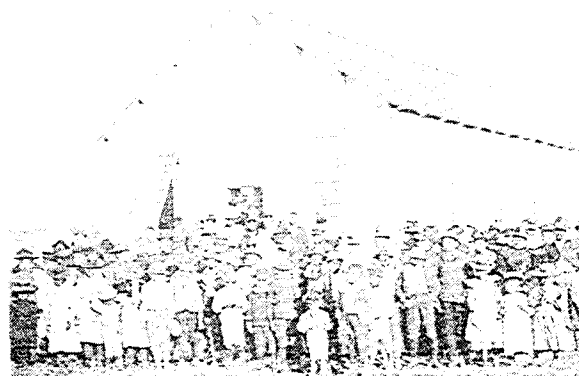
problems, mature and make extraordinary progress in the South. The Black work increasingly was recognized as a viable and significant part of the Adventist organization. In 1901 the organized work among Blacks in the South was finally legitimized by its merger into the newly formed Southern Union Conference of the church.

The **National Expansion** stage (1902-1930s) was unlike any period before. The Black work grew and expanded to all parts of the United States and even overseas. Black workers, laypersons, and ministers, trained in the mission schools of the South, along with those who received further education at Oakwood College, migrated throughout the United States doing evangelism and providing leadership.

At the beginning of the Seventh-day Adventist movement, the church had moved primarily westward; now it was moving in every direction. Black people brought to the Adventist Church an invigorating sense of fervency and vitality. In a unique way the church began to reap some of the benefits of multiculturalism.

The **Organizational Inclusion** stage (1909-1940s) saw the Black work experience progress, but with the insistent undertone that much more needed to be done. At the beginning of this period, Ellen White still intoned that the church had not done, and was not doing, what it could for the Black work.

The rapid growth of the Black work from 50 members in 1890 to more than 1,000 in 1909 necessitated that Adventist leaders officially include Black leadership and presence at the



One of the mission schools started by Edson White in Mississippi in the 1890s

highest levels of the church. During this period several Black institutions were started (including Harlem [later Northeastern] Academy, 1920; Riverside Hospital, 1927; *Message Magazine*, 1934; Pine Forge Academy, 1946).

In the midst of the Black nationalism of the 1920s, several racial incidents



Ellen White (center, front) during the time when she advocated the development of the Black work

shook the church. They became a catalyst for changes that were to follow. James K. Humphrey, a gifted Black minister and founder of the First Harlem SDA Church, was defrocked by conference officials in 1929, principally on the grounds of insubordination. Humphrey, on the other hand, felt the local conference, and church leadership in general, ignored the concerns of its Black constituency and practiced discriminatory actions. The issue came to a head when the First Harlem congregation sided with Humphrey and the conference dis-fellowshipped the entire church.

Perhaps the most well-known racial incident in the church happened in the Washington, D.C. area. Lucy Byard, a gravely ill Black Adventist woman and longtime member from Brooklyn, was admitted to the Washington Sanitarium (1943). When it was discovered that she was Black, the hospital discharged her. During her transfer to the Freedmen's Hospital she became increasingly ill and died shortly thereafter of pneumonia. Such incidents caused Black leadership to press the General Conference to address discrimination and prejudice in the church.

After facing perplexing racial problems at different levels of the church organization, and not finding satisfactory resolution of them, the General

Ten Challenges for Adventist African-Americans

BY DELBERT W. BAKER

These challenges come from interviewing various Adventist African-Americans across the nation. While they are not exhaustive, they are representative.

1. **Remember that God does not ask for blind assimilation** that disregards one's culture and ethnic background while preferring another. Adventism can coexist with culture. Reaffirm that the Adventist movement is a legacy of a beneficent God to all people. No one group owns it. It is the work of many peoples and cultures. No group is to think or to be treated like a second-class citizen.
2. **Pursue education, personal excellence, and above all, a personal relationship with God.** In the process, preserve your moral sensitivity at all cost. These are the stepping-stones to increased responsibility and higher trust.
3. **Prioritize evangelism** over church politics and the business of organized religion.
4. **Recognize the strengths of your culture** and the strengths of other cultures as well. Affirm, build, and demonstrate true love and appreciation for each other. Build, don't tear down.
5. **Manage racial attitudes.** Don't assume racism until you know it to be so. When confronted with racism, be committed to following the principles in Matthew 18. Be angry, but don't sin—do something about it. Remember that the secret of Black survival as a people has always rested on spiritual, not secular, weapons.
6. **Build bridges of communication** between your own culture and other cultures. Practice the best possible communication and conflict-resolution skills.
7. **Develop better methods to manage the resources** that have been entrusted to Blacks as a people—physically, economically, organizationally. Seek solutions!
8. **Utilize the resources of all age groups** in the church. And in all the resourcing, do everything to build, not criticize.
9. **Develop, invest in, and train leaders for the future.** Prepare for tomorrow.
10. **Act and pro-act.** Consult together, plan wisely, and then execute the plan. Find fresh ways to solve old and new problems. Pray.

Conference leadership, in coordination with the Black leadership, voted "that in unions where the Colored constituency is considered by the union conference committee to be sufficiently large, and where the financial income and territory warrant, Colored conferences be organized." Regional (Black) conferences were formed in 1944, affecting both the Black work and the entire Adventist Church in the United States.

During the **Participative Governance** stage (1944-1951), regional conferences, along with Black leadership at the General Conference, division, and union conference levels, became central in the coordination of the Black work from this point on. This new organizational configuration facilitated a period of unprecedented evangelism, leadership experience, and promotion of initiatives. It allowed for new types of intraconference and interconference mobility in the Black work. Black membership increased from 20,000 in the early 1940s to more than 70,000 in the 1950s. Membership in regional conferences increased to more than 130,000 in the 1980s, and to more than 220,000 today.

The **Cultural Activism** period (1952-1969) and the former stage were the most stormy racial periods in the church in the United States. This was the period of backlash to Jim Crow laws, the Ku Klux Klan, and lynching. Additionally, it was the time of the civil rights and Black power movements. Black and White Adventists were confronted with the influence of Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and others.

The country experienced a reordering of its laws and attitudes toward its African-American citizenry with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. These laws prohibited discrimination because of color, race, religion, or national origin in accommodations, employment, and public schools. Adventists also reassessed their own practices and attitudes toward the Black constituency of the church. The church commenced a period of racial redress. Those who lived through this period remember it as a time of profound racial sensitivity and intense organizational introspection. The

effects are still being felt.

The **Affirmative Resolution** stage (1970-1977) saw the church struggling with its practical relationship to issues of discrimination, equal opportunity, and affirmative action. During this stage the church still had some segregation in its churches, schools, other institutions, and administrative levels. In an effort to cause the church to address the issue of race and equality, Black membership demonstrated, even boycotted.

During the 1970 spring session of the General Conference Executive Committee, measures were taken to rectify conditions relative to Black leadership



E. Earl Cleveland, premier evangelist and spokesman for SDA African-American causes, in his earlier years

inclusion in the administrative structure of the church. A set of 16 points was developed to help guide the church in affirmative action. As a result of the 16 points, Black representation was included in administrative and departmental positions on the union level and higher. These points, though adjusted, are still valid today.

Coming to the 1990s, we have the **Spiritual Empowerment** stage (1978-present). During the latter part of the 1970s the church's Black leadership recognized the need for periodic consultation and planning. As a result, the regional presidents formed the Caucus of Black SDA Administrators. The caucus includes the leadership of regional conferences and Black institutions, and other representatives. It was recognized that the caucus provided Black leadership a unique opportunity to fulfill the objectives of the Black work through evangelizing, ministering, nurturing,

strategizing, networking, facilitating, and promulgating.

Charles E. Dudley, president of South Central Conference and founding chairman of the caucus, says the caucus "is an avenue for the spiritual empowerment of the Black work. It regularly allows Black leadership an opportunity to address issues, promote needs, and seek to resolve the problems indigenous to the Black work."

Black leaders in the various levels of the church have a deep desire to keep the spiritual focus central. Yet they must wrestle with the challenge of addressing the issues of residual prejudice that too often subtly and imperceptibly appears in the church. E. E. Cleveland, a member of the caucus, maintains that "the laws and policies checking discrimination and racism and guaranteeing civil rights are in place. But the implementation of these rights is slow in coming."

And Now

Since this last stage is not yet over, no one knows when the next one will begin. Or, for that matter, if there will be a next one. Jesus may come before then. But one thing is sure. Now is the time to test the power of the spirit of love and brotherhood in the multicultural environment of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Will the church be able to come together in unity and equality to solve the problems of race and culture? Will there be genuine sharing of leadership, responsibility, and decision-making?

The world is waiting to see an organizational model of the kind of love and unity Christ spoke about in John 17:22: "That they may be one, even as we are one."



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